THE WEEKLY COMMUNITY NEWS OF ASSOCIATIONS, CVBs AND HOTELS

USAE

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Brand USA concluded its inaugural Brand USA Travel Week Canada in Toronto and Montreal at the end of October. The event welcomed nearly 60 U.S. partner organizations and more than 160 Canadian travel, trade, and media representatives from across the country, generating more than 2,000 prescheduled business appointments. Pictured here is Fred Dixon (back row, second from left), President & CEO, Brand USA; Jennifer Tong (front row, third from right), Senior Director of International PR, Brand USA; Andrew Felts (front row, second from right), Senior Manager, Media Relations & Communications, Brand USA; and members of the U.S. delegation that participated in the media track during the event. Credit: Brand USA

NCBMP Honoring *USAE* with Corporate Award

By Todd McElwee

USAE is humbled and honored that the National Coalition of Black Meeting Professionals (NCBMP) is presenting it with the 2026 Corporate Award.

USAE and NCBMP announced the recognition, which honors an organization's continued impact with the meetings and events industry, on November 5. Visit KC partners with NCBMP on the award.

The honor will be presented on December 11 during NCBMP's 43rd Annual Excellence Awards. NCBMP's 43rd Annual Conference will take place from December 9–12 in Louisville, staged under the banner of "Be Bigger Than The Moment."

Jason Dunn Sr., CEO, NCBMP, sent an email on October 28 on behalf of NCBMP Chairman (Kevin L.S.) Richardson, the Board of Directors, and members that congratulated *USAE* for being nominated.

Dunn wrote: "This award recognizes organizations whose leadership leaves a lasting mark on the meetings industry. These organizations create a path for others to follow. This nomination honors the vision *USAE* has brought to the meetings and events industry. It also honors the strong partnerships *USAE* has built across the hospitality commu-

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TravelAbility Heads to Tampa for Annual Summit

By Jordan Bradley

TravelAbility, a leader in accessible travel, is hosting its annual summit in Florida from November 9–11.

Every year for the past eight years, the summit gathers professionals from destination organizations, tech companies, accessibility advocates, travelers and content creators with disabilities and hospitality companies to discuss strategies and solutions to make travel more accessible for individuals of all abilities.

This year, the summit is focused on **Vision 2030: The Accessibility Moonshot**, an effort to make travel accessible across the board by 2030. According to TravelAbility, 2030 will be "a historic inflection point," as that will be the year that "all 73 million Baby boomers in the United States will be age 65 or older, triggering a massive shift where accessible travel moves from a niche to an expectation."

"In the coming years, accessibility will be woven into how travel is planned, sold, and experienced," said TravelAbility CEO and Founder Jake Steinman. "Accessibility will no longer be viewed as an exception, it will be viewed as an expectation."

The 2026 summit will be held at the

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Milwaukee Earns LEED Gold Certification for Cities

By Jonathan Trager

The city of Milwaukee has achieved LEED Gold certification for cities through the U.S. Green Building Council, recognizing its environmental performance, energy efficiency, water stewardship, transportation, and quality of life.

Announced on November 3, the designation evaluates sustainability efforts across the entire city, providing independent verification of Milwaukee's commitment to environmental responsibility. Milwaukee earned 65 points toward the certification, with particularly strong performance in water efficiency, transportation and land use, and quality of life.

"Milwaukee is proud to be a LEED Gold-certified city, a nationally recognized distinction that reflects our commitment to sustainability, environmental responsibility and quality of life," said Josh Albrecht, Chief Marketing Officer at Visit Milwaukee. "From our world-class convention facilities to investments in

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AHLA Celebrates GM of the Year Honorees at Hospitality Show

By Jordan Bradley

The American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA) hosted its annual conference, The Hospitality Show, where it distributed the 2026 General Managers of the Year Awards.

The conference was held from November 2–4 at the Miami Beach Convention Center in Miami Beach, Florida.

The annual General Manager (GM) of the Year Awards recognize GMs "who go above and beyond to deliver exceptional guest service, support their teams, and strengthen their communities," AHLA said.

"Hospitality is an industry where talent and hard work can take you anywhere," said Rosanna Maietta, President and CEO of AHLA. "This year's honorees are proof."

Honorees were selected in eight categories from a pool of more than 250 nominees.

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NEWS

PCMA Announces 2027–2029 Destinations for Business Events Summit

By Todd McElwee

PCMA's Business Events Summit is headed to South Lake Tahoe, Nevada, in 2027. The June 20–23 event was announced alongside Indianapolis and Tampa Bay hosting in 2028 and 2029, respectively.

"We're thrilled to welcome the PCMA Business Events Summit to South Lake Tahoe in 2027. Our destination has undergone an exciting transformation, with the newly renovated Caesars Republic and Tahoe Blue Event Center adding new energy and possibilities for business events," said Carol Chaplin, President & CEO, Visit Lake Tahoe. "Where else can you bring world-class meetings, big ideas and a little mountain air together—with the Sierra Nevada as your backdrop? We can't wait to welcome the PCMA community and show them what we mean by 'Awe and Then Some.'"

Indianapolis will host from June 4–7, 2028.

"Welcoming 1,000 of our industry's most influential meetings professionals for the 2028 PCMA Business Events Summit is an incredible opportunity to showcase what Indy does best: bring people together," said Leonard Hoops, President & CEO of Visit Indy. "There's no better backdrop to convene than USA Today's No. 1 Convention City. As a former PCMA Board Chair, I personally could not be more excited to give our industry colleagues a firsthand look at Indy's momentum and deliver an experience that inspires what's next for business events."

BES is coming to Tampa Bay on June 10–13, 2029.

"Tampa Bay is thrilled to be the home for PCMA's 2029 Business Events Summit after hosting their highly successful Partnership Summit last year," said Santiago C. Corrada, President & CEO of Visit Tampa Bay. "Choosing Tampa Bay once more and partnering with Visit Tampa Bay to deliver on their vision for the 2029 summit further cements our reputation as a world-class meeting location. We look forward to showcasing Tampa Bay's exciting growth and new developments like the five-star Pendry Tampa Hotel, Gasworx development in Ybor City, and the expansion of the award-winning Tampa Riverwalk."

PCMA made the announcement following the 2026 edition in Fajardo, Puerto Rico, the first under the Business Events Summit brand. BES was formerly edUcon and is exclusively open to PCMA members. Non-members may register at the New Member + Event rate, which bundles a PCMA membership with Summit registration.

"Our members told us they want learning that goes deeper and stays with them, and Business Events Summit is our response," said Sherrif Karamat, CAE, President & CEO of PCMA and CEMA. "South Lake Tahoe, Indianapolis and Tampa Bay each bring something different, and each share our belief that business events strengthen communities. Securing these partnerships now means we can build three Summits that push our community further—and provide members with a clear path to keep growing with us."

Find more information here.



Sandy Narvaez Named Chief Commercial Officer at Hawaii VCB

By Jonathan Trager



Sandy Narvaez, a former member of the Board of Directors of the Hawaii VCB (HVCB), has been appointed Chief Commercial Officer for the organization, effective November 16.

Narvaez brings more than 20 years of hospitality experience to the newly defined role. She most recently served as senior director of sales & marketing for Marriott International, overseeing leisure, group, and Asia sales and marketing strategy for more than 20 hotels across Hawaii and French Polynesia.

"Sales and marketing in Hawaii's visitor industry has always meant more to me than simply promoting a destination. It is a way to share our cultural values with the world and generate economic vitality for the community that has given so much to me," said Narvaez. "Having had the privilege of spending my whole career at home, I recognize that the true measure of our strategic efforts lies in their impact on both businesses and our community. I am deeply honored and privileged to serve and represent my home."

Following the retirement of HVCB's former chief operating officer, Tom Mullen, at the end of September, the organization created the chief commercial officer role to take on the commercial portion of his work. Narvaez will lead travel trade, meetings and conventions, and sales by strengthening relationships with members and industry partners.

"This role is focused on the markets, customers, and partners that bring business to our islands," said Dr. Aaron J. Salā, President & CEO of the HVCB. "Sandy brings a combination of strengths not often found in a single leader: a record of sales and marketing leadership, legal training grounded in Native Hawaiian law, and relationships built over a career spent here at home. She already understands our members, our partners, and our responsibility to Hawaii, so she can lead from day one."

Narvaez also previously held executive sales and marketing roles with The Ritz-Carlton Residences, Waikiki Beach; Hilton Waikiki Beach; and DoubleTree by Hilton Alana Waikiki Beach. She's a graduate of the University of Hawaii at Mānoa William S. Richardson School of Law.

TravelAbility

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Hilton Tampa Downtown hotel and TravelAbility officials note that the decision to host the conference in Tampa this year was made to showcase what an accessible destination looks like.

"Through a series of coordinated activities, the Summit will demonstrate what a truly inclusive destination can look like—empowering local partners and galvanizing industry-wide momentum to be more welcoming to all," according to the organization.

"As a long-time ally with TravelAbility, making our destination accessible for all travelers has been and remains a priority for Visit Tampa Bay and our nearly 1,000 partners," said Santiago C. Corrada, President and CEO of Visit Tampa Bay. "TravelAbility Tampa '26 is an opportunity to showcase Tampa Bay's traveler accessibility, share best practices across hospitality sectors, and learn from accessibility advocates and experts how our industry can move the needle even further on this important issue."

Session topics at the 2026 TravelAbility Summit include the state of accessible travel today, why access matters, grant writing fundamentals, how destinations can leverage AI to get their accessibility offerings to the top of search results, updates to the TravelAbility Accessibility Playbook, ROI of accessibility and more.

The summit also invites attendees to witness the return of the annual INNOVATEAble, a "Shark Tank"-style showcase and pitch fest featuring technology solutions for accessibility needs.

Find more information here.

HOTS

HOTS Child's Play… The National Toy Hall of Fame welcomed some new members this week, the Associated Press reports. This year, Bingo, Care Bears, Pokémon trading cards and the timeless playground slide have entered the hall of fame. The toys join other Hall of Famers Mr. Potato Head and G.I. Joe. The four new inductees were selected from a group of 12 finalists that included Bop It!, mahjong, yahtzee, Monster High dolls, Tickle Me Elmo, Polly Pocket, and the board games Sorry! and Mouse Trap. According to AP, anyone can nominate a toy, but the ones that make it into the National Toy Hall of Fame "must be considered icons, have engaged multiple generations, fostered creativity or profoundly changed play or toy design." In the case of Bingo, AP reports that the game was initially based on an Italian lottery game that can be traced back to 1530. For the humble playground slide, Jeremy Saucier, Vice President of Collections at the Toy Hall of Fame, said: "People of all ages remember the simple, satisfying and energizing experience of racing down a slide." HOTS imagines that a visit to the National Toy Hall of Fame is nothing but a ball.

* * * * *

HOTS The Great Monarch Migration… Scientists in North America have equipped monarch butterflies with teeny-tiny trackers to discover just how harrowing their cross-continental migration is each year. After decades of scientists struggling to piece together the full picture of monarch migration, Rebeca Quiñonez-Piñon, the senior scientist at the National Wildlife Federation and a tri-national group of scientists have attached small, solar-powered radio tags to almost 1,750 monarchs ahead of their migration this year. This year, Quiñonez-Piñon is combining real-time migratory data gathered through the trackers and community science to better understand why monarchs stop in Texas on their way to Mexico for the winter. Members of the public can follow the individual journeys of tracked butterflies through the free app Project Monarch Science. HOTS will be flying to the app store to follow this journey!

Milwaukee LEED

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renewable energy and water stewardship, Milwaukee offers meeting planners a destination committed to a more sustainable future."

The certification complements Milwaukee's continued investment in its meetings and conventions industry, including the $456 million expansion of Baird Center. The LEED Gold-certified convention facility offers 1.3 million square feet of space and was recently named to EXHIBITOR Magazine's 2027 Centers of Excellence list for the third consecutive year.

One of just 25 convention centers recognized across the United States and Canada, Baird Center earned the distinction through evaluations of its facilities, location, service and execution, incorporating feedback from event organizers and exhibit managers.

In addition to Baird Center, a walkable downtown, growing hospitality offerings, and continued investment in infrastructure demonstrate "Milwaukee offers a place where major events and environmental responsibility go hand in hand," Visit Milwaukee stated.

Other LEED-certified developments throughout Milwaukee include Fiserv Forum, Potawatomi Casino | Hotel, and the Northwestern Mutual Tower and Commons. The Brewery District, a redevelopment of the former Pabst brewery complex that includes the boutique hotel property Brewhouse Inn & Suites, has also earned LEED Platinum certification.

Find more information about Milwaukee's environmental efforts here.

CESSE to Celebrate 50 Years of STEM Society Leaders

By Todd McElwee

It's almost time to celebrate at the Council of Engineering and Scientific Society Executives (CESSE).

Founded in 1977, CESSE will mark its golden anniversary next year with *Celebrating 50 Years, Investing in the Next 50,* a campaign emphasizing its five decades of STEM society leadership. Additionally, CESSE is accepting applications for four Friends of CESSE Scholarships to the 2027 CESSE CEO Meeting in Savannah, January 24–27.

During its commemorations, CESSE will share member stories detailing what the community has meant to them and their organizations during half a century. And, in honor of its 50th, CESSE is inviting its membership and stakeholders to mark the anniversary with a gift to the Friends of CESSE Fund. The initiative aids in professional development via scholarships for the CEO Meeting and ACCESSE. CESSE aims to raise $50,000 for the fund.

Scott Grayson, CAE, CEO, American Public Works Association (APWA); and Abigail Gorman, CEO, American Society for Clinical Pharmacology & Therapeutics (ASCPT), are Co-Chairs of the CESSE CEO Meeting.

"CESSE is a group made up of staff who work for STEM organizations, and we all have similar experiences that we can share with one another The CESSE CEO Meeting is particularly special," said Grayson. "It's a chance for other CEOs to share their stories, learn from others, be innovative, and take the pulse of what's happening in the STEM community, both in Washington, D.C., from an advocacy standpoint and in what we all need to know to run associations that focus on STEM."

Each Friends of CESSE scholarship includes a $1,000 travel stipend and a meeting registration fee waiver. November 23 is the deadline to apply.

Gorman said: "This year's meeting is a must-attend because our societies are leading through real uncertainty. Together with our colleagues, Scott Grayson and I are crafting a meeting built for what we face — one that will help us all lead with more inspiration and confidence in a rapidly changing world."

Find more information here.



The Latino Hotel Association (LHA) held its LHA 2026 Conference on October 20–21 at the Hilton Aventura Miami in Florida, gathering Latino hotel owners, operators, real estate developers and franchisors from around the country as they navigate hotel development, ownership and investment.

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NEWS

NOLA Fairmont Hotel Opens as Brand's 100th Property

By Jordan Bradley

Accor's Fairmont Hotels & Resorts opened the Fairmont New Orleans in a repurposed historical building on November 2.

The hotel is Fairmont's 100th property worldwide and marks a return to New Orleans for the brand after 20 years, officials said.

"Celebrating Fairmont's landmark 100th hotel in New Orleans is a moment of perfect alignment. This is a city built on the very poetry of celebration, culture, and hospitality, setting the ultimate stage for such a historic milestone," said Omer Acar, CEO of Fairmont Hotels & Resorts.

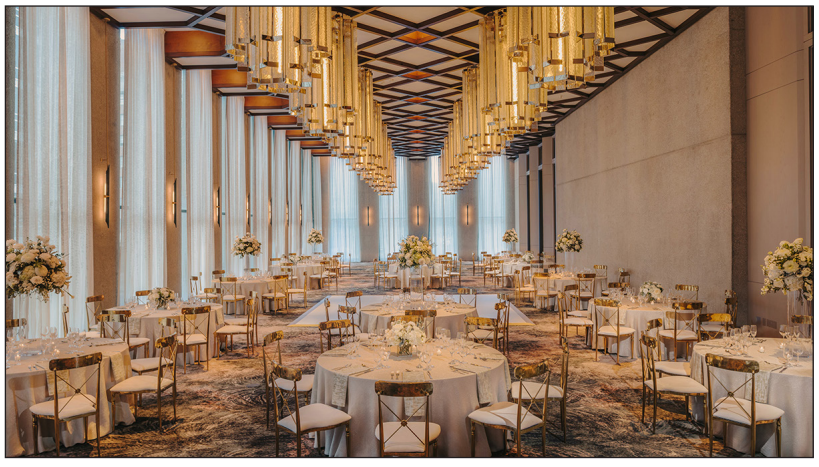
The 250-room hotel is housed in the former Bank of New Orleans building, a landmark building within walking distance of New Orleans' French Quarter that originally opened in 1970.

The new Fairmont hotel will offer guests rooms and suites designed to combine the spirit of New Orleans' oil boom, the city's European influence, and nods to Louisiana's natural landscapes, The property will also feature new dining outlets, a spa and fitness center, and more than 19,000 square feet of meeting and event space.

The hotel will also open a private lounge and "hotel-within-a-hotel" on the 29th and 30th floors with a view overlooking the Mississippi River in December, officials said.

"After two decades away, returning to New Orleans feels like a joyful homecoming. This magnificent property is designed to be a vibrant social epicenter, a sanctuary where the city's rich heritage meets a sophisticated, contemporary energy," Acar said. "Through meticulous design, spirited gastronomy, and exceptional spaces created for connection, we are not just opening a hotel; we are welcoming the soulful spirit of New Orleans back into the global Fairmont family for our next great chapter."

The new Louisiana hotel will feature dining outlets created through a partnership with famous chef and TV personality Emeril Lagasse.



The Fairmont New Orleans' ballroom

Alongside the hotel's opening on November 2, the Delmonico Steakhouse—a Lagasse concept—debuted its first location outside of Las Vegas. The menu "timeless steakhouse traditions with [Lagasse's] signature bold New Orleans flavors," Fairmont officials said.

For breakfast and lunch, Lagasse and Fairmont debuted The Café by Emeril, which combines "French-inspired classics with Creole accents and Southern influences," Fairmont said.

"I'm thrilled to bring Delmonico Steakhouse to New Orleans alongside The Café by Emeril, creating two distinct dining experiences that reflect what I love about cooking and bringing people together," said Chef Emeril Lagasse. "We're proud to be a part of Fairmont's return to the city and look forward to welcoming both locals and visitors to experience the bold flavors, genuine hospitality, and unmistakable New Orleans spirit that defines everything we do."

The Fairmont New Orleans will also open additional food and beverage outlets next month, including the hotel's rooftop pool, theBleu Perdu, a bistro-style restaurant, and Third Measure, a late-night cocktail bar.

"From the moment guests enter our lobby to an evening at Delmonico Steakhouse, the hotel was designed to feel distinctly of New Orleans, while offering the service and experience Fairmont is known for," said Eric Overstreet, General Manager, Fairmont New Orleans." We're proud to welcome travelers and our local community into these spaces and look forward to seeing Fairmont New Orleans become part of the city's next chapter."



The Delmonico Steakhouse at Fairmont New Orleans

Graduate Hotel in Providence Headed to Auction

By Jordan Bradley

The Graduate by Hilton Providence hotel, a landmark hotel in Rhode Island, will go to auction on January 20, 2027.

According to a public notice published in the *Providence Journal* on October 25, the hotel will be auctioned in New York City along with a hotel in Cincinnati, both owned by AJ Capital Partners, the Nashville-based private equity investment firm that created the Graduate hotel brand.

The auction was arranged by lender Acore Capital Mortgage, a Delaware limited partnership, in an effort to recoup some of the $44.3 million owed by AJCP for the Providence hotel's purchase.

The legal notice disclosed that more than $36 million in unpaid principal balance remained on the mortgage loan.

The Providence hotel originally opened as The Biltmore in 1922 and still bears the "Biltmore" sign on the rooftop, according to the *Journal*. The hotel was purchased by AJ Capital Partners in 2017 for $43.5 million and subsequently joined the firm's Graduate portfolio.

In 2024, Hilton purchased the Graduate brand from AJCP in a $210 million, asset-light deal, meaning AJCP still retained ownership of the hotel properties while Hilton owned the brand name and operated the hotels.

AJ Capital Partners did not respond

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NCBMP

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nity, including with NCBMP. *USAE*'s support has helped amplify our mission and the voices of our members. We are grateful to count you among our partners, and this award is a significant recognition of the impact of *USAE's* work."

USAE has provided onsite coverage of NCBMP's Annual Conference, Kermit J. Hall Leadership Summit and State of Black Tourism. In 2023, the organizations partnered on a custom issue celebrating NCBMP's 40th Anniversary.

"We are incredibly honored to be named the 2026 Corporate Award winner by the National Coalition of Black Meeting Professionals (NCBMP)," said James A. Heller, Publisher, *USAE*, Inc. "As a dedicated news platform for the hospitality and association industry, it is a privilege to provide comprehensive coverage of NCBMP's events and to help amplify the critical conversations surrounding equity, economic empowerment, and professional excellence. This award strengthens our commitment to telling the vital stories of Black meeting professionals and driving meaningful progress across our industry."

Find more information on NCBMP's Annual Conference here.



Industry Movers



Michelle Flippo has been promoted to Director of Operations and Business Development at Visit Oxnard. Since joining Visit Oxnard in 2013, Flippo has grown from Administrative Assistant to a member of the leadership team, taking on increasing responsibilities across operations, business development, and group sales. Flippo helped develop the organization's first-ever Meeting & Event Planning Guide. She serves on the Destinations International Convention Sales & Services Committee.



Mitchell Duggan has been named as General Manager of the Sheraton Grand Sacramento Hotel. Duggan has more than 23 years of Marriott hospitality experience. Throughout his career with The Ritz-Carlton, he has held progressive leadership roles, first joining the brand as opening director of food & beverage at The Ritz-Carlton, South Beach. He then went on to serve at The Ritz-Carlton, Westchester and The Ritz-Carlton, Battery Park.



Jeff Graham has joined Southern California's Mission Pacific Beach Resort and The Seabird Ocean Resort & Spa as the Area Director of Sales and Marketing. He'll oversee the sales and marketing teams and work alongside resort leadership, ownership, and Hyatt's commercial organization. Throughout his career, Graham has held senior commercial and sales leadership positions with luxury hotels, resorts, and hospitality organizations such as Preferred Hotels & Resorts.



Kristie Rasheed is now Managing Director, U.S. Hotels, Lore Group, She'll oversee Lore Group's U.S. operations, specifically for Riggs Washington DC, Lyle Washington DC, and Hotel Park Ave NYC. Rasheed joins Lore Group with more than 20 years of experience driving revenue, profitability, and operational performance for luxury hotels, resorts, and vacation rental portfolios. Most recently, she served as vice president of operations at Olympia Hospitality.

See more Industry Movers

GM of the Year

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This year's GM awards included two new categories: the GM Rising Star Award, which recognizes a general manager within the first two years of their first GM role, and the GM Community Ambassador Award, which recognizes a general manager whose hotel had become a consistent contributor to the local community.

The 2026 General Manager of the Year honorees include the following:

• GM Lifetime Achievement Award: Greg Leonard, General Manager, Hyatt Regency Denver at the Colorado Convention Center in Denver, Colorado

• GM of the Year, Extended Stay Property: Marie Ciss, General Manager, Extended Stay America Select Suites BWI Airport in Baltimore, Maryland

• GM of the Year, Full-Service Property: Sam Ioannidis, General Manager, The Plaza Hotel in New York City

• GM of the Year, Select-Service Property: Nilesh "Neil" Patel, General Manager, Best Western Opp Inn in Opp, Alabama

• GM of the Year, Independent Property: McClinton Heil, Area Managing Director, Halycon, a hotel in Cherry Creek, Denver

• GM of the Year, Resort Property: Greg Cook, General Manager, The Ritz-Carlton in Amelia Island, Florida

• GM Rising Star Award: Chris Egbert, General Manager, Holiday Inn Express & Suites in New Buffalo, Michigan

• GM Community Ambassador Award: Brad Everett, General Manager, Hilton Garden Inn & Manhattan Conference Center in Manhattan, Kansas

Leonard, the recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award, was given the award in recognition of "his more than 45 years of leadership with Hyatt, including leading a transformative hotel renovation while maintaining operational excellence and making lasting contributions to Denver's tourism industry and community," AHLA said.

Rising Star honoree Egbert was recognized for delivering "exceptional business results while strengthening team morale" and "transforming" the hotel's workplace culture. Community Ambassador honoree Everett was recognized for "his unwavering commitment to community service," AHLA said.

Maietta added that this year's honorees "grew into leaders who develop their teams, drive results, and make their communities stronger. We're proud to celebrate them. There's no greater joy than recognizing the important role they play in shaping the guest experience and bringing hospitality to life."



The American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA) recognized the 2026 General Managers of the Year on November 3 in Miami. Left to right: Neil Patel, General Manager, Best Western Opp Inn; Chris Egbert, General Manager, Holiday Inn Express & Suites New Buffalo; Greg Cook, General Manager, The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island; Marie Ciss, General Manager, Extended Stay America Select Suites BWI Airport; Greg Leonard, General Manager, Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center; McClinton Heil, Area Managing Director, Halycon, a hotel in Cherry Creek; and Brad Everett, General Manager, Hilton Garden Inn & Manhattan Conference Center.

Checking Inn

Wyndham Hotels & Resorts announced on October 29 that it has launched **Homes & Havens**, a collection of almost 800 professionally managed vacation homes, villas and condos in the United States, the Caribbean, Mexico and Europe.

In the coming months, Wyndham expects to add additional accommodations like cabins, yurts and tiny homes to the collection. As part of the launch, members of Wyndham's rewards program, **Wyndham Rewards**,

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NEWS

American Bus Association Looking Forward During 100-Year Anniversary

By Todd McElwee

The American Bus Association (ABA) is celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2026. The centennial is a time for celebration but also a catalyst, a springboard for the association and its membership to rally around in a collective push forward.

During a recent conversation with *USAE*, Fred Ferguson, President & CEO, ABA, detailed how the association's mission for year 101 and beyond is integrating its founding values with modern sensibilities.

Ferguson, who joined ABA in 2024 and received a four-year contract extension in August, has been adamant that ABA must focus on the bus companies.

Ferguson, who joined ABA in 2024 and received a four-year contract extension in August, has been adamant that ABA must focus on the bus companies.

"When I arrived at the American Bus Association, bus operator membership revenue represented a small portion of the association's total budget," he wrote in an ABA column. "While ABA proudly represents the broader travel and tourism ecosystem, we can never lose sight of our most important member: the bus operator. The bus is the engine of the group travel industry. When bus operators are healthy, so is the entire ecosystem. Tour companies grow. Destinations welcome more visitors. Attractions, hotels, restaurants, and travel suppliers all benefit. That reality has shaped an important shift inside ABA. We are refocusing our strategy around a simple principle: ABA should work for bus operators every day."

Ferguson reiterated that belief to *USAE*, noting ABA's unique place in the travel/tourism ecosystem is derived from its representation of North America's bus operators. ABA was founded as a coalition of private bus companies, and Ferguson said it is committed to that core constituency and making sure bus companies "feel at home."

Showcasing the economic impact of ABA's constituency to policymakers has been paramount. As ABA's Sr. Director of Content, Ben Rome, wrote: "Perhaps the most visible change under Fred's leadership has been ABA's more assertive federal advocacy posture." Evidence noted by Rome included Ferguson's July 2025 testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation's Subcommittee on Surface Transportation, Freight, Pipelines, and Safety, national policy letters and smaller Council-centered Capitol Hill fly-ins; The African American Motorcoach Council held its first Capitol Hill Fly-In in September 2025.

No stranger to Capitol Hill, Ferguson—who served as a Chief of Staff and Legislative Director in the U.S. House of Representatives, managing successful campaigns and mentoring over 50 Congressional staffers—knows numbers grab the attention of elected officials and their staffs. He told *USAE* that ABA has become very intentional in research and data collection and dissemination.

A collaboration between Tourism Economics, an Oxford Company and the ABA Foundation, *The 2025 Economic Impact of Motorcoach Group Travel in the United States*, arms motorcoach champions with the metrics to confirm the industry's stature as an economic powerhouse. They include an estimated 41.1 billion passenger miles and direct spending by motorcoach group travelers of $72.5 billion in 2025.



Fred Ferguson

Revisiting the notion of buses as the engine of the group travel industry, Ferguson highlighted the interactive map affiliated with the study. Because all politics is local, data is broken down by province, state, county, and congressional district allowing for personalized presentations to policymakers and other community stakeholders.

With a new Congress descending on D.C., Ferguson noted this is the time to ensure freshly elected officials and their staffs understand not only the economic significance of the motorcoach industry, but also what ABA represents—private motorcoach companies and not public transit or school buses.

Marketplace, ABA's signature event, will be in Calgary from February 6–9. In addition to commerce—an independent Tourism Economics analysis found the 2026 edition generated an estimated $124.9 million in total sales-based transaction activity—and education, Ferguson said the conference will reinforce the relationship between the U.S. and Canadian motorcoach industries.

Roughly six weeks remain in ABA's centennial celebration. With more member-forward initiatives, advocacy and engagement on deck, Ferguson and the association are intent on utilizing 2026's momentum to propel the start of the next 100 years.



Boutique and luxury hotel owners and partners gathered for the Boutique & Luxury Lodging Association's 2026 Boutique Hotel Owners Conference on October 19-20 at the Westlake Village Inn in Westlake Village, California. The annual conference gathered more than 200 owners, operators, investors and creatives from around the globe to discuss the conference's 2026 theme, The Age of Wonder, with panels on AI, retail partnerships, food & beverage trends and more.

Graduate Hotel

continued from page 4

by press deadline to *USAE* request for comment about the Graduate by Hilton Providence's forthcoming auction.

AJ Capital Partners is no stranger to hot water.

An affiliate of the company was sued by Cornell University on April 29 over the November 2025 closure of its Graduate hotel on the university's Roosevelt Island campus.

In 2018, AJCP affiliate Graduate Roosevelt Island Owner LLC and Cornell University signed a 65-year lease. The university alleged that the closure violated the lease agreement. The LLC filed a countersuit on April 30 arguing that closure did not violate the terms of the agreement.

New York-based Lender Acres Capital also sued the AJCP affiliate over the closure of the Roosevelt Island hotel, seeking $79.27 million in outstanding principal debt, unpaid interest, late charges and attorneys' fees, according to the *Nashville Business Journal*.

Most recently in September, hotel worker union Unite Here released a statement in opposition of AJ Capital Partner's planned Field & Stream Lodge headed for Bend, Oregon in 2028. The outdoor adventure hotel brand is being launch in partnership between AJCP and Starwood Capital, according to the *Bend Bulletin*.

"Field & Stream Lodge Co. is a partnership between multibillion-dollar private equity companies AJ Capital Partners and Starwood Capital," said Tiffany Ten Eyck, a UNITE HERE communications representative. "AJ Capital's relationship with some of the communities in which it has developed projects has been contentious."

The union referred to a set of circumstances surrounding AJ Capital's Palo Alto, California, Graduate hotel.

According to local reports, after AJCP purchased an apartment building in 2019, the company evicted tenants amid a housing shortage in the city, causing pushback from community members and investigations into the company's dealings with tenants and city officials.

NEWS

OBITUARY

Thomas C. Dolan, Past Chair of ASAE, Dies

By Todd McElwee

Thomas C. Dolan, Ph.D., LFACHE, FASAE, President Emeritus, American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE) passed away on October 30. He was 78.

Dolan's roughly 30 years of service, accomplishment and engagement helped define a generation of association leadership. A willing and able leader, mentor and advocate, he was guided by an enthusiasm to help others achieve success. A quote on his Ahlgrim Funeral Home/ Legacy.com obituary exemplified this ethos: "It's all about people. All these other accomplishments are nice, but if you're not helping people and improving their lot in life, I don't see any purpose."

Dolan was ACHE's President & CEO from 1991–2013, taking on his emeritus role after his tenure. ACHE's obituary said he guided the organization through a period of advancement, strengthening its role as the professional home for healthcare leaders and expanding its impact through education, professional development, credentialing and networking.

Deborah Bowen, FACHE, CAE, President & CEO of ACHE, said: "Tom's legacy is woven into the core fabric of ACHE and the healthcare leadership profession. He understood that building a strong organization was about building a community, investing in people and creating opportunities for others to lead and make a difference. He was a passionate and steadfast champion for diversity, equity and inclusion, and believed deeply that healthcare leadership should reflect the communities it serves. Through his vision, advocacy and commitment to developing future leaders, he helped open doors, elevate voices and create pathways for generations of healthcare executives. I would not be who I am today as a leader without his guidance, support, friendship and mentorship. We stand on the servant-leader foundation he helped build, and living the values that he reflected. We will carry his legacy in our hearts and work as we move forward. He will be greatly missed."

Dolan's influence and impact stretched well beyond ACHE. He served as Chair of both ASAE and Association Forum with the former naming him both as a Fellow and its Key Award recipient - the highest individual honor it bestows.

Michelle Mason, FASAE, CAE, President & CEO, ASAE; and Artesha Moore, FASAE, CAE, President & CEO, Association Forum, provided *USAE* comments on Dolan's passing and legacy.

"Tom Dolan embodied the generosity and purpose that make association leadership so meaningful," said Mason. "Through his 27 years leading the American College of Healthcare Executives and his dedicated volunteer leadership with ASAE and other associations, he strengthened our profession and helped countless people grow and lead. In addition to his board service, Tom was named to the ASAE Fellows in 1993 and was the 2012 recipient of ASAE's Key Award. We are deeply grateful for his lasting contributions and extend our heartfelt condolences to his wife, Georgia, his family and all who knew and loved him."

"Our Association Forum community is deeply saddened by the passing of Tom Dolan," said Moore. "His impact on this community runs deep. Through decades of service, mentorship, relationships, and an incredible generosity of spirit, Tom helped shape generations of leaders. His wisdom traveled through people, and I am among those who have benefited from it through the leaders he influenced and the community he helped build. That is a powerful legacy. We are incredibly grateful for all that Tom gave to Association Forum and to the profession, and he will be deeply missed."

Dolan also served with the Association of University Programs in Health Administration, the Board of Overseers of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, Institute for Diversity in Health Management, Mental Health Association in Missouri, International Hospital Federation and Volunteers of America. He held a variety of teaching, research, and administrative positions at St. Louis University, University of Missouri-Columbia, University of Washington, and University of Iowa. He also served in the U.S. Army as a field artillery officer.



Born December 31, 1947, Dolan resided in Elmhurst, Illinois. He attended Loyola University of Chicago and received his PhD in Hospital Administration from the University of Iowa, which honored him with an alumni award in 2022.

The Ahlgrim Funeral Home/ Legacy.com obituary said he survived by his loving wife, Georgia; three children and their spouses, William "Bill" Dolan, Barbara Ciesinski (Jim); and Lauren Rapisand (Jason); and three grandchildren, Matthew Ciesinski, Maxwell Rapisand and Reese Rapisand. He is also survived by his brothers Terrance "Terry" (Jeri) Dolan, Gerald "Jerry" (Jan) Dolan and Daniel "Danny" (Debbie) Dolan.

A memorial visitation was held November 6 at Ahlgrim Funeral Home in Elmhurst. In lieu of flowers, please donate to the Volunteers of America or one's favorite charity in Dolan's name.

Checking Inn

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can earn points on stays in Homes & Havens properties.

"No two trips are the same, and the best rewards programs should reflect that," said Michael Shiwdin, GVP, Integrated Marketing, Loyalty and Digital at Wyndham.

Find more information here.

The **Westin Hilton Head Island Resort & Spa** in **South Carolina** has closed its doors for a $50 million renovation, according to **The Post and Courier**. The renovation is expected to introduce five new dining concepts, a redesigned the lobby featuring an indoor-outdoor layout, expanded spa and meetings & event amenities and an adults-only pool to the property.

Renovations of the Westin's approximately 40,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor meeting and event space will include new boardrooms, meeting spaces and improvements to the Grand Event Lawn.

"We are making meaningful investment across the property, from the public spaces to dining and wellness, with a focus on creating an elevated experience that remains distinctly connected to Hilton Head Island," said General Manager Markus Krebs in an interview with *The Post* and *Courier*.

The renovation is expected to be completed in April 2027.

Longevity media company **Super Age** partnered with Hyatt's loyalty program, **World of Hyatt**, "to champion longevity and welcome athletes" **Hyatt's Regency Times Square** hotel, the pair announced on October 30.

The announcement preceded The Super Age Games, "the world's first whole-human longevity fitness competition," held November 7 at the Armory Track in New York City. The event invited athletes to compete in eight trainable longevity markers: grip strength, aerobic capacity, agility, balance, functional strength, endurance under load, working memory under physical stress and relational capacity in real time.

As part of the partnership, Hyatt and Super Age launched a travel wellness collection for game participants to help competitors "stay on track" before, during and after the competition.

Find more information here.

Placemakr announced the forthcoming opening of **Placemakr Tempe, Apartments by Hilton** on November 2. The opening of the property builds on the brands partnership with Hilton as part of the latter's **Apartment Collection** of accommodations. The flexible-living property will feature 87 studioes, one-bedroom, two-bedroom and three-bedroom accommodations within Shorehave, a new-build 722-unit Class-A community developed by Silverstein Properties, Placemakr said. Guests can book through Hilton's Apartment Collection channel and will have access to a resort-style pool, game lawn, clubroom and fitness center.

"The greater Phoenix hospitality market has performed well over the past half decade, and demand for apartment-style stays is outpacing supply - so we're doubling down," said Jason Fudin, CEO and Co-founder of Placemakr. "Tempe is a natural fit for what we do, with a mix of business, university and leisure demand."

Placemakr Tempe, Apartments by Hilton is scheduled to open on December 2.

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