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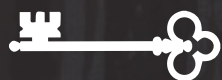
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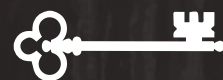




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FEATURES

16 BARNES WITH CHARM

IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A ONE-OF-A-KIND EXPERIENCE FOR YOUR GUESTS, LOOK NO FURTHER THAN A BARN EVENT

By Shelby Deering

23 THE POWER OF DATA-DRIVEN EVENTS

THE COLLECTION OF DATA IS ENABLING PLANNERS AND MARKETERS TO GET THE MOST VALUE OUT OF THEIR EVENTS

By Amy Wunderlin

28 DESTINATION: FOND DU LAC

A REVITALIZED DOWNTOWN, NEW CONFERENCE DISTRICT AND VARIED ENTERTAINMENT OPTIONS FORM AN AFFORDABLE, ACCESSIBLE AND UNIQUE MEETINGS AND EVENTS DESTINATION

By Jen Bradley

39 WISCONSIN CHEFS DISH ON LOCAL CUISINE

MEET SOME OF THE CHEFS FIXING FOODIE DELIGHTS ACROSS THE DAIRY STATE

By Ronnie Wendt

45 REACH OUT FOR YOUR ROI

TO PROPERLY ASSESS YOUR ROI GATHER INFORMATION BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER YOUR MEETING OR EVENT

By Ronnie Wendt

DEPARTMENTS

6 IN THE NEWS

Briefs on the latest happenings in the meetings conventions industry

8 VENUE SPOTLIGHT

Hartland venue plays tribute to the Beatles with replica of Liverpool's Cavern Club
By Ronnie Wendt

10 PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

How to ask for help when you need it
By Molly Rose Tueke

13 EXPERT ADVICE

Six tips for booking entertainment
By Greg Gerber

50 PLANNER PROFILE

Bonnie Oleson shares top tips for standout events
By Ronnie Wendt

33 DESTINATION SHOWCASE

JANESVILLE, MANITOWOC, OSHKOSH, RACINE

ON THE COVER: FOND DU LAC, WIS. PHOTO BY DAVID USELMANN/
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EDITOR'S NOTE

My daughter was married in a barn. Well, not really; she married under a grove of burr oaks on a Madison-area farm. We held her reception in an old octagon-shaped barn renovated for wedding use.

I remember two things about this event. One, once it came together, the farm provided an idyllic setting for a wedding, and the barn itself provided an elegant but rustic space for the reception. But I also vividly recall the knot that formed in my stomach as I discussed details with the venue operator and

realized there is much more to consider when holding an event in a barn.

Tasks that are normally taken for granted at a hotel or banquet hall fall on your planning plate when holding an event at such a space.

Even so, barn venues boast benefits that are hard to replicate, making them worthy of consideration, whether planning a wedding, a corporate meeting or a small expo. Andrea VandeBerg and Sarah Sarbacker of Cherry Blossom Events say hosting in a barn presents "a bit more work than a traditional hotel ballroom event," but add that it's "totally worth it for the incredible ambiance that a barn venue provides."

In *Barns with Charm*, author Shelby Deering helps readers navigate their way through the challenges presented when hosting an event in these charming and rustic settings.

Tips on planning an event at a farm are not all you'll find in this jam-packed issue.

After reading that a Harvard Business study found two out of three companies fail to measure full event impact, we decided to find out how others measure the success of their events. "Reach Out for Your ROI" examines how goal setting, data gathering and attendee surveys can help you calculate your ROI and plan for the following year.

Finally, don't forget to check out writer Jen Bradley's focus on Fond du Lac, a city meeting and exceeding planners' top demands for accessibility, affordability, safety and activities. Bradley, a Fond du Lac-area native, details how this agricultural hub is revitalizing its downtown spaces and adding modern venues that can accommodate groups of all sizes. Though nearby, Lake Winnebago is sure to thrill with opportunities for fishing, boating, windsurfing and more, she shares that the city itself and the surrounding area offers a whole lot more including agritourism, traditional Wisconsin supper clubs, fine art galleries and shopping.

Enjoy the read!

Ronnie L. Wendt
Editor

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PHOTO COURTESY VISIT MILWAUKEE

IN THE NEWS

VISIT MILWAUKEE RELEASES VENUES VIDEO

VISIT Milwaukee has released a two-minute video showcasing Milwaukee as a premier meeting and events destination. The organization has sent the video to meeting planners nationwide in a special Milwaukee box that also includes a sampling of items from the city, including beer soap, The Milwaukee Chocolate Bar and a mini cheesehead. Highlights in the video footage include the city's emphasis on beer and brewing; paddle taverns and pedal taverns; Harley-Davidson motorcycles; and traditional Wisconsin food offerings, such as cheese curds and bratwurst, and fine dining. The VISIT Milwaukee video titled "Totally Random, Totally Wonderful: Milwaukee" can be viewed at youtube.com/user/VISITMilwaukee/videos.

CHARLESTOWNE HOTELS TO MANAGE THE COVE

Charlestowne Hotels adds The Cove of Lake Geneva to its portfolio of managed properties. The 222-room, all-suites condominium resort is Charlestowne's first property in Wisconsin. "Across our portfolio, we've seen a significant rise in travel to smaller, yet active, destinations like Lake Geneva, making The Cove a natural addition to our management group," said Michael Tall, president and COO of Charlestowne Hotels. "This area is already a celebrated destination for closer drive markets like Milwaukee, Chicago and Madison. In partnership with the resort's ownership team, our goal is to broaden awareness

for The Cove, and the charming destination of Lake Geneva, among nationwide travelers." Charlestowne will initiate marketing and revenue efforts that target new audiences through website and booking engine optimization, geo-targeted paid media campaigns and engagement-focused social media presence.

HOTEL NORTHLAND OPEN FOR BUSINESS

The 160-room luxury hotel, Hotel Northland, which is now part of the Marriott Autograph collection, opened on February 14, concluding three years of renovations, legal battles, ownership disputes and rising costs that marred the effort to revive the downtown Green Bay landmark. Room night prices at this storied hotel range from \$160 to \$200. The hotel's main restaurant, The Walnut Room, also opened on Valentine's Day.

HEIDEL HOUSE TO CLOSE IN MAY

Heidel House, an iconic Midwestern resort that once served as a private estate in 1890 and began as a hospitality landmark for guests in 1945, has announced it will cease operations May 20th. Stacy Nemeth, COO of Fiore Companies, which owns Heidel House, cited sustained financial losses as the reason for the closure. She notes that though Fiore Companies took many steps to improve the resort, including constructing a world-class spa, expanding the conference center and utilizing the expertise of a national management company, the current operational model is not a viable enterprise. Nemeth indicated that if no buyer for the resort steps forward, Fiore Companies will pursue other development options and will continue to work with the City of Green Lake as it explores opportunities.

SAINT KATE NAMES NEW GENERAL MANAGER

Saint Kate, the former InterContinental but soon to be a new, independent arts hotel in Milwaukee, appoints luxury hospitality veteran Scott Sloan as its general manager. Sloan will oversee daily operations of the 219-room arts destination. This includes managing all pre-opening and opening activities, overseeing the creation of three new restaurants, leading over 170 team members, collaborating with community influencers and artists, and shaping experiential moments for those who visit Saint Kate. Prior to joining the Saint Kate family, Sloan worked at Sage Hospitality Resources.

LA CROSSE CENTER REVAMP TO START SOON

The La Crosse Common Council recently approved conceptual plans for a \$42 million update to La Crosse's nearly 40-year-old convention center, clearing the way for construction to begin later this year. The proposed La Crosse Center revamp will expand the lobby area, add more restrooms, increase concessions offerings and renovate 12,500 square feet of space. The city has set aside approximately \$2 million in reserve funds and the state of Wisconsin has approved a nearly \$5 million grant for the project. Construction is expected to take about a year.

HOTEL RETLAW HIRES HEIDEL HOUSE RESORT SPA DIRECTOR

The Hotel Retlaw has hired Druellen Kosti as its new spa director. Kosti brings more than 30 years of experience to Hotel Retlaw. She has worked in spas and salons in Florida, Illinois and Wisconsin, and most recently served as the spa director at Heidel House Resort's Evensong Spa in Green Lake. Hotel Retlaw's spa treatments will include facials, massages, waxing, manicure-pedicure services, body treatments, eyelash extensions, a relaxation pool and a full-service salon.



KLETT JOINS VISIT LAKE GENEVA

VISIT Lake Geneva has named former state Tourism Secretary Stephanie Klett as its next president and CEO. Klett, a Beloit native, served as tourism secretary for eight years under former Gov. Scott Walker. For 18 years, she hosted the "Discover Wisconsin" television and radio series, for which she won an Emmy. "Some

of my early memories include the wonders of the Lake Geneva area," Klett said in a recent press release. "This opportunity to represent a community I've loved for so long is special to me, and I can't wait to get going." Klett will begin the Lake Geneva job April 8. She will cover strategic planning, business development, marketing, promotions, building strong partnerships and keeping the organization well managed and financially fit. While Klett served as tourism secretary, the state's tourism economy grew nearly 40 percent and added 25,000 tourism jobs. Tourism expenditures totaled \$20.6 billion. "She has been a visionary in the world of tourism and brings great energy and exceptional skills to our organization," said VISIT Lake Geneva Board Chairman Michael Jackson.



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VENUE SPOTLIGHT

VENUE PAYS TRIBUTE TO THE BEATLES

PLANNERS WILL SING ‘YEAH, YEAH, YEAH’ WHEN THEY SEE THIS REPLICA OF LIVERPOOL’S CAVERN CLUB, WHERE THE BEATLES ONCE PLAYED.

BY RONNIE WENDT

The British Invasion began in 1964 when the Beatles landed in the states for a two-week-long promotional blitz. As the country celebrates the 55th anniversary of Beatlemania, it seems fitting to share information on a hot new venue in Hartland that commemorates the subterranean Liverpool club, known as The Cavern Club, where the Fab Four got their start.

Technology entrepreneur Dave Meister spent the last four years fashioning a replica of The Cavern Club in an office building on Hartbrook Drive. The space lies below Blue Sky Jazz, a small club Meister also created. Both floors can be rented, separately or together, for corporate meetings and events. And, once planners learn the unique details of these well-appointed spaces, it will be hard for them to “let it be.”

The plans for these venues took root when Meister found himself struggling to fill vacant office space in the building. Rather than let the space sit empty, he decided to bring in a pool table, install a small kitchen and stage, add a flat-screen TV and use the area to hang out. However, plans changed as the project quickly took on a life of its own.

He first built a swanky jazz club on the first floor, complete with custom artwork celebrating Ella Fitzgerald and a large mural of 1920’s-era New York City. This posh hideaway also offers modern amenities, including a top-of-the-line sound system, a 75-inch flat screen television hidden behind remote-controlled panels, and an electronic window shade system that raises and lowers throughout the day.

Later, Meister landed on the idea of recreating The Cavern Club downstairs. He hired an architect to draw up exacting plans to the original club’s specifications. “We got as close as we could to the original dimensions, but it’s actually about eight inches lower and two feet narrower because we had to work around the trusses in the basement. We also had to pull in the vault a bit to have the same arch as the original vault,” he says.


Meister then packed the room with Beatles memorabilia. There is a Hofner violin bass guitar like the one Paul McCartney played; a Ludwig drum kit like Ringo Starr’s; and Rickenbacker guitars, which George Harrison and John Lennon once favored. And, there are exact copies of the drum and the uniforms from Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band.

Even the stairwell leading visitors to the lower level offers a visual treat. Visitors pass a mural of Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and The Big Bopper, take a few steps on Abbey Road, then take a nostalgic trip down a stairwell lined with British Invasion-era album covers.

The Cavern Club features a gorgeous wood bar equipped with a custom-designed refrigerator made to look like an old British phone booth and an array of opulent wood cocktail tables with leather-covered chairs. Warm lighting washes the entire area with a golden ambience.

Both Blue Sky Jazz and The Cavern Club are available to rent for events. Each space comfortably holds approximately 50 people. Planners can rent one area or both for their meeting or event. All that’s required is a \$500 donation per space to Blue Sky Jazz, a 501(c)(3) devoted to furthering the musical education of area youth.

“Blue Sky Jazz will use the money to provide scholarships and educational opportunities for young musicians,” Meister says. “The fee covers the space itself, but planners must cater in food and beverages, set up and clean up. We will have a representative from Blue Sky Jazz at every event to make sure the doors are locked and to answer questions as they arise.”

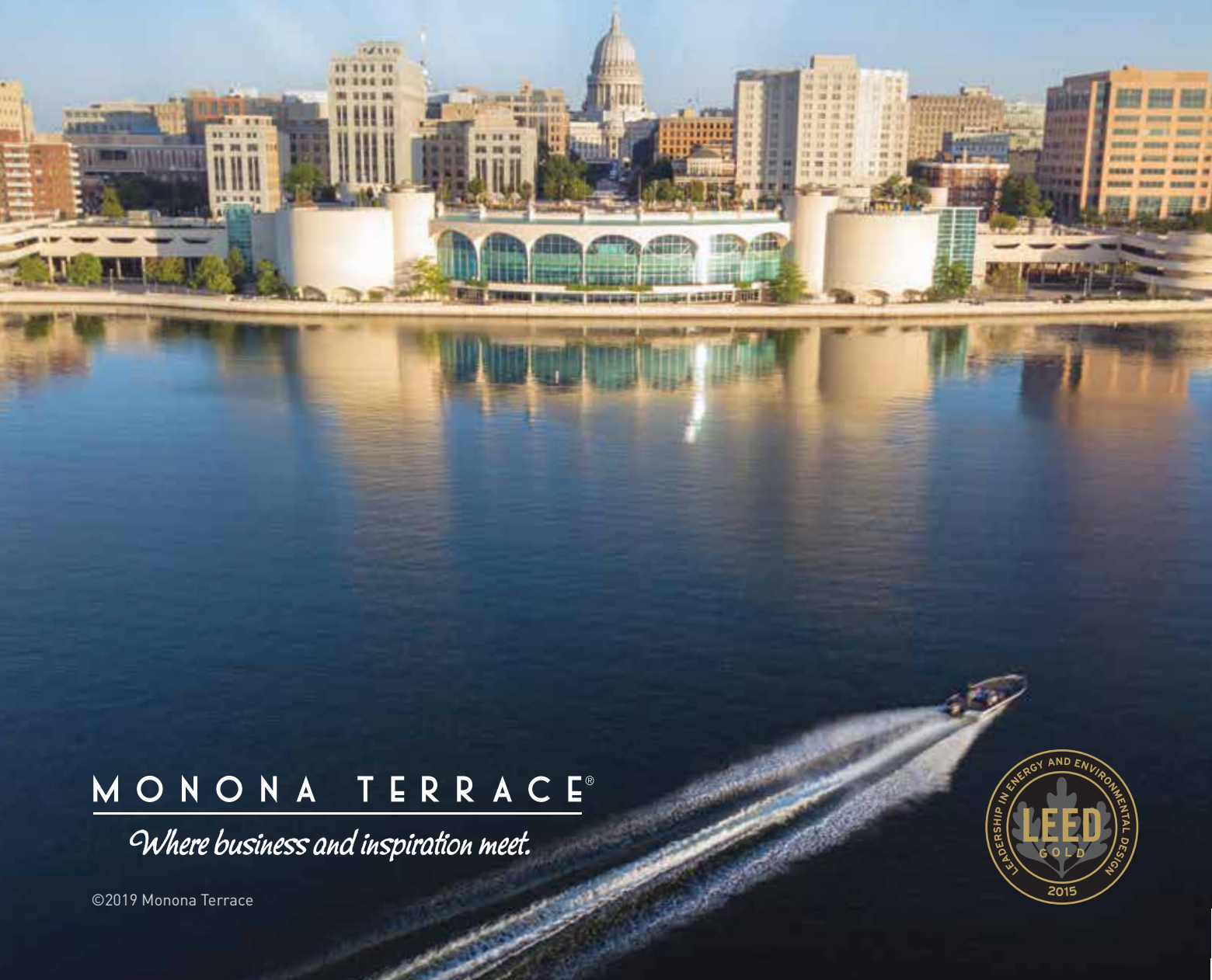
To discuss hosting a meeting or event at Blue Sky Jazz or The Cavern Club, call (414) 640-1024 or email Meister at dmeister@BlueSkyJazz.org. 

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PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

NEED HELP? JUST ASK.

HOW TO ASK FOR HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT.

BY MOLLY ROSE TEUKE

*"You are never strong enough
that you don't need help."*
— César Chávez

In today's stressful workplace, it's second nature to feel overwhelmed with proposals, reports and various projects. Yet, we're reluctant to ask for help. We worry that people will like us less for asking, or we don't know our colleagues well enough to ask for help, or we've asked before and been turned down, and on and on.

When experts put those reasons under the microscope, it becomes clear that we've got it all wrong. Cornell University Social Scientist Vanessa Bohns and her colleagues have studied helping behavior and come away with surprising findings.

A STRANGER IN NEED

We worry people will say "no," leaving us embarrassed for asking. Yet, research shows that even strangers are more likely than not to help us. In many studies where subjects are sent out into the world to ask strangers to fill out a questionnaire, give up a subway seat or lend the use of a cellphone, people consistently underestimate how likely a stranger is to say "yes." Further, research by Bohns and her colleagues suggests that if we've said "no" to one request, we are more likely, not less likely, to say "yes" to a second request.

Most of us, says Bohns, "don't realize that the social pressure to comply with a request is very, very strong. It's often harder for people, even bosses, to say 'no' than 'yes.'"

DON'T BE SHY

There are two sides to why it doesn't pay to be shy about asking for help. First, inviting others to help us is, in some ways, an act of generosity. Helpers feel better about themselves and experience mood upswings as a result of their helping behavior.

The second reason is a bit counter-intuitive. It turns out people will like us more, not less, when they agree to help us. Benjamin Franklin got it right when, back in the 18th century, he said that asking a favor was more powerful than doing a favor. He made this observation in his autobiography after borrowing a book from a rival who then became a lifelong friend: "He that has once done you a kindness will be more ready to do you another than he whom you yourself have obliged."

We humans like to be consistent in our actions and beliefs. This is Leon Festinger's 1957 theory of cognitive dissonance, which suggests that doing something that goes against our beliefs creates a mental discomfort. Research conducted a decade later (1969) by Jon Jecker and David Landy supports this. When we help someone, we justify our behavior by adopting a belief (or strengthening an existing belief) that the asker is worthy. "Help seekers," say Jecker and Landy, "may not recognize that requesting help can be a means of strengthening relationships, not straining them."

Bohns underscores that idea in a 2015 *Harvard Business Review* article: "Research suggests that the best method for smoothing over a conflict with someone may not be to offer to help but to ask for help," she says. "The target of the request is likely to comply, the justification process will follow, and feelings of positivity will start to restore the relationship."

MAKE IT EASY ON EVERYBODY

It's one thing to ask for help and something different to say, in essence, "Here's my problem. Please solve it for me." Before you ask for help, think through what you need and complete any foundational work that will make it easier for someone to step in to help you.

Also, consider how much time your helper can reasonably devote to helping you and scale your request accordingly. Be sure you're asking the right person.

Don't send out a mass plea for help, because everyone on your list will assume someone else is going to step up. Research by Bohns and her colleagues suggests that a face-to-face request is 34 times more effective than an email request. Yes, 34 times!



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In her 2018 book, “Reinforcements: How to Get the Help We Need,” Heidi Grant, lead scientist for the NeuroLeadership Institute and Associate Director of Columbia University’s Motivation Science Center, draws on neuroscience and the unfolding science of social psychology to offer some advice.

- For starters, hoping someone will notice that you need help isn’t very effective. “Human beings are, as a rule, preoccupied by their own affairs,” says Grant. “Inattention blindness”—being selectively focused on our own needs—is a natural survival instinct. Meet people halfway. Be explicit in your request and make it clear that you want the help.
- Go light on the apologies. When you lead with, “I really, really hate to ask you this, but...” you simply make the other person uncomfortable. “I can’t get a lot of personal satisfaction from helping you if I know that you hated having to ask me, and that you appear to be miserable about the whole thing,” says Grant.

- Likewise, leading with, “Can I ask you a favor?” might get someone to say “yes,” but is more likely to make the person feel trapped into saying “yes.” That can have a big impact on the degree and quality of help he or she is likely to give.
- Another no-no, says Grant, is emphasizing reciprocity, especially the “You owe me a favor” variety. It makes us feel controlled and again, isn’t likely to yield willing or whole-hearted help.
- While Tom Sawyer capitalized handsomely on the “You’re gonna have a blast helping me” gambit, chances are your prospective helper will see through the hyperbole and feel annoyed by it. This, too, can undermine the degree and value of the help you get.
- Don’t overdo the drama of the need. You run the risk of overwhelming the person who could help you, causing him or her to want to tune out. “If I don’t get some help with this, I could lose my job,” is more likely to scare people off than get them to pitch in willingly.

With common sense and a little personal sensitivity, asking for help can be an effective way to lighten our load when we most need it lightened. The flip side of asking, of course, is being the person in your office who is known for helping when needed. The more you say “yes” to others, the more likely others will be to happily say “yes” to you and give their all. www.wm

RESOURCES:

“Reinforcements: How to Get People to Help You”; ©2018 Heidi Grant (Harvard Business Review Press)

Selected Works of Vanessa K. Bohns
<https://works.bepress.com/vanessa-bohns>



Molly Rose Teuke has an enduring curiosity about what makes our brains tick. She delivers a program for Nicolet College called Get Your Brain On Your Side, and delivers brain-based leadership training for the NeuroLeadership Institute, a global leader in the performance arena. She also hosts a weekly classical music program on WXPB-FM. You can reach her at mollyrose@mollyrosecorcoaching.com.

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EXPERT ADVICE

EVENTS THAT ENTERTAIN

SIX TIPS FOR BOOKING ENTERTAINMENT THAT SETS THE STAGE FOR A SUCCESSFUL EVENT.

BY GREG GERBER

When planning an event, there are many tasks to perform, but none are remembered as much as the entertainment participants enjoy.

Whether it is selecting a DJ, band or comedian, or coordinating a casino night, planners face a unique challenge in determining the best option to serve a diverse assembly of people of all ages and both sexes.

#1 KNOW THE CROWD

Scott Batterham, owner of Elite Music Service and Batterham Entertainment in Green Bay, encourages event planners to pay careful attention to the type of crowd at the event when they are selecting music or entertainment.

"It could be that the audience would react better to a stand-up comedian than it would to a casino night. Whether you choose a live band or a great DJ, it is all about setting the tone for the party," he explains.

So, before booking, be sure to ask about the entertainer's experience working with groups of similar size to the event being planned, as well as their ability to work with the crowd's demographics.

For example, you probably won't want a rap artist to entertain a group of middle-age professionals, he states. Whatever type of entertainment is booked, Batterham encourages planners to seek ways to personalize the presentation. For example, the band or DJ might play music that includes a selection of hits from the high school or college era of many of the guests. Or a comedian might toss in a few jokes about the profession or special interests of the group.

#2 CHANGE IT UP

Many organizers limit their entertainment options by booking the same entertainment year after year, says Batterham. However, if the crowd once stayed until midnight to enjoy the show, but is now leaving at 9 or 10 p.m., perhaps it is time to switch things up.

Likewise, if guests are leaving early, it may mean the entertainment needs to start earlier. Depending upon the audience and location, people may want to hit the sack, or continue the party away from the venue.

#3 INVEST IN YOUR EVENT

"Entertainment really is an investment in your event," Batterham explains. "People may not remember the meal or table decorations. However, they will remember whether the entertainment was terrific or left them bored out of their minds."

For that reason, it is important to budget enough money to make entertainment a priority, he emphasizes.

"For some planners, having flowers and ice sculptures is a priority, for others it is decorations or a printed program," says Batterham. "Those who want to plan a memorable event should also budget enough money for crowd-pleasing entertainment."

A problem arises when money is already allocated and the planner is left with \$600 to keep the crowd entertained all evening, he notes.

"You need to ask yourself, do you really need to spend \$5,000 on catered hors d'oeuvres and two ice sculptures, or do you want an entertainer that will provide your event with awesome entertainment?" he asks.

#4 SURVEY THE AUDIENCE

The best way to determine the type of entertainment to book is to survey people who are planning to attend or who attended a similar event in the past. Then, seek options targeting that demographic and their interests, says Batterham.

"An excellent entertainer will work with organizers to craft something unique, new and different for that specific event," he adds.

It may center around the event theme or key participants, but when the entertainer does research to learn about the audience, the result is typically one that resonates with guests.

#5 SEEK HELP

Some planners believe getting a big-name entertainer or popular band is important, says Batterham. However, lower-cost local options are often just as good and more readily available at a fraction of the cost to fly in a headliner. That's where working

out who is available and at what cost," he explains.

Local event planners are familiar with excellent entertainment options and can often pull strings to make the option available within the event's budget. However, Batterham says working with a local booking agent becomes critical if the event takes place a considerable distance from where the organizer works. A local booking agent, he says, will know of popular entertainment options that out-of-town guests are not

so many details that go into planning a successful event that working with an agent to help select entertainment options ensures the planner has time to focus on other essential tasks."

#6 DO YOUR DUE DILIGENCE

Because there are a lot of entertainment options for planners to consider, it is essential that they do their due diligence before signing a contract. That applies not only to the acts themselves, but to booking agents as well.

"Those who want to plan a memorable event should also budget enough money for crowd-pleasing entertainment."
—Scott Batterham, Elite Music Service

with a professional booking agent is a tremendous help.

"For many event planners, it is easier to seek help from a booking agent than it is to call several dozen entertainers to find

aware of, and can provide planners with several options to choose from.

"Firms like ours are convenient, one-stop shops that can really help with planning an event," Batterham says. "There are

It means checking references at a minimum, and trying to view the entertainers in person, when possible. Even viewing YouTube videos can help narrow down a list of options to a few that are ideally suited for the audience. [WM](#)



Greg Gerber is the owner of RV Daily Report and a freelance journalist based in Phoenix, Ariz.

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Barns with Charm

If you're looking for a one-of-a-kind, laid-back experience for your guests, look no further than planning your next event at a barn.

By Shelby Deering

As the colorful leaves fell outside on a cool October day last year, planner Shanna Edwards saw the Elegant Barn Wedding Expo she planned become a reality. As the owner and creative director of Rustic Rhinestone Events, the barn at Sparta's Justin Trails Resort overflowed with 500 delighted attendees, where they perused 31 vendor booths outfitted with wedding ideas and inspiration. And all the while, the beautiful barn surroundings acted as the star of the show.





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"Barns can offer a remarkably unique opportunity for any event," Edwards says. "I find time and again that the essence and feel of a barn can be so inviting, create excitement and fun, and allow attendees to feel like they are getting away from the norm. Many barn venues have charming and warm characteristics, a gorgeous natural environment and tons of curb appeal for promoting and celebrating just about anything."

If you're planning a meeting, conference or event, a barn is certainly a way to surprise and enchant your guests. *Wisconsin Meetings* recently asked planners and barn venue owners and operators to share their thoughts on what makes a barn a magical venue for events, and they had several thoughts to share.

"Clients just love the flexibility of a blank canvas space that incorporates elements of the outdoors," note Andrea VandeBerg and Sarah Sarbacker, owners of Cherry Blossom Events.

Paul and Audrey Gaynor, owners and operators of Dodgeville's White Oak Savanna Events Farm and Sanctuary, say, "[A barn] facilitates personal connections between work and professional colleagues without the usual confines of generic buildings, conventional food and atmosphere."

Katie Klitzke, venue manager at Wisconsin Dells' Vennebu Hill (a hilltop barn with views overlooking the Wisconsin River and Baraboo Bluffs), echoes this sentiment, saying, "I think overall the advantages to holding a meeting or conference in a barn venue are that it inspires creativity and offers a unique venue to discuss business."

A barn can captivate attendees with its natural surroundings and outside-the-box feel, but there are considerations that differ from planning an event at a standard facility.

As VandeBerg and Sarbacker say, "[A barn] is a bit more work than a traditional hotel ballroom event, but it's totally

worth it for the incredible ambiance that a barn venue provides."

FOOD & FUN

Barns are similar to convention centers and halls in that each and every one of them handles catering and liquor differently. But since a barn is a rustic, distinctive environment, there may be more considerations to think about while planning.

Located on 87 acres of historic farmland once owned by Frank Lloyd Wright's cousin, White Oak Savanna opened in 2017 readied with a restored 1920's barn, tents and additional buildings.

Between providing spots for live music performances and outdoor areas for group



© WHITE OAK SAVANNA

discussions and bonfires, the Gaynors say it's important to keep in mind Mother Nature when hosting events at barn venues. "[Planners] do need to consider weather as we are mostly an outdoor, seasonal place."

Planners then need to think about one of the biggest components of any event: the food. Barn venues tend to be across



the board in providing food options. For example, White Oak Savanna is a licensed restaurant and also has strong relationships with many area caterers.

The Barn at Harvest Moon Pond, a timbered barn sitting on 10 acres in Poynette, just north of Madison, offers flexibility and allows groups to bring in their own food, choose their own caterer or ask the venue operator for assistance. They've also seen their fair share of food trucks, and there's even an on-site pizza oven.

Dave Muehl, owner and operator of Deerfield's Badger Farms, a working farm that doubles as a barn venue, has sage advice to share as well. He says, "It's extremely rare for a barn to have a commercial-grade kitchen, so most will require food to be catered in, since their kitchens are classified as warming kitchens. Some venues only allow caterers from a pre-selected list, while the rest are usually open to sourced food. Watch out for catering commissions that may be invoked. We are open-sourced, but do not charge a commission."

The moral of the story? Each barn venue has its own approach to catering and food, so be sure to talk everything through with the barn venue operator before planning your menu.

As for libations, it can be a tricky subject when it comes to barns. As Muehl explains, "Venues without liquor licenses are presently permitted to allow liquor on site for private parties, like weddings or most meetings—but there can be no sales of alcoholic beverages. Those without liquor licenses are not permitted to have liquor served if the public is allowed to attend, even if the liquor is given away." However, recent debate on a statewide level is pushing for barns to be required to carry liquor licenses. That discussion is ongoing, so be sure to discuss thoroughly with the venue operator to stay on top of the possibly changing issue.

SETTING THE SCENE

Beyond food and alcohol, as an event planner, you know there are lots of other details involved and covering those details in a barn setting can differ from other events you've planned.

If you'd like to include presentations, Wi-Fi access and other technology offerings to your guests, keep in mind that a barn is not naturally a high-tech place. But many venues, like the Barn at Harvest Moon Pond, are fully outfitted for modern needs.

Renee Whirry, who owns the venue alongside her husband, Gary, and daughter Marsha, says, "We offer Wi-Fi throughout



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venues means that there is a need to create a different environment for attendees, and with that comes a trade-off."

That trade-off can include room to get creative with a theme, as Whirry points out. She says, "We have seen several conferences with themed days, which brings an added level of enjoyment for attendees and makes the event even more memorable. Themes are much easier to carry out in a venue that is in the country, with room for these themes to grow."

Edwards summarizes planning a barn event, saying, "Being part of an event at a barn is a truly one-of-a-kind experience. Many of us do not have access to nature and the relaxation a barn property can offer. It feels like a small getaway. In my experience, a barn venue always delivers the combination of the comfort of home and carefree enjoyment of the moment." **WM**

the venue with redundant high-speed Internet and secure routers. This connectivity, coupled with our in-house speaker system, projection system and staff, keeps our conferences running smoothly."

Wi-Fi is available in several barn venues nowadays, but some planning ahead doesn't hurt. Klitzke says, "We recommend that groups come prepared with their own laptops and HDMI cords."

No event is complete without décor, which can include table set-ups, linens and other aesthetic items. Again, these elements can differ from barn to barn, so it would be wise to confirm the barn's policies before getting deep into the planning.

For example, Vennebu Hill will work with planners to create a floor layout and order linens, but the décor is up to the planner. The Barn at Harvest Moon Pond includes extra time in contracts for set-up and take-down. At White Oak Savanna, some of the set-up is included in the rental fee,

but some outdoor set-ups may require additional fees.

Edwards points out even more considerations when planning a barn event, and lists questions to ponder: What is parking like? Is the barn temperature-controlled? What's the weather back-up plan for outdoor spaces? What are the restrooms like? She adds that many barn venues offer fun extras that you can think about, too. "Maybe you can feed the llamas, camp overnight on the property, play the golf course or go sledding."

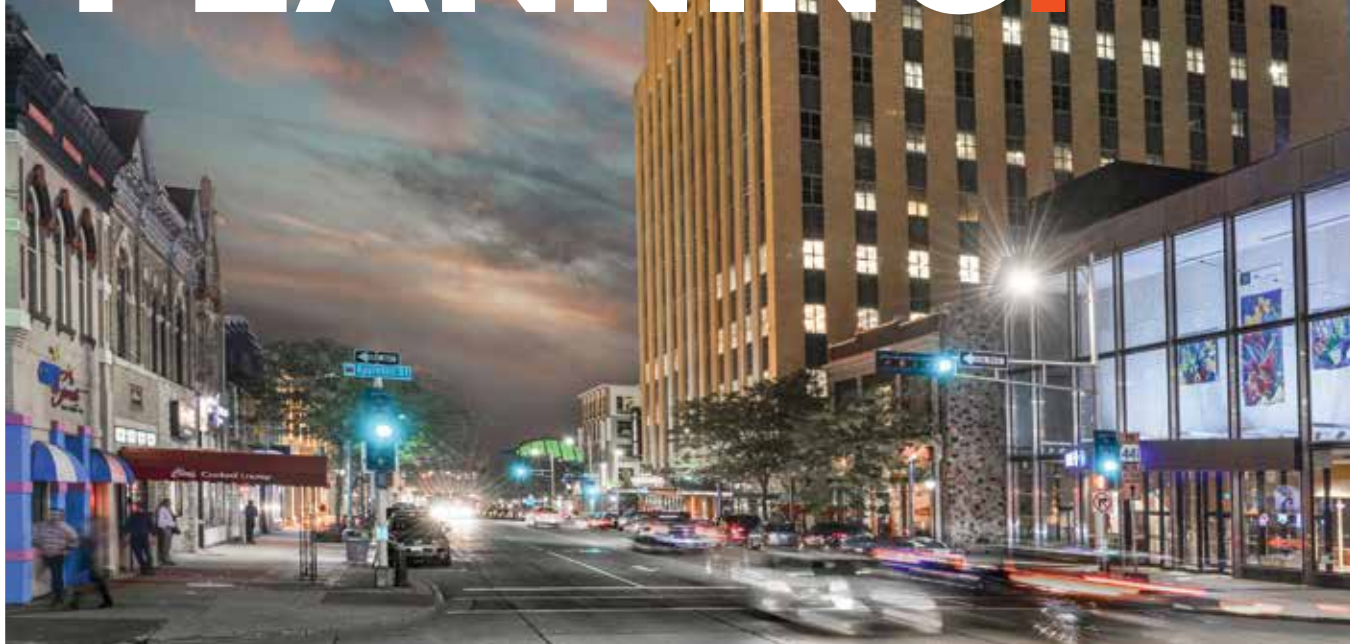
A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE

Klitzke shares that holding an event at a barn has pros and cons, which is true of any venue. She says, "Considering that big conference venues have the infrastructure for large-scale events, a planner needs to think slightly outside-the-box at an alternative venue. The mere fact that planners are interested in doing events at unique



Shelby Deering is a Madison, Wis.-based lifestyle writer contributing to national and regional publications such as *Country Living*, *Good Housekeeping* and *Experience Wisconsin*.

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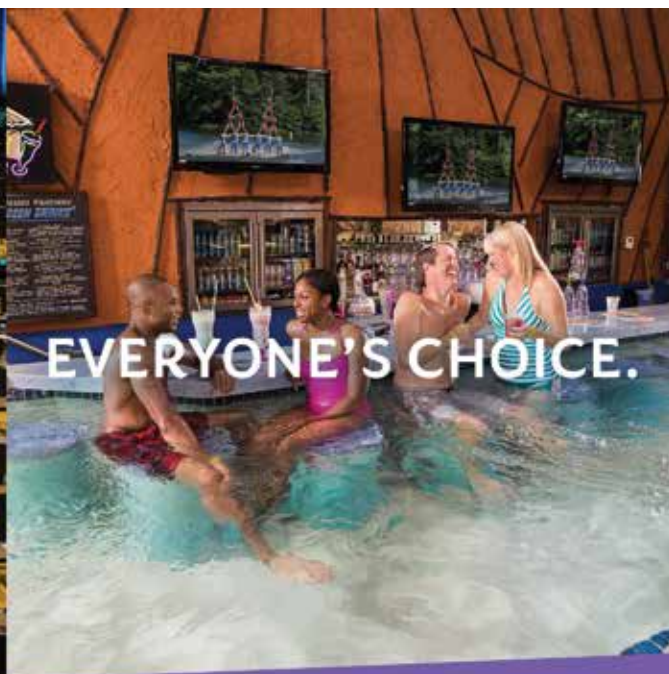


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The Power of Data-driven Events

The collection of data is enabling planners and marketers to get the most value out of their events.

By Amy Wunderlin



Chances are every time you host an event or meeting, you are collecting data. That online registration form? Yep, that's a source of data. Your mobile app? There is data to be collected there, too. No matter the size of your event or meeting, today, there is more data being collected than ever before. But how you analyze and then put that data to work is still a work in progress for many event planners, marketers and sales teams.

In 2019, Corbin Ball, industry expert and owner of Corbin Ball & Co., expects the industry to make serious headway in the standardization of data analytics and management, as mobile event apps, specifically, enable an explosion of on-site data collection.

"Now that we have the tools, let's process it," Ball says. "Data points are being collected everywhere, which provide a very rich understanding of attendees, and all those things can now be measured."

How to Collect Data

In addition to mobile event apps, data is being collected in both simple and complex ways.

Brian Friedman, vice president of digital innovation at Aventri, a company offering cloud-based events management software, says there are essentially two levels of data collection: interactive and non-interactive.

Non-interactive data collection is

something as simple as recording on pen and paper or scanning a QR code.

Interactive data collection utilizes more advanced technologies like near field communication (NFC), which is a method of wirelessly sharing information. Many smartphones and tablets have NFC and can interact with other wireless devices when in proximity. Friedman notes this technology can monitor attendees as they check in and out of sessions.

There are also passive interactive technologies like radio-frequency identification (RFID). RFID tags and smart labels are encoded with digital data that is captured via radio waves. This technology is often used to capture people walking in and out of rooms.

"This is convenient if you want to do more analytics throughout the event," Friedman explains.

During a recent event in Las Vegas, a client of Aventri's used attendance information to

"IoT is the intersection of mobile and capturing all that data on the cloud. Bluetooth beacons are a great example of that," notes Friedman. "We've gone from events with no data collection at all, to events that have data collection where the data isn't processed for

weeks, to leveraging the IoT to collect data that is available immediately."

Capitalizing on Data Collection

Advances in technology have made data collection seem almost easy, but the practice of analyzing it and acting is still in the early stages. In fact, many planners still track event data on Excel spreadsheets, Ball says, and it will take time for them to transition.

"Event data collection is going to become fairly automated and commonplace, but we're still in the building stages," Ball

says, adding that where the industry is seeing the most impact currently is at the marketing and sales level.

"Meetings are an essential part of marketing because attendees are now able to be better understood," he explains. "The attendee journey can now be tracked, and that's really important from a marketing standpoint."

Marketers and sales teams are benefiting from the ability to track each attendee's journey, gaining insight into their unique

profile. Attendee information can be collected in the organizer's CRM to create a record of attendee likes, dislikes and behaviors. This provides an opportunity for marketers to create a more personalized experience.

According to Friedman, marketers have three goals in mind when it comes to data capture:

- Personalization at the event to give attendees a more optimized journey
- Insights that can help them curate their content after an event
- Better understanding and guidance to help them get the most value of their event

"Marketing's goal is to capture the value of the attendees and get more insight into what they are doing. That way they can keep the data from the event and plug it into their marketing system, and they can then target and personalize their campaigns. Through that they can upsell or determine if an attendee is a sales prospect," Friedman adds.

Audience engagement experts Interactive Meeting Technology, for example, use games and activities to capture data. The Minneapolis, Minn., company links several kiosks together for these games and the data collected in those kiosks provides their clients with basic company information, such as the attendees' photos from LinkedIn, their LinkedIn profile and other information about the lead.

"The booth staffers at a trade show can view all of this data in an app on their phone before they have a face-to-face



Aventri's smart tags are wearable devices that track attendees as they move about.

make real-time improvements. The client's CEO spoke at back-to-back keynote sessions in rooms that could hold about 1,000 people. Aventri showed that they only had about 600 people in the room, giving the appearance of a half empty room and lackluster event. For the next session, the client removed about half the chairs, making the room feel much more crowded with fewer seats available, and then sent out notifications on the event's mobile app reminding attendees that a keynote was coming up.

Advancements in Internet of Things (IoT) devices enable the use of Bluetooth beacons, which are used to collect attendee records. Each attendee is assigned an ID that is also assigned to the beacon. When an attendee is within the beacon's range of about 30 feet, it sends a signal of where the attendee is and for how long. Friedman says they are typically placed anywhere the organizer wants to capture activity such as at a booth or table.

"Marketing's goal is to capture the value of the attendees and get more insight into what they are doing. That way they can keep the data from the event and plug it into their marketing system."

—Brian Friedman, vice president, Digital Innovation, Aventri





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“The booth staffers at a trade show can view all of this data in an app on their phone before they have a face-to-face conversation with the lead.”

**—Samuel Smith, managing director,
Interactive Meeting Technology**



spend 10-30 percent of their budgets on events, which typically account for about 10 percent of their annual revenue. Data analytics enable them to tie a sale back to influence at an event. For example, tracking that an attendee talked to a salesperson or attended a session, which ultimately converted into a sale.

Organizers also can use event data to entice sponsors. They can show current sponsors the value gained from the event in real-time to encourage them to sign up again the following year. Friedman adds that organizers also use data internally to collect information about what employees are interested in and engaging in.

“This can help them improve their training between events. They can also motivate their team and improve their brand messaging,” he says.

Over the next few years, experts predict this level of analysis will trickle down to the event planners themselves, who will also benefit from data to predict, prescribe,

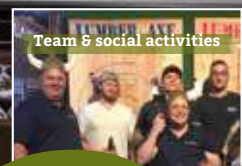
conversation with the lead. After the conversation they can make notes about the conversation that can be saved for later,” explains Samuel J. Smith, managing director of Interactive Meeting Technology.

A Wisconsin safety and compliance company, for example, recently used a trivia game to capture leads, identify marketing next steps and educate people on compliance. The data from the game helped this compliance company develop a post-event communications plan to reinforce key messages via video, blog posts and more, Smith says.

Another Minnesota medical device marketing team used a very simple trivia game with questions tied to learning objectives to help them understand whether their key opinion leaders were actually absorbing the content. “The data showed that the attendees did not understand one of the learning objectives. The client used that insight to make a small change during the event,” Smith explains.

These types of insights are also valuable to understanding your ROI, which ultimately is what event planning is all about. According to Friedman, marketers

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“Data points are being collected everywhere, which provide a very rich understanding of attendees, and all those things can now be measured.”

—Corbin Ball, industry expert and owner, Corbin Ball & Co.

learn and understand. This information can help them set up effective events, and data collected in real-time can help track an event's success as it is taking place. Event planners can even make corrections during events.

Data Integration

Before meeting organizers and planners can start making recommendations and calculations, Friedman notes, they need data accessibility. There are many software platforms that enable organizers to integrate data from multiple sources

into one platform but getting started can be overwhelming.

Friedman says when Aventri brings on new clients, they start by asking the company to identify their key performance indicators (KPI)—or its one metric for success.

“It's all about asking the right questions, and not focusing on too many things,” he adds.

Once you've identified an area of focus, Friedman says you can begin to identify where you are at and track daily how you are doing.

“It's about starting simple and understanding the value of one or two metrics, and then from there, when your team is more familiar with the system, you can start asking more questions and layering on more data,” he concludes. [WM](#)



Amy Wunderlin is a Fort Atkinson, Wis.-based journalist who specializes in the subject areas of supply chain, logistics and technology. She has written for several weekly and daily newspapers, in addition to trade publications such as *Supply & Demand Chain Executive* and *Food Logistics*.

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Fond du Lac

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MEETINGS AND EVENTS DESTINATION.

By Jen Bradley

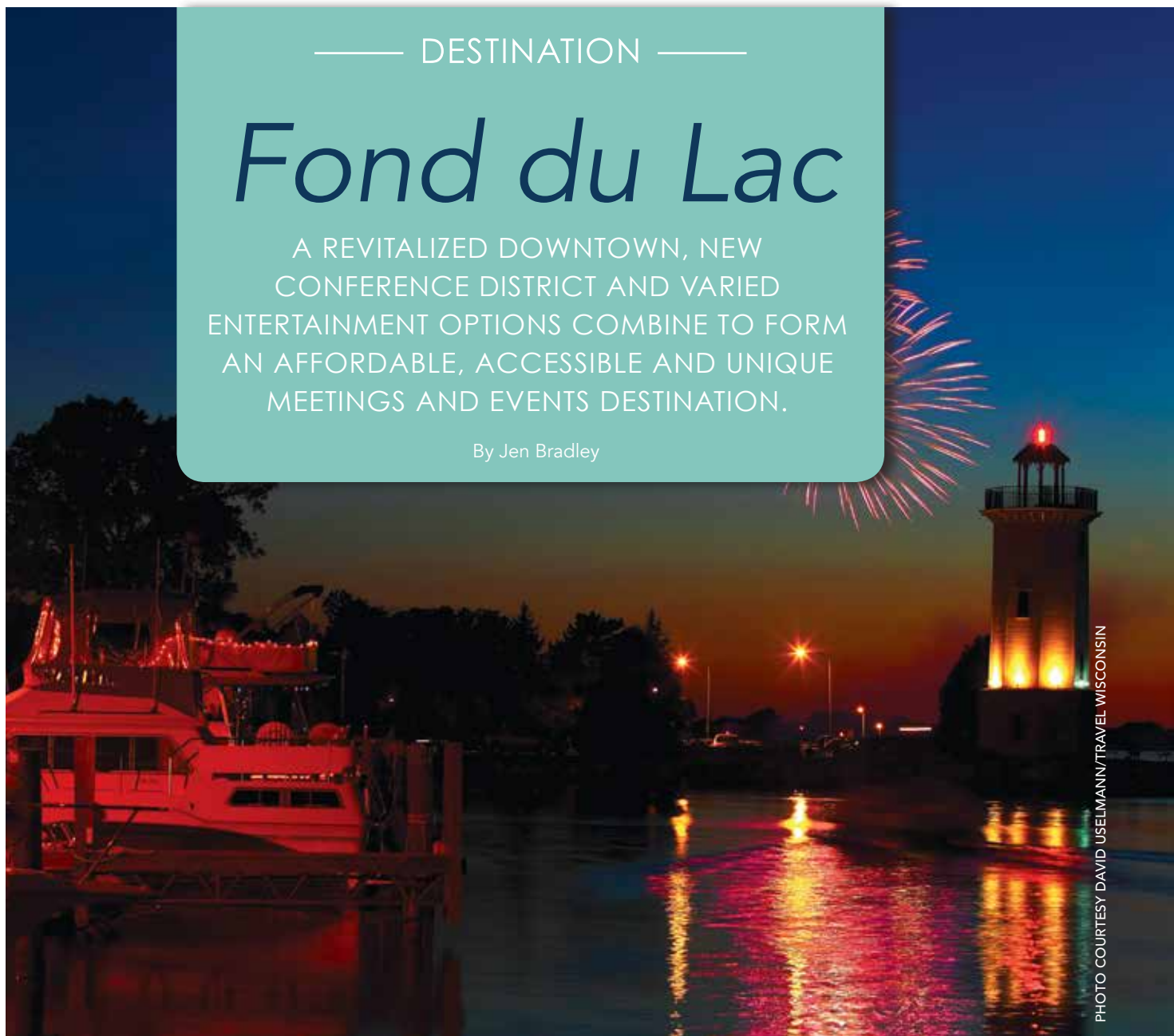


PHOTO COURTESY DAVID USELMANN/TRAVEL WISCONSIN

*“It is a classic hub
and spoke scenario:
We really are at the
center of it all!”*

—Craig Molitor,
President/CEO, Destination Lake
Winnebago Region

At the foot of iconic Lake Winnebago, Fond du Lac offers an affordable, central location nearly equal distance from Green Bay, Madison and Milwaukee.

“We’re not geographically centrally located, but one fact I find stunning is that 70 percent of Wisconsin’s population can get to Fond du Lac within an hour’s drive,” says Craig Molitor, president/CEO of Destination Lake Winnebago Region (formerly known as the Fond du Lac Convention & Visitors Bureau). “This allows us to attract more people to meetings and give them a lot to do while they are here, at the foot of the lake. It is a classic hub and spoke scenario; we really are at the center of it all!”

Molitor took over leadership of the organization nine years ago and undertook a branding initiative for Fond du Lac and the Lake Winnebago region. Through this process, he and his team identified four pillars which make Fond du Lac a premier destination community: affordability, accessibility, attractions and Lake Winnebago in its own right.



PHOTOS COURTESY DESTINATION LAKE WINNEBAGO REGION

Mary Denis is proud to say that she and other Fond du Lac tourism professionals have spent the last decade studying meeting trends and matching the city's meeting products to those trends. As the director of sales for Destination Lake Winnebago Region, she believes the city and surrounding area offer the industry stunning spaces as well as unique experiences.

THE CONFERENCE DISTRICT

First and foremost, meetings demand space—something Fond du Lac has to offer. A four-star luxury property, a completely renovated and modernized

conference center facility, and a unique art-focused venue offer a variety of price points, experiences and amenities. In addition, a variety of other accommodations complete a generous profile for meeting planners.

The buzz around Fond du Lac this spring is the re-opening of Hotel Retlaw, which has undergone a \$25 million renovation. "The property is absolutely stunning," says Molitor of the hotel, originally built in 1923. It is in the heart of the downtown district and has 10,000 square feet of obstruction-free meeting space, the largest being the iconic Crystal Ballroom, which can accommodate up to 400 people.

Hotel Retlaw has 121 guest rooms and offers a full-service spa, Espresso Café & Wine Bar, Players Club Sports Tavern and Jazzmine's—a farm-to-table brasserie with live music.

Another option is the longtime go-to for meeting planners in Fond du Lac, the former Holiday Inn. Today, this venue is the stunning Radisson Hotel and Conference Center. Molitor says this facility has gone through monumental changes in recent years, including all new guest rooms and public spaces, as well as meeting and banquet rooms. It can accommodate groups up to 600 guests and each of the 12 meetings rooms boasts free Wi-Fi, modern audio/visual equipment and onsite catering. Total meeting space exceeds 13,000 square feet and the facility offers 133 guest rooms.

The Radisson is owned by the Wisco Hotel Group, which also owns the Holiday Inn Express and Comfort Inn, among other properties across the state. These three Fond du Lac properties plus several other limited-service flagged properties are often referred together as the Fond du Lac Conference Center District, which offers an ideal set up for events of all sizes.

A third and creative option for meeting space is the Thelma Sadoff Center for the Arts, just blocks away from Hotel Retlaw and a few short miles away from the Radisson's convenient location near Interstate 41. Affectionately called THELMA, this former Masonic Temple was renovated and expanded in 2013.

THELMA offers a unique space for meeting planners and can host events for eight to 250 people. It has large meeting rooms, breakout areas, bars, outdoor spaces and three floors of art exhibits to peruse. THELMA's Great Hall is a memorable venue for any event, while Café 1906 is a comfortable training room or lunch area. The Fountain City room also is an Art Deco space ideal for any formal or informal gathering.

"We always had a great destination, but with the recent renovations in these full-service properties, we now have the hotel and meeting space to complement the awesome list of attractions, activities

A Meeting Planner's Perspective

Randy Bunnell works for TAK Communications and is secretary of the Badger State Society of Cable Telecommunications Engineers (SCTE). The organization is the training arm for the cable industry, says Bunnell, who adds that it has an annual trade show, a competition event and six seminars throughout the year.

The group has been meeting in Fond du Lac since 1990, primarily for its central location to Wisconsin's big cities and metro areas.

"We love the location because it is central to where the majority of our technicians come from," Bunnell says. "We host our events at the Holiday Inn, now the Radisson, and over the years, the service has always been very good."

He and his peers appreciate the reasonable rates, working with the hotel's meeting director, and the high quality of food and service the hotel provides.

"The renovations have been ideal," he says. "The nice room sizes and new Conference Center has just made it really nice for us to continue having our meetings. They have an excellent projection and sounds system which makes our events a little more modern now."

Modern Meeting Spaces

HOTEL RETLAW



"The elegance of the Crystal Ballroom always mesmerized me," says Sue Irizarry, Hotel Retlaw's director of sales, reflecting on memories from her youth. "I am elated we were able to preserve the crystal chandeliers, while infusing the space with a modern feel for a whole new generation of memories."

With a recent \$25 million renovation, the historic Hotel Retlaw, in downtown Fond du Lac, offers 121 guest rooms and 10,000 square feet of meeting space. The re-designed space bridges the building's rich history with today's modern technology and contemporary amenities.

THE RADISSON HOTEL AND CONFERENCE CENTER



The Radisson completed a full transformation three years ago, adding a brand-new conference center which offers 13,315 square feet of meeting space and 133 fully remodeled guest rooms.

"Visitors traveling to the hotel will be pleased by its proximity to local businesses, Rolling Meadows Golf Course and Lake Winnebago," says Kristen Nesterick, who manages sales and marketing for the Wisco Hotel Group.

THELMA



"THELMA has become a community gem," says Jacqui Corsi, executive director for Thelma Sadoff Center for the Arts.

She says its proximity to Hotel Retlaw, restaurants and shopping in the heart of Fond du Lac's Downtown District make it an ideal meeting space. A variety of caterers offer many choices for groups meeting in this memorable facility, which has three floors and nearly 40,000 square feet.

"THELMA provides an event coordinator who brings seamless and stress-free service to ensure a successful event," Corsi adds. "We believe in providing the best guest experience possible."

and experiences Fond du Lac and the Lake Winnebago Region has to offer," says Molitor.

VARIED ATTRACTIONS

Denis brings Milwaukee and Door County-based destination marketing experience to Fond du Lac. She knows meeting planners look beyond face-to-face interactions and seek to add in experiences for their attendees. "Meeting planners look beyond the ordinary," she says. "They like to offer their delegates attractive off-site venues and special experiences in order to boost attendance and leave lasting memories."

Fond du Lac and the Lake Winnebago area can deliver on those things, she says.

When it comes to outdoor recreation, the area's hiking trails, golf courses and parks all bring visitors out and about after being in conferences or meetings. The big draw in Fond du Lac, of course, is one of the country's largest inland lakes, which offers a variety of outdoor fun in all seasons.

Lake Winnebago is well known for its fishing and water sports, but also award-winning lakeside supper clubs. Two farm-to-table experiences are within a short drive north on Highway 151—at LaClare Farms and Meuer Farm.

Denis explains that at Meuer Farm, meeting planners can arrange for groups to visit, eat locally sourced meals prepared by a gourmet chef and then tour the farm for an authentic agritourism experience

At LaClare Farms, goats and world-renowned goat cheese are the highlights. Visitors can do "goat yoga" on summer weekends, then dine inside for lunch during the week, Sunday brunch or even a private event meal prepared by the farm's James Beard-renowned chef, who returned to the area to offer others local cuisine.

"I think our organization's close relationship with the owners of the farms, vineyards and distilleries make us rather unique to some other destinations," Denis says of the agritourism aspect. "It seems to really be resonating with meeting planners. They need the basics, but also want something different."

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While the main hotels and other restaurants offer quality food options, she says it's nice to also have unique attractions for groups visiting the area.

These are all high points for meeting attendees who travel with their families, which she says is becoming more common each year. Fond du Lac boasts multiple swimming/water attractions (Fondy and Aqua Sports Park); nearby orchards with animals and outdoor activities; the famous Lakeside Park with a zip line, train, petting zoo and carousel; and more.

The nearby Horicon Marsh provides sunset cruises and other outdoor activities, as does Vines and Rushes vineyard, just a bit north in Ripon.

"The area offers many unique places to have off-site lunches, team building events or cocktail parties. We are also excited by the recent opening of Ledgerrock Distillery for locally sourced and crafted spirits," says Molitor.

DOWNTOWN DISTRICT

Molitor and Denis both agree the revitalization occurring in Fond du Lac's Downtown District in recent years has been appealing to meeting planners.

"Our Downtown District is a resurging area within the community where historic meets contemporary and green space sidles up to urban hip in a vibrant mashup of fun," Molitor explains. "There's a bike and walking path through the community, and our downtown in the last three to four years is really starting to spring to life with eclectic food and beverage venues and a world-class lodging facility."

Darcie Holte, national sales manager at Destination Lake Winnebago Region, says that evening entertainment and nightlife in the Downtown District is becoming a draw for meeting professionals. Rooftop dining at a local restaurant, outdoor plazas and the upcoming Retlaw Player's Club offer one-of-a-kind experiences for guests.

The arts scene is growing too. THELMA brings concerts and art exhibits, while other art galleries on the main street offer gallery nights as well. Art classes can be done in a workshop form, and even brought to a meeting space itself.

"Fond du Lac offers a customer experience that is unparalleled," says Denis. "People coming from the major cities always notice that. They notice the care and pride people have in our community. Legendary Wisconsin hospitality is important to us, and we talk to meeting planners about that." **WM**



Jennifer Bradley is a freelance journalist based in New Holstein, Wis.

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DESTINATION showcase inside



- 34 JANESVILLE
- 35 MANITOWOC
- 36 OSHKOSH
- 37 RACINE

YOUR GUIDE TO GREAT MEETING AND EVENT LOCATIONS THROUGHOUT THE BADGER STATE

Wisconsin has the best of all worlds, from the cosmopolitan atmosphere of its big cities to the welcoming charms of its small towns. Whether you're in search of a site to host a large-scale convention or a smaller, more intimate team building meeting, Wisconsin offers a variety of affordable and conveniently located facilities to suit your organization's needs. Add to that a wealth of convention and visitor bureaus staffed with professionals eager to share the best of their communities with your group, and there's no question that Wisconsin is the ideal place for your next meeting or convention.

As a meeting planner, you know that every detail counts. Wisconsin's CVBs understand this and make every effort to ensure that none are overlooked. They aim to be your resource throughout the planning process, from assisting with RFPs, setting up walk-throughs, recommending local vendors and planning group outings, to providing the kind of number crunching that guarantees you get the deals to keep you within budget while still ensuring that your event will be memorable.

In this issue we focus on the great meeting and convention destinations of Janesville, Manitowoc, Oshkosh and Racine. The community profiles include an overview of what makes their locations, facilities, accommodations and services unique. Some area activities and entertainment options are also highlighted to give you a sense of the offerings that can make the after-meeting hours as productive and enjoyable as the actual work sessions. The profiles list some of the specifics — number of hotel rooms, largest meeting facility, nearest airport, phone numbers, websites and more — that give you an idea of whether or not these communities are the right fit for your group and, if so, includes the contact information to get you started planning your event.

When you begin searching for a site for your next meeting or convention, look no further than Wisconsin, where your options are endless and your event's success is every CVB's top priority.

DESTINATION SHOWCASE



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JANESVILLE

QUICK FACTS

CONTACT INFORMATION

Lori Johnson
800.487.2757 or 608.757.3171
20 S Main Street, Suite #11
Janesville, WI 53545
meetings@janesvillecvb.com
janesvillecvb.com/meetings

COMMUNITY INFORMATION

Population: 64,359
Number of hotel rooms: 750
Largest meeting facility:
10,000 sq. ft.
Largest exhibit facility:
10,000 sq. ft.
Airport: Chicago O'Hare
International Airport

DISTANCE FROM

Madison: 40 miles
Milwaukee: 70 miles

Chicago: 120 miles
Minneapolis: 305 miles

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Janesvillecvb.com

Pictured: Lincoln-Tallman House/Rock County Historical Society



JANESVILLE
Wisconsin's Great Outside

MANITOWOC



QUICK FACTS

CONTACT INFORMATION

Megan Bruckschen
920.686.3077
4221 Calumet Ave.
Manitowoc, WI 54220
mbruckschen@manitowoc.info
manitowoc.info

COMMUNITY INFORMATION

Population: 80,000
Number of hotel rooms: 1,000
Largest meeting facility:
20,000 sq. ft.
Largest exhibit facility:
36,000 sq. ft.
Airport: Austin Straubel
International, Green Bay

DISTANCE FROM

Madison: 139 miles
Milwaukee: 81 miles

Green Bay: 42 miles
Stevens Point: 110 miles

Connect on the Coast! Manitowoc and Two Rivers are just a short drive either north of Milwaukee or south of Green Bay on I-43. The Manitowoc Area Visitor & Convention Bureau offers a full line of convention services including welcome bags with free attraction passes, name badges, registration help, entertainment and tour assistance and more.

Only in Manitowoc can your meeting delegates go below deck on a WWII Submarine at the Wisconsin Maritime Museum, take a selfie with Bernice the Cow at Cedar Crest Ice Cream, see where a piece of the Sputnik crashed outside of the Rahr West Art Museum, and welcome a calf into the world at the Farm Wisconsin Discovery Center (NOW OPEN!).



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TWO RIVERS



DESTINATION SHOWCASE



OSHKOSH CONVENTION & VISITOR'S BUREAU

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CONTACT INFORMATION

Cathy Cluff
920-303-9200
100 North Main St., Suite #112
Oshkosh, WI 54901
cathy@visitoshkosh.com
visitoshkosh.com/meetings

COMMUNITY INFORMATION

Population: 67,000
Number of hotel rooms: 1,000
Largest meeting facility:
24,000 sq. ft.
Largest exhibit facility:
40,000 sq. ft.
Airport: Appleton
International Airport (20 miles)

DISTANCE FROM

Madison: 86 miles
Milwaukee: 87 miles

Chicago: 176 miles
Minneapolis: 274 miles

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CONTACT INFORMATION

Eileen Arnold
262.884.6407
14015 Washington Ave.
Sturtevant, WI 53177
eileen@realracine.com
aboutracine.com

COMMUNITY INFORMATION

Population: 130,000
Number of hotel rooms: 1,300
Largest meeting facility:
10,000 sq. ft.
Largest exhibit facility:
17,000 sq. ft.
Airport: General Mitchell
International, Milwaukee

DISTANCE FROM

Madison: 100 miles
Milwaukee: 25 miles
Chicago: 68 miles
Minneapolis: 356 miles

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Wisconsin Chefs Dish on Local Cuisine

From Milwaukee's Third Ward to the far north in Bayfield, dining options abound. Meet some of the chefs fixing foodie delights across the Dairy State.

BY RONNIE WENDT

Food is a central point of every meeting, but equally important are the restaurants attendees dine at after hours. With 12,796 restaurants in Wisconsin from which to choose — according to the National Restaurant Association — picking a place to dine can be complicated. *Wisconsin Meetings* recently chatted with a few of Wisconsin's top chefs to get a flavor for what's out there. Two chefs recently returned as executive chefs to the places that gave them their start; and two have big plans in 2019 that will bring new options to Wisconsin's dinner table.

Chef Nelly Buleje: **Back where he began, at** **Grand Geneva Resort**



PHOTOGRAPHED BY HOLLY LEITNER

Chef Nelly Buleje remembers well the checkered pants of a chef de partie or line cook. He remembers them because at the time he wore them, he longed for the day when he'd wear black pants, have his name embroidered on a double-breasted white jacket, and no longer would have to don a hat. Why? Because this is the uniform of an executive chef.

It's a role he's held in kitchens in Virginia; Hilton Head, South Carolina;

and Cleveland, Ohio. It is not, however, the role he held at Grand Geneva Resort & Spa, at least until now.

Buleje began his career at the Lake Geneva resort at 17. But when he left to take a position at the Milwaukee ChopHouse, he didn't know then that his culinary journey would eventually return him to his roots. Sixteen years later, the 33-year-old chef has landed back at the resort, only this time he is wearing the white jacket and is the one in charge of the resort's 11 kitchens and culinary staff.

What was your first culinary job?

My first job was in Lake Geneva at Annie's Ice Cream Parlor, where I worked as a soda jerk. I joined the Grand Geneva when I was 17; that's where I started my culinary career.

Did you always love the kitchen?

I'm half Guatemalan, half Peruvian with Mexican roots. Food has always been a part of my heritage. My mother learned to cook Peruvian cuisine from my grandmother, who taught her to make dishes for my Peruvian father. My father wanted me out working with him, doing all the outside work. But I always wanted to be in the kitchen.

How do you feel about your return to Grand Geneva Resort & Spa?

This is where I learned who I am. With 11 kitchens on the property there was always someone who needed help and was willing to teach me. Working here shaped me into the chef I am today. It's an honor for me to return as executive chef.

What are your plans for Grand Geneva's restaurants?

Each Grand Geneva restaurant has its own DNA. I will be introducing new techniques and flavors to existing dishes to give them a modern twist. I am also working on new menu items. My sous chef built a custom dry-age box for our whiskey-aged rib steaks, and people love them. But being in Wisconsin, where we love our brandy, we are also looking at doing some dry-aged brandy rib eyes.

Chef Stefano Viglietti: ***Looking toward the future***



Chef Stefano Viglietti made headlines in 2018 when he was nominated for the highest culinary honor in the country, the James Beard Award. This award celebrates the best American chefs in a variety of categories; Viglietti was nominated for best chef in the Midwest for his restaurant Trattoria Stefano.

Though he didn't win, being recognized as a finalist is a distinction that is well deserved for the chef who has been cooking award-winning fare for nearly 25 years.

Viglietti did not study cooking professionally; he studied history. But on a whim and a prayer, at the age of just 24, he and his wife, Whitney, opened their first restaurant in downtown Sheboygan. The couple now owns four thriving restaurants in Sheboygan, including Trattoria Stefano, the one that began it all, and have racked up countless culinary awards and accolades.

Why cooking instead of history?

History was my first love, and I initially considered going on to further my education and eventually teach. But I decided not to. I was always running back to my place to cook. I was always cooking and always getting excited about food.

How does someone open a restaurant at age 24 with no culinary training?

You live upstairs and you work from 4 a.m. in the morning until 12 at night. We closed twice yearly and traveled to Italy, where we would eat obsessively. I read the "C.I.A. Cookbook" from the Culinary Institute of America and every cooking magazine I could get my hands on. And I cooked from 5 or 6 in the morning till the end of the night. I also hired three chefs to work with me as I was learning to work on the line. I watched everything they did, and I kept making food, experimenting and getting better and better.

Do you have a signature dish?

I love making ragus. I love making soups. While I love the produce of the summer, I love the cooking styles of the winter. When people come to the restaurant, I recommend our veal osso bucco. It's a beautiful veal shank dish, made from local veal.

Or the veal chop, called the Vitello Stefano, which is a 12-ounce veal rib chop stuffed with truffle, cheese and prosciutto and sage, then breaded and pan fried.

What makes your restaurants stand out?

We bake all our own breads. We roast all our own coffee beans. We do a lot of things that other restaurants do not, and I think that sticks out. People expect this in Chicago or New York or LA, but they don't expect it in Sheboygan.

Future plans?

We recently purchased a 7,000-square-foot building. We plan to use the space to create a forward-looking grocery. It will have a fish counter, a meat counter and a rotisserie, and we will sell all our baked goods here. It will offer prepared meals and semi-prepared meals. We have a lot of great chefs, and when we open this grocery store, it's going to be unique ... and very chef driven.

Chef Steven Keen: ***From Alaska to Hawaii to his hometown***

Chef Steven Keen took an unusual path to becoming a chef. He graduated with a conflict mediation degree from Northland College, which he jokingly says, "can come in handy in the kitchen." But all kidding aside, he worked his way through college at restaurants on Madeline Island and in Bayfield, and that's where his love of cooking began.

Keen recently took on the role of executive chef at Landmark Restaurant, an upscale restaurant known for its mouth-watering American and French cuisine, situated within Bayfield's five-star Old Rittenhouse Inn. He has big plans for the restaurant based in the popular northern destination for meetings and events.

How did you move from conflict mediation to cooking?

I had a chef ask me one night if I liked to travel. When I said "Yes," he informed me that this is a job that will allow you to go anywhere. I started leaving every winter, and this took me to culinary stops in Alaska, California and Hawaii before returning to Bayfield.





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What do you like about the kitchen?

Initially, I enjoyed the pressure and the fast pace of a busy kitchen. As I learned more about food and the history of what I was doing, it started to mean more to me. It wasn't just a job that was exciting, it was a job that had meaning.

How does travel impact your cooking?

Food trends show up in places along the West Coast and Hawaii before making their way to the Midwest. A lot of our clientele come from the Chicago/Minneapolis areas where those trends arrive first in the Midwest, and they expect to see those trends in the food here. Traveling helps me bring them here.

What are your plans for the restaurant?

When I returned to the restaurant, I inherited a menu. My sous chef also came on board last August. We both brought fresh ideas to the table, and we've been incorporating these new ideas and techniques to put modern twists on classic dishes. We will introduce a new menu this spring, where dishes can easily be dairy-free, gluten-free and egg-free if they need to be.

Chefs Dan-Dan:

Four restaurant openings in two years



Chefs Dan Jacobs and Dan Van Rite didn't open their first restaurant together until 2016, but once the train left the station this dynamic duo quickly opened three more in Milwaukee's Third Ward. The first endeavor was a Chinese restaurant named Dandan, followed by a restaurant within a restaurant named Esterev; Batches Bakery; and finally, Fauntleroy, a French restaurant with a 1970s flair.

The two met as cooks at local culinary events. At the time, Jacobs worked at Roots, as a sous chef then executive chef, and Van Rite, as executive chef at Hinterland. They left those restaurants in 2015 to forge their own path together.

Did you always want to be a chef?

Van Rite: As a boy, I wanted to be an accountant; once I got older, my passion turned to architecture. While pursuing an architectural degree, I started working at a local restaurant, first as a server then as a cook. I knew I'd found my calling. I left architecture school just shy of graduation and enrolled in the Western Culinary Institute.

Jacobs: As a kid, I wanted to be a cop; my brother, a robber. But after taking courses at the Cooking and Hospitality Institute of Chicago (now Le Cordon Bleu), I began working at Carlos', where I spent two years learning technique from Carlos Nieto.

Why did you decide to open a restaurant together?

Van Rite: We were friends, and we got along. And, in 2015, we didn't want to work for anyone else anymore. We wanted to do more. We wanted to do something else.

What surprised you when you opened your own restaurant?

Jacobs: You think you know how to run a restaurant, but you don't know s---. We did a lot of learning on the fly. I had opened a restaurant as a sous chef, but I quickly realized I had a lot to learn.

Why did you open your second restaurant?

Jacobs: Dandan was a challenge on its own, but it was pigeonholing us into one kind of cuisine. We're creative guys and we wanted to do more. EsterEv is named for my great-grandmother Ester and Dan's grandmother Evelyn. We feed people communally, just as we did at my home growing up when Dad brought his buddies or work friends to dinner at our house. We offer one nightly seating for up to 20 diners on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

What are your favorite dishes?

Jacobs: I don't know that I have one. I hate pigeonholing myself into one thing.

Van Rite: I'm attracted to wild game and seafood.

Where do you find inspiration for your dishes?

Jacobs: I travel, read magazines and look on the Internet. In the old days you had to buy a cookbook, now you can find inspiration on Instagram. We also find inspiration from each other and bounce ideas off each other well. We end up with a better product that way.

Van Rite: Traveling and eating out is a great way to find inspiration for new dishes. Every time you go out you see a new way of doing something.

What's next?

Jacobs: We are introducing catering this year, French to Chinese to four-star dining experiences. We have catering trucks that can feed up to 200 people. The best way to serve food when catering is family-style as opposed to plated meals. No one really wants to eat from a buffet. Family style also keeps costs down. When it's plated, you need more hands to get the food out to people.

Van Rite: Catering is a revenue stream we haven't had before. We have developed a catering wing. People were asking about it. It made it an easy decision for us. [WM](#)

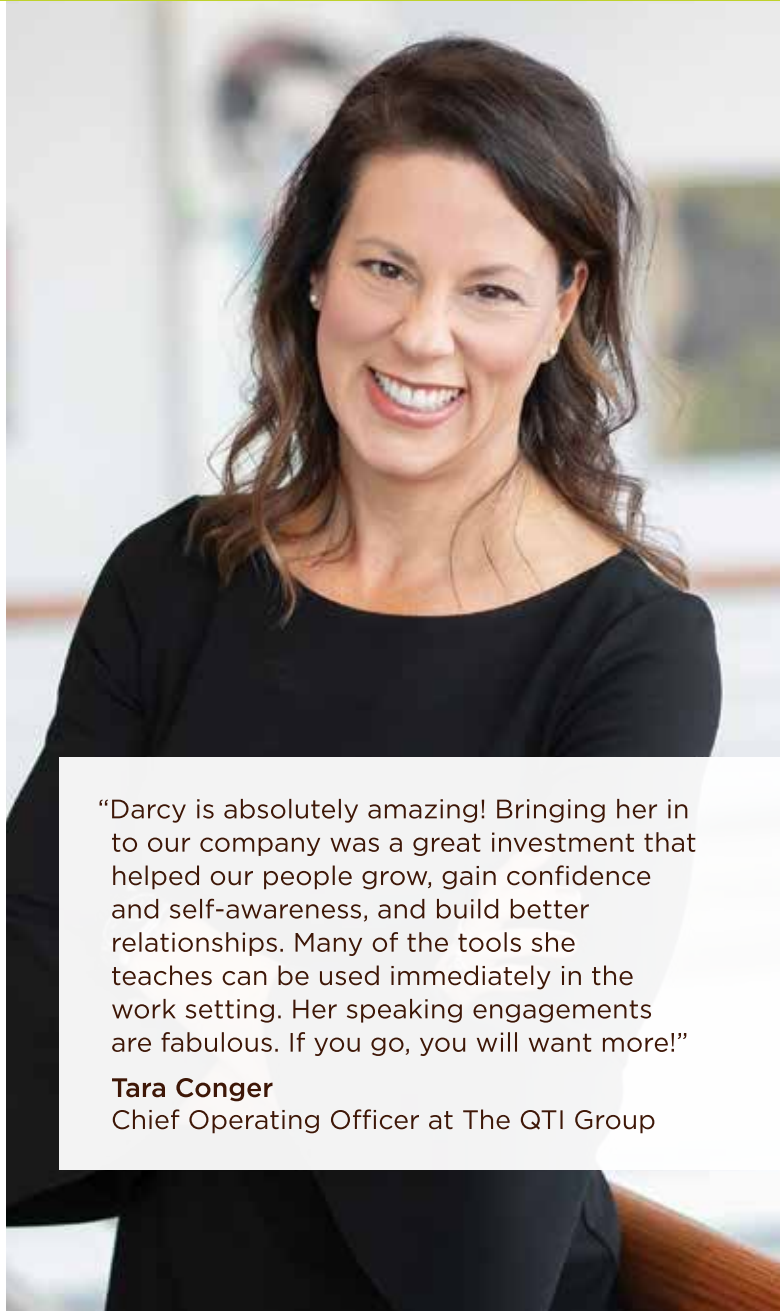
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Reach Out for Your ROI

To properly assess your ROI gather information before, during and after your meeting or event.

BY RONNIE WENDT

Do you track the return on investment (ROI) of your events?

Before answering, "Of course," with an eye roll for added effect, consider this: A recent Harvard Business study highlights that two out of three companies fail to measure full event impact.



The survey of 700 senior executives, titled “The Event Marketing Evolution: An Era of Data, Technology and Revenue Impact,” finds 90 percent of companies prioritize staging events for customers and potential customers, and the fastest-growing companies are increasing their event activity. But the same study also reveals many companies miss out on the benefits events provide because they fail to track and measure their effectiveness.

In fact, only 23 percent of those surveyed report they can accurately calculate ROI from their meetings and events. Those who do track ROI, share that they train their focus on top-of-the-sales-funnel activities, such as the number of attendees, the quantity of leads generated and even the amount of social media mentions.

However, these very metrics only provide a snapshot of an event’s true ROI. They do not consider the quality of the audience; how that audience viewed the event itself, from speakers to location; how long attendees stayed at the event; or if they even found the event valuable.

Though Jennifer Rzepka, CAE, vice president of Svinicki Association Management, Inc. (SAMI), says she cannot speak to why some event organizers fail to assess ROI, she does stress its importance. SAMI is a Milwaukee-based association management company and under that umbrella helps its customers (industry associations) plan and execute meetings and events. Associations, she says, focus on how much money an event brings in but sometimes overlook the less tangible items when determining ROI.

“But assessing your ROI is critically important,” she states. “We find that a lot of times the focus is: Did we make money? But it’s important to look at more than that, such as: Was it a good location for the group? Did the format bring in the expected number of people? For us, ROI

is the gauge that tells us the success of each piece, not just the bottom line.”

Set Concrete Goals

Accurately calculating ROI requires planners to set meaningful goals for the event itself, reports Tifani Jones, corporate director of sales for Kalahari Resorts & Conventions.

Jones, who works with event planners to calculate ROI in all measurement areas, states, “You have to go into it knowing specifically what you want the result to be. What is important to some events may not be a priority for others.”

For example, if the event is tied to a company’s product rollout, then measuring sales after it is over is essential. But if the meeting serves as an association’s primary funding mechanism, then it is important to measure donations and profit. That same association also may want to examine whether its members and vendors were engaged

and happy with the event. “They need them to be happy with it to ensure their continued support,” Jones explains.

Jones also recommends asking key questions about an event while setting goals. “Is your goal to make money? Is it member engagement? Is it to sell products? Is

it to educate others,” Jones asks. “Companies really need to look at this, and this is where a

professional meeting planner comes into play because they can help organizers and decision makers understand the questions they should be asking before they plan the event itself.”

The answer to these questions can help organizers set concrete goals. What is the

event’s revenue goal? What is the goal for registration? What is the goal for actual attendance? What is the goal for raising brand awareness?

Once goals are in place, it becomes easier to set a budget around them. For instance, if a company deems training as its top priority, it can devote a larger chunk of funds for that purpose. If the highlight of the conference is a gala awards event, planners can put more money toward that. “Budget for the things that provide value [and help you achieve your goals],” Jones says.

Gather Data

Just as excitement builds leading up to an event, the case for ROI multiplies after the event ends.

“The biggie is going to be how the financials came together,” says Jones. “Did you work within your budget? Did you match your revenue goal? Did your registration numbers match your registration goal?”

There may be sub goals to consider as well. If an association recognized the need to reach younger members and set a goal to raise that number by 25 percent, then it’s important to closely examine the registrations and to evaluate the types of attendees. “Are they first-time attendees or have they attended before?” Jones asks.

Rzepka states the plan is typically to grow the event every year and to generate a profit. But she adds, “Sometimes a group will expect less because they moved to a new location or changed the time of year

“For us, ROI is the gauge that tells us the success of each piece, not just the bottom line.”

—Jennifer Rzepka, Svinicki Association Management Inc.

that they hold their event,” she says. “ROI is a good tracking measure because it helps us see how we’ve been doing over time. Have we been growing by 20 percent every time we change locations? Have we made money every year? We will go back a decade and look for trends. We might see that we made a lot of money in one



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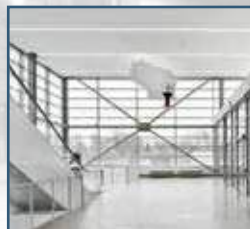
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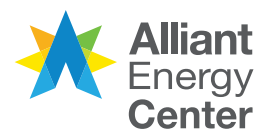


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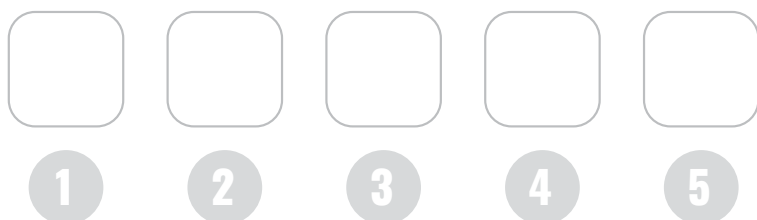


particular year. What was the difference that year? Then we will consider implementing the things that made a difference in future years.”

Survey Your Attendees

“Build the Best ROI Methodology for Your Corporate Event,” a blog on the Kalahari website, recommends key areas to track after an event, though there are many more:

- How many returning attendees signed up for the event? How much did you spend on marketing to them?
- How many new attendees registered? How much money did you spend to attract them?
- How many registrants took advantage of discounts, early bird specials, VIP pricing?
- How fast was the check-in process? Did you use self-serve kiosks this year? How much time did they save? Was the process more accurate?



- How many people registered through email campaigns or social media postings?
- What came up in the session poll responses?
- How was session attendance overall and for each breakout program?
- What was said in social media mentions and shares?

Some of these items are easily tracked during an event, through program surveys and actual notations made on the fly. Other items must be tracked after the event. Here, both Jones and Rzepka recommend surveying the audience.

SAMI sends three separate surveys after an event: One to attendees, one to exhibitors and one to those who didn't attend but are members of the association. The latter is very important, Rzepka says, because the survey asks these individuals things like: “Was it priced too high? Did the location prevent you from attending? Was it timing? If we find that 90 percent of the people didn't attend because of the location or the pricing, we have some very important changes to consider,” she says.

The exhibitor group is asked how they felt about the value for the price they paid? Did they have enough exposure to attendees? What could be changed to make the event more valuable? “We can use this data to better plan ROI in the future,” Rzepka adds. “If they say they don't care how much they pay as long as we feed them three meals a day, then we have to recalculate what we provide and make those changes.”

For such surveys to be successful, Rzepka advises meeting organizers to take a critical look at the questions being asked. She recommends crafting survey questions


in a way that provides useful information versus disparate data that can complicate spotting trends. SAMI begins this process during the event itself by keeping a running list of things that come up during the event and then creating a survey that includes questions targeting those issues. “We test the questions with others to see if we get the kind of response we are looking for or if they come back and say, ‘Why didn't you ask me about this?’” she says.

The best questions get specific, Rzepka states. “The questions should ask: ‘Did you like ___?’ But be more specific and ask, ‘Was it problematic that _____?’ ‘Did you find benefit because _____?’” Rzepka says.

For instance, let's say a company hosts an event in Bayfield. The survey could ask attendees: Did you like Bayfield as a location? But this is a very open-ended, personally skewed response. But if the survey asks instead: Did you have to come in early because of the location? How long did you have to drive to get there? The survey will gather information that helps organizers determine if they need to expand the dates of the room block in the future, or if the location was too far away for some attendees.

Make the survey questions finely focused, adds Jones. “The survey shouldn't be too long because you'll lose people, but you should break the questions down by experience type,” she says. “Was registration and retrieving your badge a smooth process? But then take a step back and ask these questions too: How did you hear about us? How was your registration process before you arrived? What was your registration process the day of the event? Ask about the content at the event too. Did the content inspire you or engage you?”

Do more research after the survey, adds Jones, who recommends calling attendees and asking specific questions to ensure their answers match survey results. “A survey will only get a small percentage of responses. You don't want to make changes for the following year based on a small number of people,” she explains. “You have to monitor the results for trends, then use the survey feedback to open up additional conversations. Make personal calls to those you trust as stakeholders and ask them the questions that bubbled up in the survey process.”

Finally, as the research identifies areas for improvement, reach out to managers at the venue. “The team at your venue can help support your objectives,” Jones says. “We can share what worked for other events. We can connect you with other planners who faced similar problems. And, we can adjust the environment we provide for your event next year.” 

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| BRAIN SWELL MEDIA38 | |
| ryandohrn.com | |
| DARCY LUOMA43 | |
| darcyluoma.com | |
| DELAFIELD HOTEL41 | |
| thedelafieldhotel.com | |
| DESTINATION LAKE WINNEBAGO REGION31 | |
| fdlmeetings.com | |
| ELKHART LAKE11 | |
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| EXPLORE LA CROSSE49 | |
| expolorelacrosse.com/meetings | |
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| OSHKOSH CVB36 | |
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| | |
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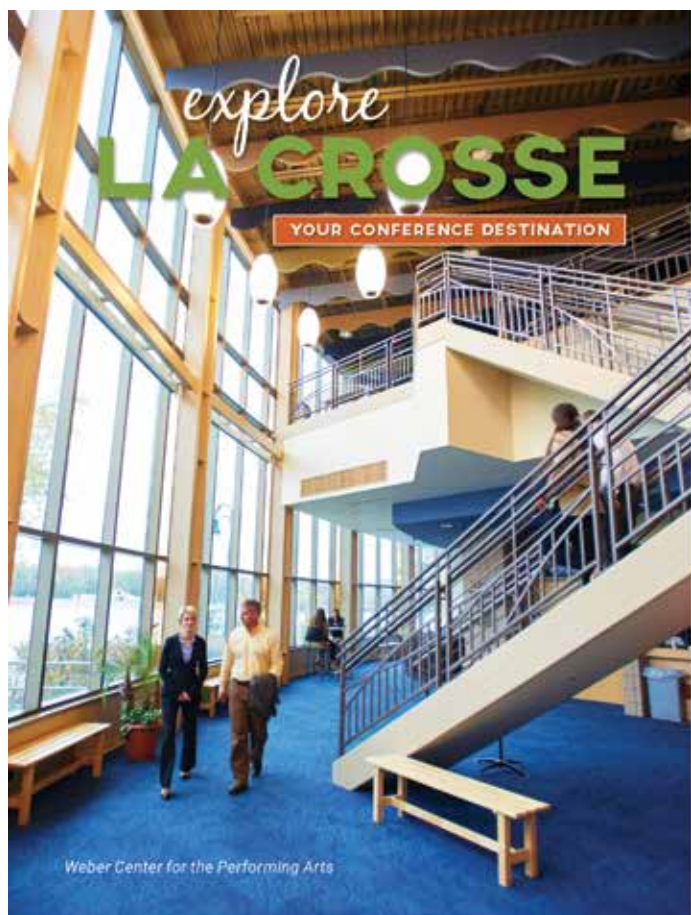
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PLANNER PROFILE

STAGE A CLASS ACT

PLANNER BONNIE OLESON SHARES HER TOP TIPS FOR STANDOUT EVENTS.

BY RONNIE WENDT

When people ask Bonnie Oleson what she does for a living, she laughs and answers, "I order a lot of porta potties."

But Oleson's job is far cooler than she makes it out to be. As director of event marketing for Mid-West Family Events, she plans and hosts gatherings for eight Madison-area radio stations. In a typical year she might organize radiothons and golf outings, awards luncheons and rock concerts. "If it's a large station event or a multi-station event, it falls on me," she says.

The seasoned meetings and events veteran reports there are three main ingredients for a successful event: Venue, food and experience.

Venue is always a top concern; the more unique the location the better. Though Oleson seeks creative event spaces, such as art museums or airplane hangars, she admits she ultimately settles on the facility that allows catering and offers the space she needs without breaking the bank. If that site happens to be an airplane hangar, even better!

Experience has taught her that a venue's location, while important, is not as critical as the quality of the event itself. For many years, Q106 hosted its Storytellers Jam at the Marriott on Madison's west side. "People loved the location because it had

free parking, was in a large room and we felt that the country radio station's listeners appreciated not having to go downtown to get to it," she says.

But when she moved the event downtown to the Monona Terrace Community and Convention Center, she says she learned, "If you have a good event, people will adapt."

She received the same message when she rebranded the WJJO Band Camp as JJO Sonic Boom and moved the event from Madison to Janesville. The concert still drew a crowd of nearly 15,000. "It was a good show. People traveled and they enjoyed themselves," she says. "I have a little more faith in people now."

Food offerings also top her list. She explains today's festival-goers expect more than pizza, hotdogs, pretzels and nachos. They seek a variety of offerings that go beyond traditional festival fare and meet varied dietary restrictions, including gluten-free, allergen-free, and even vegetarian.

"It used to be you could present a buffet, and you were good. Now you really need to accommodate people," she says. "So, whether you're planning food for 2,000 or food for 100, you need to remember that for the people you are making the accommodations for, that extra little detail you need to worry about is a big detail to them. It's these little things that people will remember."

Finally, Oleson focuses on experience. Great music or an engaging keynote, she says, is no longer enough; attendees crave meaningful activities at events more than ever. This fact keeps Oleson on her toes as she elevates food and beverage offerings and incorporates experiential activities, including craft beers, food trucks, carnival-type games and other elements.

"People today expect more out of the events they attend," she says. "You have to be able to surprise them without them knowing that they were missing it before. You want to hold people's attention all day."

Surprising attendees with experiential activities, she says, elevates an event's exposure on social media, which can drive interest long after it ends.

"You need to ask yourself if there is something that attendees can do that's outside of the norm and makes for a memorable experience," she says. "If it's something they want to share with others, it in turn helps promote the event. People love to say, 'Hey, look what I'm doing.' And that's good for everybody." **WM**



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