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# FEATURES

#### 18 LESSONS LEARNED

HOW GOOD COMMUNICATION PROTECTS PEOPLE AND SAVES EVENTS AND RELATIONSHIPS DURING A CRISIS. By Ronnie Wendt

#### 22 DESTINATION: EAU CLAIRE

FUNKY OFFERINGS, CREATIVE FLAIR, A HAPPENING MUSIC SCENE AND PREMIER MEETING VENUES PUT EAU CLAIRE ON THE EVENT RADAR. By Melanie Radzicki McManus

#### 27 HOW TO SUPERSIZE EVENT SPONSORSHIPS

STRATEGIES TO CONCEPTUALIZE, PRICE AND SELL SPONSORSHIPS THAT HELP FUND YOUR EVENT. By Greg Gerber

#### 32 GOLF WHERE THE PROS PLAY

SCORE A HOLE IN ONE BY BRINGING YOUR GROUP TO ONE OF THE STATE'S TOP TOURNAMENT COURSES. By Kristine Hansen

#### 40 LOWER YOUR RISK

SIX STEPS TO BOOST EVENT SECURITY AND BETTER PREPARE FOR AN EMERGENCY. By Ronnie Wendt

#### 44 JUST ADD WATER

FOR A UNIQUE AND BEAUTIFUL ATMOSPHERE, LOOK NO FURTHER THAN A WISCONSIN LAKESIDE VENUE. By Shelby Deering

# DEPARTMENTS

- 7 IN THE NEWS Briefs on the latest happenings in the meetings and convention industry.
- 13 VENUE SPOTLIGHT Breaking the Norm The new Brookfield Conference Center presents a modern alternative. By Ronnie Wendt
- 14 PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT Thriving in an Upside-down World Tips for keeping cool during a pandemic. By Molly Rose Teuke

#### 17 PLANNER BASICS 5 Tips for Better A/V Knowledge is power when

planning for your audiovisual needs. By Jen Bradley

50 PLANNER PROFILE Business Minded

With a master's degree in marketing, planner Terri Yanke uses her retail experience to shape her approach to event planning. By Amy Wunderlin

#### 36 DESTINATION SHOWCASE JANESVILLE, OSHKOSH, REAL RACINE

ON THE COVER: LAKEFRONT EVENTS AT THE ABBEY RESORT. ©THE ABBEY RESORT





## EDITOR'S LETTER

As I write this, uncertainty plagues the meetings and events industry. Planners are working long hours to cancel and re-plan events to slow the spread of the coronavirus - and they are doing everything from the confines of their homes. These are stressful times!

In this issue, Molly Rose Teuke shares a few suggestions to help planners keep cool as the pandemic heats up. She

recommends exercise, healthy choices, sticking to a schedule, engaging with others, and showing grace to yourself and others.

My family of six is finding our own ways to wait out the virus. We are making time for fun. We are filling our days with hiking, board games, intense Scrabble competitions with relatives who live elsewhere, and loud, happy music. Time is standing still, but we are making the most of it.

Communicating with others also helps us as we shelter in place. Good communication helps planners too as they work to cancel hundreds of events. How do you communicate with others during a crisis? How do you give notice about a cancellation? How can you be a voice of calm when fears escalate? We answer these questions in an article covering tips for crisis communications from planners navigating coronavirus cancellations.

The situation won't last forever, and as the daffodils push up and spring makes its way into the Dairy State, planners seek innovative activities and unique venues for their next events. Planners looking to inject fun, funky and flair into their meeting or event need look no further than our featured destination — Eau Claire. This city of 68,000 offers a happening music scene, thriving shopping district and premier meeting venues.

As warm weather intercedes and puts this virus back in its box, golf will be in full swing. And Wisconsin offers a wealth of pro courses to choose from. Wisconsin hosts major championships like the PGA, Ryder Cup and U.S. Open. In "Golf Where the Pros Play," you can learn how to improve your meeting score by taking your group to a top tournament golf course.

Albert Einstein once said, "In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity." Though 2020 started with uncertainty and unprecedented challenges, it's possible to turn our troubles into opportunities. Just as the leaves push out on the trees every spring after a long, cold winter, innovation will bud and help the meeting and event industry emerge from this storm stronger than before.

Enjoy the read!

L Wendt

Ronnie Wendt Editor editor@wisconsinmeetings.com

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# CARES ACT PASSES; SOME RELIEF FOR TRAVEL INDUSTRY

The CARES Act, the largest economic relief package in our nation's history, was signed into law on March 27 and includes major provisions to deliver economic support to travel businesses, travel workers and their families.

Highlights of the CARES Act, according to U.S. Travel association, include:

• \$377 billion in loans and loan forgiveness for small travel businesses: The bill provides small travel businesses (500 employees or less), self-employed individuals, and 501(c)(3) nonprofits with enhanced and expedited Small Business Administration (SBA) loans, which will be made available quickly through community banks. Loan recipients can receive tax-free forgiveness on a portion of the loan, equal to eight weeks of payroll and other expenses.

• \$454 billion in federally backed financial assistance for impacted businesses: The bill provides \$454 billion through the Treasury Department and Federal Reserve to assist impacted travel businesses and governmental entities through secured loans, loan guarantees and other financial measures. The broad eligibility under this program ensures any impacted organizations can access a liquidity lifeline to keep workers employed and stay afloat through the worst months of this crisis.

• Tax relief to mitigate losses and allow businesses to use cash to pay employees and keep the lights on: The bill allows affected businesses to temporarily defer tax liability, access an Employee Retention Tax Credit, delay or eliminate estimated quarterly tax payments and filings deadlines, and allow for a carryback of the Net Operating Loss (NOL) Deduction.

• Grants for impacted tourism businesses and airports: The bill provides \$10 billion in airport grants to support vital operations and provides \$6.5 billion in Community Development and Economic Development Administration grants for economic injuries caused by COVID-19, including the tourism industry.

Those affected are encouraged to reach out to the Small Business Administration to find out if they are eligible for any of the loans and compensation offered through this package.

#### WISCONSIN HOTELS CLOSE AMID COVID-19 EMERGENCY

Two of Marcus Hotels & Resorts' downtown Milwaukee properties, as well as one in Lake Geneva, join the growing list of hotel closures across the state. Both the Saint Kate and Hilton Milwaukee City Center have closed, though, Marcus' Pfister property will remain open. Grand Geneva Resort has closed as well. Potawatomi Hotel Casino, The Park Inn in Madison, along with Kalahari and Great Wolf Lodge all closed earlier in March. Of those properties that remain open, many have laid off staff or reduced hours, including The Edgewater in Madison.

"The safety and well-being of our guests and associates is our number one priority. The lodging industry is facing unprecedented challenges due to the nationwide COVID-19 pandemic. In light of these challenges and our current business levels, we have made the difficult decision to close a select number of properties across our portfolio," said Michael R. Evans, president of Marcus Hotels & Resorts. "During these difficult times, our leadership team is meeting daily to monitor the situation, and we will continue to explore every option to help our associates, our guests and our properties. Our sincere hope is that these closures will not be for an extended period of time and that our dedicated teams will all be back together again very soon and welcoming guests to our hotels."

#### SURVEY OF DMOS SHOWS IMPACT OF COVID-19

The Destinations International Foundation and MMGY Travel Intelligence have partnered to poll destination management organizations across North America to measure the impact of coronavirus and actions being taken within the tourism industry as a result of the COVID-19 disease outbreak.

This is the second of a multi-wave study on the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak on North American destination organizations. In this release, the survey indicates that the expectations that destination organizations had of COVID-19 on local tourism economies went from a sense of uncertainty to a strong expectation of extreme impact over the next six months. Since late March, the percentage of destinations reporting coronavirus-related postponements and/or cancellations of conferences, meetings or events surged from under 40% to almost 100%. Although only 30% of destination organizations have their own pandemic emergency plan, they continue to play an important role in reassuring the traveling public. More than

80% of destination organizations surveyed have now reduced or postponed sales and marketing spending, which is up from less than 20% in Wave I, with a similar percentage restricting domestic travel for their employees. More than 60% of respondents have asked all employees to work from home.

#### WISCONSIN CENTER DISTRICT UPDATES

Wisconsin Center District (WCD) officials released plans on the proposed expansion of the downtown Milwaukee convention center as cancellations began rolling in amid coronavirus fears. The \$425 million expansion, which promises to create more than 1,000 construction jobs, will add 112,000 square feet to the event space. Major events at the center were cancelled due to the continued spread of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus. Among the events



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was the "Catholics for Trump" campaign rally, which the president planned to attend, and the National Council of Teachers of English's annual Conference on College Composition and Communication. Trump 2020 Campaign Director of Communications Tim Murtaugh tweeted that the event would be rescheduled.

The architecture team of tvsdesign and EUA will design the Wisconsin Center expansion. The award-winning architect in convention center design recently completed expansions for the Las Vegas Convention Center and McCormick Place in Chicago. tvsdesign partners with Milwaukee-based firm EUA, which aided work on the Fiserv Forum, Miller Park, Milwaukee Intermodal Station, Discovery World addition and dozens of projects on the Summerfest Grounds.

In response to the changing business climate due to COVID-19, WCD notified staff of across-the-board, 20% salary cuts through the end of June. The move affects around 70 full-time staff members and up to 225 part-timers who work individual events have been idled since the outbreak. WCD also delayed non-essential capital projects, instituted a hiring freeze and cut expenses.

WCD has also recently launched an engaging new video series at www.visitmilwaukee.org/meetings-and-conventions/meetingand-event-venues/convention-center-campus/. The new video series shows how the Wisconsin Center District is a one-stop shop for events. Though the entire series is available online, VISIT Milwaukee and the WCD plan to roll out additional video spotlights throughout the year.

#### NEW DATE FOR SUMMERFEST 2020

Organizers moved Summerfest 2020 to Sept. 3-5, 10-12, and 17–19, 2020. The date change they say was necessary to keep the public and artists safe as the coronavirus spreads. Officials say the new dates provide the best possible option to deliver the Summerfest experience fans and sponsors have grown to love. The organization will honor all pre-purchased festival tickets in September. Information about rescheduled performances at the American Family Insurance Amphitheater and BMO Harris Pavilion will follow.

#### STATE MAY LOSE NEARLY HALF ITS HOTEL JOBS

More than 40% of Wisconsin's hotel jobs could be lost as the coronavirus takes a deeper and wider toll on travel and tourism. The Hyatt Regency in Milwaukee, The Edgewater in Madison, and the Holiday Inn Convention Center in Stevens Point have already filed mass layoff notices, reports the Milwaukee Journel Sentinel. Altogether, the American Hotel & Lodging Association projects more than 18,000 jobs at Wisconsin hotels — out of a total of 41,291 — will be lost.

#### AMERICAN CLUB KEEPS 5-STAR RATING

For the ninth consecutive year, The American Club and Kohler Waters Spa at Destination Kohler have kept their Five-Star ratings from Forbes Travel Guide. "We are proud and humbled to be consistently acknowledged by Forbes Travel Guide with its highest honor and the gold standard within the industry," said Christine Loose, vice president of lodging and wellness for Kohler Co. Hospitality & Real Estate. "The accolades show the Kohler Hospitality team's commitment to providing gracious and



unmatched service, along with the passion to create meaningful travel experiences for our guests."

#### DISCOVER WISCONSIN DEBUTS PODCAST

Discover Wisconsin recently debuted a new weekly podcast called The Cabin. Hosts Mariah Haberman and Eric Paulsen bring a weekly dose of Wisconsin-centric conversation, can't-miss events, and exclusive behind-the-scenes content from the Discover Wisconsin crew. Discover Wisconsin releases the podcast every Tuesday. The podcasts are available on Spotify, Apple and Google.

#### GROUP TO REDEVELOP TELEMARK

A group of developers hopes to construct a new 250-room Telemark lodge, restore and reopen downhill ski slopes and a chalet, and create an independent corporate training center. Sponsors want the State of Wisconsin to help fund a sewer line extension and demolish the lodge structure. James Bolen, operator of Lake Owen Resort, leads the efforts. Developers aim to make Telemark a more sustainable four-season tourist destination that benefits the entire region.



# MADISON'S CROWNE PLAZA TO BECOME DOUBLETREE

North Central Group has purchased the Crowne Plaza Madison hotel on E. Washington Avenue and is in the process of converting it into a DoubleTree by Hilton. The property was originally scheduled to open in the fall after a six-month renovation. No word if that's still on schedule. Renovations will focus on the meeting and banquet areas, restaurant and bar, lobby and guestrooms. North Central Group is based in Middleton, Wis., and owns properties throughout Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, Colorado and Arizona.



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#### HOTEL RETLAW NABS DFP AWARD

Downtown Fond du Lac (DFP) awarded Hotel Retlaw with an Interior Design of the Year Award during its annual meeting in February. The hotel's interior design is the work of Yvonne Roberts, principal at Legendary Hotels and creative director of Guru of Luxury. DFP also gave its Exterior Design of the Year Award to 18 Hands Ale Haus and Favorite New Downtown Business of the Year awards to HempWorks Wisconsin and The Hair Lounge.

#### HO-CHUNK MUSEUM OPENS

The Ho-Chunk Nation Museum and Cultural Center opened in January and offers exhibits featuring the history and culture of the Ho-Chunk Nation. The Museum and Cultural Center allows the Ho-Chunk Nation to tell its story in a dedicated space open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. daily. Admission to exhibits and classes is free. The museum's first exhibit features the work of Ho-Chunk landscape watercolor artist Clarence Boyd Monegar.

#### COUNTRY BOOM NABS TOURISM GRANT

The Wisconsin Department of Tourism is giving Country Boom a \$39,500 Joint Effort Marketing Grant again this year. The grant will help the festival reach out-of-state visitors. The three-day music festival takes place July 9-11 at Maple Grove Venues in West Salem. Its headliners include Big & Rich, Justin Moore and Hailey Whitters. The department predicts the event will attract 20,000 guests and generate \$711,500 in visitor spending.

#### HISTORIC HOTEL RENOVATION APPROVED FOR PARK FALLS

The City of Park Falls received a \$250,000 Community Development Investment Grant from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation to help finance the renovation and expansion of a historic hotel into a 50room Cobblestone Hotel & Suites. The \$3.6 million hotel project will create 14 jobs and be complete by year's end.

#### RACINE HOTEL/ CONVENTION CENTER EXPANSION BACK ON

Racine city officials and a developer unveiled revised plans earlier this year for a proposed \$48 million hotel and expanded convention center project to be developed along the city's lakefront. The plan calls for a 171-room hotel and an expansion of almost 35,000 feet of the city's Festival Hall convention center. The project would be funded in combination by both the city and the developer, Gatehouse Capital of Texas. The full-service hotel would include a roof-top restaurant and bar, and observation deck. Pending city approvals, construction could begin later this year, with the hotel and facility opening in 2022.

#### ANDERSON ARTS CENTER RE-OPENS

The Anderson Arts Center began a new chapter on February 23, when it re-opened after a \$4.3 million preservation and modernization project. The revamped arts center offers a new geothermal heating and cooling system, new ADA compliant bathrooms, repaired roof and exterior walls, new landscaping, and updated gallery spaces and hanging systems. The city and county of Kenosha funded the year-long renovation.



#### VISIT MILWAUKEE NAMES DIRECTOR OF SPORTS DEVELOPMENT

VISIT Milwaukee has promoted Marissa Werner to director of sports development. The promotion creates an entirely new sports division for the visitor bureau. In her new role, Werner will create and lead a department focused solely on bringing sports business to the Greater Milwaukee area. The official launch of the new division is in August.

#### WI AIRPORTS RECEIVE IMPROVEMENT FUNDS

U.S. Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao announced a \$16.1 million award for Wisconsin airport infrastructure projects. Milwaukee Mitchell International Airport received \$600,000 as part of the grant. The other \$15.5 million will go toward projects at small and rural airports across the state.



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#### **BREAKING THE NORM** THE NEW BROOKFIELD CONFERENCE CENTER PRESENTS A MODERN ALTERNATIVE TO TRADITIONAL CONVENTION SPACES. BY RONNIE WENDT

Bathed in light and alive with color are rarely words used to describe conference centers. However, the new Brookfield Conference Center breaks outside the norm, greeting meeting goers with towering ceilings, banks of floor-to-ceiling windows, shiny terrazzo floors with splashes of bright color and walls of hand-glazed terracotta from Germany.

"We're not an expo center," stresses Nancy Justman, president and CEO of VISIT Brookfield, which recently moved its offices to the conference center. "Both of our ballrooms are carpeted and completed with highend finishes."

It's the amenities the 54,000-square-foot facility offers that really set it apart. Built on a site at the south end of Brookfield Square Mall, the center offers an intuitive and flexible design that makes it suitable for events of many sizes.

"The 18,000-square-foot main Connect Ballroom is the largest functional space in the [Milwaukee] suburbs," says Justman. "We can split it into 11 different configurations. Our smaller 6,000-square-foot Collaborate Ballroom splits into three configurations. This accommodates requests we received from clients. They called for a divisible space that they could use for different functions."

A dramatic and colorful atrium in the main entrance, state-of-the-art boardroom awash in light and a 9,000-square-foot outdoor garden continue the center's versatile offerings. Clients can rent each space and make it their own. For instance, the beautiful outdoor plaza, aptly named the Celebration Plaza, provides permanent lighting fixtures and benches, green space and string lights for ambience but leaves plenty open for guest interpretation. "There isn't a permanent tent there," Justman explains. "But we can tent the plaza. Guests can make the space look and feel the way they want."

The 8,000-square-foot Celebration Atrium with lofty ceilings and glass on three sides offers a grand reception area that guests can "use on its own or with a ballroom," she adds.

The boardroom also builds in flexibility. While most boardrooms come with a permanent table, the boardroom at the Brookfield Conference Center does not. Guests can opt for a larger table, groupings of tables, or even comfortable soft seating arrangements. "We can convert the boardroom into whatever the client needs," she says.

Food options also are limited at some conference centers, but not at the Brookfield Conference Center. Executive Chef Bill Wilkinson prepares a creative menu from locally sourced ingredients in a state-of-the-art kitchen equipped with Alto-Shaam warming tables, and vector and cook-and-hold ovens.

"We have set banquet menus, but Chef Bill also works with groups to customize a menu that matches specific budgets and dietary needs," Justman says.

The conference center's proximity to hotel rooms is also a plus. There are 2,000 hotel rooms within a onemile radius. The center links to the 168-room Hilton Garden Inn via a glass walkway, while the Sheraton Brookfield Hotel is just shy of 100 feet away.

"There is an abundance of places to stay, which is nice because some of our guests are very brand specific and may prefer a Marriott product over a Hilton product or vice versa," she says. In addition, planners can tap into hotel event spaces for smaller intimate meetings that are part of their larger event at the conference center.

"We are not looking to take away any current business happening in Brookfield," Justman explains. "Our hotels do a tremendous job of working with smaller meetings and functions. We want to attract larger functions that we couldn't accommodate in Brookfield before. That was the focus early on; to build something large enough to accommodate 1,800 people at a time and complement, not compete, with the events the hotels were already holding."

To inquire about reserving space for your next meeting or event, call (262) 789-0220.



#### PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

# THRIVING IN AN UPSIDE-DOWN WORLD

TIPS FOR KEEPING YOUR COOL IN THE HEAT OF A PANDEMIC. Molly rose teuke

> The novel coronavirus known as COVID-19 is keeping most of us at home, wondering how we'll cope. In a typical crisis, we find comfort in coming together and helping others. Now, we're told to isolate, and it seems the highest and most noble contribution we can make to humanity is to hide out. Not that satisfying.

> Sheltering in place upends much of what makes for a good life — purpose, connection and a sense of control. What now? Though it may not feel like it, you do have control over some important levers that can move you toward a greater sense of well-being.

#### TAKE CHARGE

Sleep, exercise and nutrition are the holy triumvirate of a healthy immune system. Getting plenty of all three is a good way to reclaim control of what feels like an out-of-control life.

- Turn off the alarm. Get to bed earlier and don't get up till you've slept 8 or 9 hours, or 7 at the very least. One critical thing that happens during sleep is that we clear out our brains, literally and figuratively. It's a great starting point for maintaining a healthy mood and maximizing your cognitive powers.
- Get outside to exercise, even if it's just a stroll around the block. The fresh air and daylight will lift your spirits. You might also get some much-needed social contact by chatting with neighbors on their

porches (six-plus feet away). Exercise has been shown repeatedly to elevate mood, reduce anxiety and depression, and improve cognitive powers.

- 3. Make healthful, nutritious food choices. Eliminate processed food from your diet to the extent you can. Visit cnn.com/2020/03/25/health/immunitydiet-food-coronavirus-drayer-wellness/index.html for a primer on how food impacts your immune system. Take time to learn about the best sources of essential vitamins and minerals. For instance, did you know red peppers have many times the Vitamin C content of oranges? The USDA's website, nutrition.gov, has easily digestible information. Eat well, feel well, think well.
- 4. Drink plenty of fluids. In one study noted on the National Institutes of Health website, young women who were mildly dehydrated (from exercise) reported feeling grumpier, being more fatigued and having a harder time concentrating.

#### PRODUCTIVITY

Focus will be an increasing challenge as you work from home and juggle a multitude of competing responsibilities. Here are some tips for managing productivity while balancing family needs and getting a grip on your own highly distractable brain.

- Establish a specific place to work a table, a desk, a nook in the dining room. Claim your space and make it your own. Add a few comforts and, if possible, designate it off-limits for any other purpose.
- 2. Set a schedule. You may not be able to stick to it absolutely, yet it will give you a rough guide for how to move through your days with purpose.
- 3. Take frequent breaks, scheduled and unscheduled. Our brains are on overdrive right now and they need all the help we can give them. DeskTime, a company that pioneered productivity tracking tools, has noted that "what the most productive 10% of our users have in common is their ability to take effective breaks." Just knowing it's OK to take a break will ease the pressure and refresh your brain.
- 4. It's easy to get caught up in the media swirl. Monitor your news diet and curate your news feeds. Get the information you need and skip the sensational stuff, which is designed to capture and hold your attention hostage.
- 5. Be aware that every one of us will navigate this upside-down world in our own way. Give yourself the gift of compassion and don't compare yourself to how others are coping. Much research supports the

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driveway or yard as a place to socialize from a safe distance.

- 3. Get out for a walk with a friend, keeping a safe distance between you.
- 4. Watch a movie at the same time as your siblings in another city or state, exchanging commentary and laughter by phone — or by app. Netflix Party seems tailor-made for our present situation: netflixparty.com.
- 5. Do what you can to help others. When you do a grocery or pharmacy run, ask neighbors what they need. Are there errands you can run for an older relative? Could you tutor a young friend or relative from a distance? Science supports the notion that generosity makes us feel good and improves our cognitive function. Opportunities to be of service may be limited, but they haven't disappeared altogether.
- 6. Carve out time to keep your spirits up with some fun. Do an online search for "free things to do during Coronavirus." Among a myriad of possibilities (many now offered at no cost as a direct response to Coronavirus): movies of Broadway plays, virtual tours of museums and national parks, and a virtual pub trivia contest. You'll find plenty of feel-good videos by searching for your favorite zoo or aquarium online. You can even learn to cook from a celebrity chef or take a free class from an Ivy League school.

Whatever your skill level or comfort in this new shelter in place world, realize that your response to it will be uniquely yours. Letting go of what you can't control and taking charge of what you can will lead to the most positive outcome for you, your family, your co-workers, your community and your nation.



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 brainbased leadership training for

the NeuroLeadership Institute, a global leader in the performance arena. She also hosts a weekly classical music program on WXPR-FM. You can reach her at mollyrose@mollyrosecoaching.com.

Feeling grounded is critical to moving through uncertain times with equanimity. Meditation and mindfulness are increasingly popular tools for calming your mind and heart.

notion that people who feel good about themselves get more done than those who beat themselves up. By the same token, suspend judgment on how others are coping. We're in uncharted waters, and we're all doing the best we can.

#### INNER CALM

Feeling grounded is critical to moving through uncertain times with equanimity. Meditation and mindfulness are increasingly popular tools for calming your mind and heart.

- 1. Much research underscores that those who practice daily mindfulness have an easier time coping with adversity. It can be as simple as noticing sensory details about the apple you're eating - its color, temperature, texture, even the sound when you bite into it. Or notice what you're feeling as you stand under the shower — temperature, pressure, sound. If you want to try more formal meditation and aren't sure how to begin, there are many resources online. You could check out Headspace, a respected app that offers a free trial of guided meditations, some as short as three minutes: headspace.com.
- 2. Meditation often focuses on breath, but just paying attention to how we breathe has an impact on whether

our brains think we're safe or not. Kelly McGonigal, an expert on stress, suggests a simple exercise: Slow your breathing down to four to six breaths per minute. "Slowing the breath down activates the prefrontal cortex and increases heart rate variability, which helps shift the brain and body from a state of stress to self-control mode," she writes in "The Willpower Instinct." "A few minutes of this technique will make you feel calm, in control, and capable of handling cravings or challenges." Don't hold your breath; that will only increase stress. Instead, inhale slowly and exhale even more slowly. Imagine you're breathing through a straw.

#### ENGAGEMENT

We humans are wired to connect and engage — with people, places and experiences. But how do you stay connected when you're ordered to disconnect? Think of "social distancing" as "physical distancing" and get creative about how to get social with family and friends while keeping your physical distance.

- Spend time with loved ones using whatever tools you have access to. Get on Skype, ramp up FaceTime or just pick up the phone. Any contact counts.
- 2. Take the party outside. Use your



#### **5 TIPS FOR BETTER A/V** KNOWLEDGE IS POWER WHEN PLANNING FOR YOUR AUDIO-VISUAL NEEDS. BY JENNIFER BRADLEY

Planners often turn to Brandt Krueger for audiovisual (A/V) advice, which the Minneapolis-based consultant and tech producer is more than happy to provide. He says that with AV, knowledge is power and he shares five tips for planners as they examine their A/V needs:

#### No. 1: You can usually overcome cost with time.

"One of the unfortunate things that happens is those that can least afford it wind up spending the most because they just go with in-house A/V," explains Krueger. "It's easy, they're on site, it goes on the master bill and it's done, right?"

It may take a little extra time to secure a third-party A/V bid, but bidding out A/V can save money, even if the venue requires using its A/V provider. How? Krueger says it's bargaining power that can drive down in-house A/V costs.

#### No. 2: You know more than you think you do.

This pro explains that a meeting agenda contains a wealth of information and recommends sharing it with A/V providers. "If you know the CEO always hops on stage to give a message, a panel presents at some point and the sales' leadership hosts a seminar, you know more than you think you do," he explains. "This information provides a lot of direction to an A/V provider."

No. 3: Get your A/V team involved early. Speaking of A/V providers, Krueger says it's never too early to involve them. The more the A/V team learns early on, the greater the accuracy of their service quote and the more seamless the A/V process. He also recommends involving a third-party, even if it's just to examine the venue contract.

#### No. 4: Know your venue and its capabilities.

Before planning any A/V details, a meeting planner must know what's possible at the venue. "Where are people going to get power from?" he asks. "What about the loading dock?" He explains old hotels often have one loading dock, shared with caterers, garbage trucks and other vendors. The dock must be sufficiently sized to accommodate loading/unloading A/V equipment and all others using the dock.

#### No. 5: Know your client's needs.

A meeting planner must know the venue's capabilities, but also the client's wants/expectations. The size of the audience, core locations of the content and activities being offered are all factors to consider.

Krueger recalls a simulcast meeting that had two dozen VIPs in the room, with most investors watching via the Internet. "The planners didn't want lights because it would look weird in the small breakout room, but the resulting feed was super dark," he explains. "So, the primary audience had a nonoptimal experience."

For a medical meeting with presentations, what software must you support? The needs of a more personal event differ from those of a quarterly sales meeting, he says. Will you broadcast the event? To whom? What size room will participants sit in?

Finally, meeting planners must understand their client's reputation and consider how to uphold it. If a company is known for its high-tech, cutting-edge personality, its A/V may look considerably different than A/V for a small, non-profit where "if you go too fancy, you may be criticized," Krueger adds.

A/V may intimidate some planners, but it doesn't have to, Krueger says. He believes there are simple ways to save costs, maximize the experience and keep everyone, from the planner to the client to the attendees, happy.



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

# LESSONS LEARNED

How good communication protects people and saves events and relationships during a crisis.

By Ronnie Wendt

Editor's Note: We are in the height of the COVID-19 emergency in the U.S. as Wisconsin Meetings goes to press with its spring issue. Rules and guidelines are changing daily. The information in this article is intended to offer suggestions to help you through this crisis and as we recover in the coming months.

The coronavirus scare took everyone by surprise. No one foresaw event venues across the country closing their doors; restaurants offering take out only; waterpark resorts closing. No one imagined the President of the United States recommending gathering sizes of no more than 10 people.

In Wisconsin, as we go to press with this issue, Gov. Tony Evers has prohibited gatherings of more than 10 people, temporarily shutting down the meetings and event industry, in addition to countless hospitality businesses for weeks, if not months.

"The coronavirus caught us all off guard and we have had to learn as we go," says Terri Lynn Yanke, founder and CEO of Eventful Advantage in Madison.

Yanke experienced a flurry of cancellations amid coronavirus fears and restrictions. Though she describes the situation as less than ideal, she also says she views it as an opportunity to grow.

An event organizer since early 2000, Yanke is no stranger to crises. As a planner in New York City after 9/11, she remembers the struggle to keep events alive. "No one wanted to go to New York City after that," she recalls. "It was scary, and times were uncertain."

Later, she stretched her planner know-how again after the mass shooting in Las Vegas, where 58 people lost their lives, 413 people suffered gunshot wounds, and the ensuing panic injured another 398 people. "The Las Vegas shooting brought greater awareness about the need for security and security plans at meetings and events," she says.

Yanke sees the coronavirus as another lesson to learn. "The coronavirus is my third new territory," she says. "It will teach me new ways to handle the unexpected. We will know how to handle a future outbreak and will have planned for it."

#### PLAN AHEAD

As Wisconsin Center District (WCD) officials released plans on the proposed expansion of the downtown Milwaukee convention center, cancellations began rolling in amid coronavirus fears. The cancellation of the "Catholics for Trump" campaign rally, which the president planned to attend, quickly overshadowed news about the \$425 million expansion.

But WCD leaders stood ready as the coronavirus took over and tested their crisis communications plans.

"We had just spent the last three months updating and refining our crisis plan," says Sarah Maio, vice president of marketing and communications, WCD. "The crisis plan guided us in what we said and to whom and reminded us that our words really matter."

In "Crisis Communications for Events: Does Your Show Have a Plan?," Lindsay Krause, senior meeting and event manager at Special D Events, stresses planning crisis communication before it's needed. She recommends that crisis communications plans answer:

- Who needs to know the information?
- Who communicates to these specific audiences?
- Does each team member responsible for communications have all the facts and understand the situation?
- What is the best way to communicate the message to an audience?
- What is the timeline to communicate that message?

#### **SET THE SCRIPT**

As owner of Cheri Denise Events, Cheri Davis has planned events and weddings in Wisconsin and Chicago for over 10 years. She thought she'd seen it all but navigating mass cancellations over the spread of a novel virus was a first.

"I had to undo, prepare and reschedule at the same time," she says, noting everyone was in the same boat, which made things easier. "The virus didn't just impact events," she explains. "It affected everyone involved in those events, from the caterers to the entertainers to the venues."

She quickly saw how open communication worked to keep everyone informed during

a widespread crisis. In one case, Davis observed as corporate headquarters in another state cancelled a local Milwaukee event. The leadership announced the cancellation in the company newsletter, on social media and on its website. "That's how local employees found out corporate leaders had cancelled their event; the leadership didn't tell them directly," she says.

Davis recommends a more direct approach where leaders craft a message then share it with affected parties and other managers. "This ensures communication is consistent. People know what's been decided, why it was decided and the plan for the future," she says.

Consistent messaging became very important for WCD as the media storm raged over COVID-19. Maio recommends developing talking points and limiting who handles media communications.

"The Wisconsin Center District restricts who speaks to the media. It always starts with the CEO or the vice president of marketing communications, and only if they are unavailable, are others engaged," she says. "That has been helpful in making sure our message to the media stays consistent."

WCD leadership distributed information to staff so that employees knew what to say to clients about COVID-19. "They could change their name and the client's name on the memo, but the message needed to stay the same," she says. "It's also important to keep [emergency] correspondence concise. Send as much information as you can but don't overload people."

The organization also took big steps to protect people attending its events, but Maio shares their efforts meant little if managers failed to communicate them.

She explains WCD prepared for weeks as the virus made its way to Wisconsin. Crews rigorously disinfected facilities before, during and after events to lessen health risks for guests and employees. They doubled the number of hand sanitizing stations and posted guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). They then shared information about their efforts with everyone.

"We were very forthcoming with our staff

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[and the public] that COVID-19 is serious, and we are not joking around," Maio says. "Their health and wellbeing, and that of their families, is our No. 1 priority. As the situation developed, we were extremely fluid and able to respond to their needs. We had lots of communication and made sure the leadership team responded quickly and appropriately."

When concerns are serious, clients get scared. It's essential that planners be the calm within the storm. This means gathering facts and communicating them, adds Yanke. She helped clients navigate the unknowns by reaching out to venues, hotels and caterers and asking questions as concerns escalated.

"Long before the government set limits, I called every vendor and asked about their response to the virus," she says. "I asked, 'What are you doing that I can share with attendees?'" When a health scare is the concern, she recommends asking:

- What are you doing to sanitize the space?
- Do you have hand sanitizer available?
- How have you trained employees about best practices for hand washing and safety?
- How are you screening employee health?
- What are you asking of guests if they are ill?

She shared vendor responses with clients — in writing. "You may not raise their comfort levels — everyone has a different risk tolerance," she says. "But you do need to talk about it."

If clients decide the show must go on, Yanke recommends communicating best health practices to everyone, from event organizers to volunteers to attendees. "It should start at registration where workers share best practices," she says. "We will elbow touch instead of shaking hands. If you are feeling ill, we ask that you stay home. Here are the CDC guidelines. And it should continue throughout the event."

#### **KNOW THE CONTRACT**

"Event organizers may decide to cancel, then it becomes our job to do so in a way that doesn't cost our clients a lot of money," Yanke stresses. Many contracts include a force majeure clause to protect event organizers when unforeseeable circumstances prevent fulfilling a contract. But not all contracts include these clauses, reports Davis. The first step before canceling, thus, is a thorough contract review to determine what is legally possible.

Contract review for force majeure clauses begins in the planning stages; it's too late after the unexpected happens, Davis adds. "I don't feel comfortable with contracts where if the venue closes, or the caterer cancels, you lose your deposit and there is nothing else you can do," she says. "That is not how I do business."

#### **DEVELOP A PLAN B**

Before every event, Davis reviews event plans and brainstorms adverse outcomes, then develops solutions for each one. "I think, well in this situation, we can do this, or we can do that. If we cancel, maybe we can hold the event on this day instead," she says. "There is always something you can do. Vendors have been very flexible with this [coronavirus] situation. I don't think it's a total loss for anyone."

The right contract always includes a Plan B, even during forced cancellations. "We had to break contracts [because of the virus], and there are always some losses with that," says Yanke, adding planners can really shine during these situations.

"We can negotiate so it's not a total loss," she explains. "We need to look at how can we negotiate this situation so it's a future win-win, and we don't burn any bridges."

She suggests looking for future dates then talking to clients about moving the event, instead of an outright cancellation. Planners must look at every affected vendor and ask for open dates. "Then you can facilitate the move," she says. "It's not the ideal because you had to cancel but it's still more of a winwin than if you cancel with money on the table, and everyone's left mad at each other."

Get creative. Planners might save the event, for example, by hosting it virtually. "While it's harder to create an experience when holding a virtual event, it can be done," Yanke says. "A situation like this opens up opportunities to get creative. You can

# "THE VIRUS DIDN'T JUST IMPACT EVENTS. IT AFFECTED EVERYONE INVOLVED IN THOSE EVENTS, FROM THE CATERERS TO THE ENTERTAINERS TO THE VENUES."

—Cheri Davis, Owner, Cheri Denise Events

implement a gaming app, for example, in a virtual meeting to create an experience."

During the COVID-19 scare, event insurance protected some event organizers. Many times, only large events buy this insurance, but Davis recommends purchasing it for all events. "I've stressed the importance of insurance to clients long before this situation arose," she says. "If it gets to where you cannot reschedule, insurance guarantees at least a partial refund."

#### IF THE SHOW CANNOT GO ON

The best way to communicate cancellations is through the same channels organizers communicated the event to begin with, notes Yanke. She had some clients use Eventbrite for registration, so they communicated their cancellations through that medium. Others used social media channels, emails and websites.

Yanke recommends putting a person — or at least some signage — at the venue the day of the cancelled event. "Some people may not see your cancellation notices, and will show up anyway," she says. "There should be someone there to inform them of the change."

The coronavirus reminds planners that a crisis can occur without warning. Planners who know how to communicate, what to communicate, and how to save an event protect existing relationships and build new ones for the future.



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"Eau Claire is a nice package. We have the art, the sporting, the music, the facilities."

> —Kenzi Havlicek, Director of Marketing, Visit Eau Claire

Ax-throwing hardly seems like something to put on the agenda when planning your next meeting. But maybe it should be. The Metropolis Resort & Conference Center in Eau Claire recently added eight ax-throwing lanes to its wealth of recreational offerings. And the novel activity has been a huge hit.

"It's crazy, but it's actually a lot of fun," says Lauren Pabich, sales manager at Metropolis Resort. "When attendees take a break, they can get a snack, throw a couple of axes and release a bit, then go back on their merry way."

Ax-throwing is kind of crazy, for sure. But it's also emblematic of Eau Claire: an increasingly funky city where creativity is causing people to take note. Couple that energy with the city's 175,000-plus square feet of meeting space and over 2,500 hotel rooms, and you've got the perfect destination for your next event.

#### City on the Move

Eau Claire's roots are in the logging industry, thanks in part to the Chippewa and Eau Claire rivers that wind through the heart of its downtown. But today, the city of 68,000 is home to the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, branches of the Mayo and



Marshfield clinics, and Menards, a home improvement chain.

It's also the birthplace of Justin Vernon, founder of the popular indie folk band Bon Iver; home of the U.S. National Kubb Championships — kubb (pronounced koob) being a Swedish lawn bowling game brought to the U.S. by an Eau Claire resident — and site of the annual National Snowshoe Beer Mile Championship.

And it has a top-notch music and arts scene that's been growing steadily over the years, starting with 30-year-old Country Jam, one of the world's largest country music festivals, and continuing with the more recent Blue Ox Music Festival, an acoustic, bluegrass and string band blowout that's the largest such event in the upper Midwest.

Yet, despite such hipness, many outsiders took little notice of Eau Claire until 2016. That's when DoubleTree by Hilton reopened The Lismore Hotel in the city's fraying downtown after a \$21 million rebuild. The presence of this modern, stylish hotel and conference center kick-started an astonishing flurry of redevelopment that changed Eau Claire almost overnight from a weary-but-hip locale to a true sizzler.

"We're the up-and-coming spot," says Kenzi Havlicek, director of marketing for Visit Eau Claire. "And I really want people to understand what we have here."

#### **Heads Up, Planners!**

Eau Claire has 2,500 hotel rooms — with three more hotels under construction. When completed, they'll add 300 rooms to the inventory.

The vast number of available rooms means Eau Claire can host groups of up to 1,200 comfortably, says Havlicek, although its sweet spot is 300 to 500. Later this year, construction begins on the Sonnentag Event and Recreation Complex, a multipurpose event center and recreation/fitness facility.

One of the city's premier meeting spots is The Lismore, which offers 112 guest rooms and flexible meeting space that will soon hit 16,000 square feet, says Cori Erickson, sales





#### **Planner's Perspective**

The OpenAir Classic recently based its annual convertible tour in Eau Claire. Gary Knowles, meeting planner, says the event was a huge success. The itinerary includes checkpoints to explore.

**TOURS BEGAN:** Carson Park. "Carson Park is where Hank Aaron started his career. The first statue erected of Hank in Wisconsin is there. We also used the park's Paul Bunyan Logging Camp Museum as a checkpoint. It's probably one of the best-preserved logging camps in the state."

#### FAVORITE CHECKPOINT:

Artisan Forge Studios. "There are really fine artists working

there in everything from welding and metal art to jewelry and visual arts. There's even a chocolatier and a guy who makes handmade guitars. It's really quite a discovery and was universally loved by our people."

**UNEXPECTED CHARM:** The Eau Claire Ukulele Club. "We hired them to perform at our opening banquet. Many people hear the word 'ukulele' and laugh. But they are quite good, and I highly recommend them."

WHY EAU CLAIRE? The people. "When you're bringing in 200 cars and 400 people, it's important that the local people really welcome your group."

director for The Lismore. The full-service hotel also features a farm-to-table restaurant, coffee shop and rooftop lounge with patio.

The Lismore is steps from the Pablo Center at the Confluence, a \$51 million arts center that opened in 2018 and boasts a 1,200-plus-seat theater/concert hall, 400-seat flexible theater, dance studio, visual arts galleries and a 250-seat flexible-use space, among other offerings.

"We work a lot with the Pablo Center," says Erickson. "We just had an event where all the meetings and all the meals were here. Our proximity gives us that luxury."

Visit Eau Claire also has its offices in the Pablo Center. But we're not talking a desk and some brochures. No, the tourism office created an Experience Center instead. Here, guests can head to a sampling kitchen to taste local foods, or meander into the entertainment corner, where local musicians may offer sneak previews of upcoming shows. And every month, a different local business operates a pop-up shop.

"Basically, we're creating a microcosm of Eau Claire," says Havlicek. "We're giving visitors a taste of what we're about."

Just north of the Pablo Center, The Oxbow Hotel is also making noise. Created from an old brick-and-steel building connected to a mid-century motor lodge, the creative hotel features a farmer-sourced restaurant with a bar and music venue, a courtyard with fire pits, kubb pitch, outdoor hammock nook and bike rentals. Small groups can hold meetings in The Gallery, a flexible 700-square-foot space filled with regional artwork.

When the weather warms, a producers-only farmers' market opens in Phoenix Park a few blocks away. Shoppers can walk away with everything from veggies and meat to kombucha, egg rolls, salsa and goat milk soap. There's live music every Saturday during the season, and local makers sell their wares at the adjacent Artist Market.

The temperate weather is also when Sculpture Tour Eau Claire goes live. Each May, they set several dozen sculptures out around the city. Created by artists around the world, visitors can grab walking-tour brochures affixed to light posts to locate the sculptures, then later vote for their favorite. The event organizer gifts the winning sculpture to the city.

#### More Than the Downtown

There's much more to Eau Claire than its downtown. Another favorite meeting spot is the Metropolis. Besides those ax-throwing lanes, the facility offers 107 rooms and over 10,000 square feet of flexible meeting



space. Its largest spot can hold up to 320. There's also a restaurant and pub on-site.

The Metropolis works with clients to develop team-building activities that best meet their needs. That may be a simple scavenger hunt or something incorporating one of the resort's entertainment amenities. Pabich says one group blindfolded several employees and had them make their way up the climbing wall by listening to the directions their teammates called out to them.

"Many people are surprised at how much there is to do here," she says, noting they also offer a trampoline park, laser tag, laser maze and indoor go-karts. "You will never, ever get bored."

The Florian Gardens Conference Center sits just west of the Metropolis. It features three ballrooms that can accommodate over 500, plus on-site catering and a full-service bar. But perhaps its most appreciated amenity are the lush gardens out back, a perfect spot for relaxing after a day of meetings.

Another option for downtime: heading 20 minutes north to tour the Leinenkugel Brewery. The historic facility offers daily tours and plenty of sampling. Even better, you can rent the Leinie Lodge, which features a large stone fireplace and comfy couches, plus outdoor patio seating. While Leinenkugel's has historic appeal, Eau Claire's The Brewing Projekt is another good choice. The growing brewery is already in its second, larger location in the city's Cannery District, where you can drink in views of the Chippewa River from its spacious, airy taproom featuring church-pew seating. Upstairs, there's meeting space for 200.

Visit Eau Claire also offers several Signature Experiences, which are after-hours activities for individual groups. Baseball fans will appreciate the Express MVP Behind-the-Bases tour, which takes you to the city's minor league ballpark, where you can check out the press box, sample the team's official beer and have dinner with the players. The Banbury History tour, led by a resident artist, takes you into Eau Claire's old Uniroyal factory, today filled with small businesses and artists' studios.

"Eau Claire is a nice package," says Havlicek. "We have the art, the sporting, the music, the facilities." And, of course, those axes.



Melanie Radzicki McManus often writes about Wisconsin from her home in Sun Prairie, Wis. In 2015, she received the Lowell Thomas Grand Award as Travel Writer of the Year, honorable

mention. Lowell Thomas awards are considered the most prestigious travel writing awards in North America.

#### Other Venues in the City

Eau Claire has so much to offer in the way of venues that it's difficult to list all of them within a single article. Some additional venues include:

#### HOLIDAY INN EAU CLAIRE.

This venue has seven state-of-the-art meeting and event rooms offering 4,323 square feet of space. The largest room can accommodate groups of 460. Two on-site meeting and event planners are available to help with your meeting planning needs.

## BEST WESTERN PLUS EAU CLAIRE CONFERENCE CENTER.

This venue is thoughtfully designed to meet the needs of business and leisure travelers looking for enhanced style and comfort. Its meeting/banquet facilities accommodate up to 300 people. The venue offers an indoor heated pool, fitness center and on-site lounge to enjoy after the event ends.

#### AMERICAS BEST VALUE INN.

A Red Lion Hotel branded property was renovated in 2010 and now offers 5,164 square feet in three meeting rooms. It can accommodate up to 320 attendees. The hotel features 120 guest rooms and has an outdoor pool and fitness center.

#### THE EAU CLAIRE EXPOSITION CENTER.

Situated on 20 acres, The Expo is equipped with a main exhibit building, multi-use buildings and plenty of outdoor space. The Expo's smaller meeting room seats 50 people comfortably while its larger meeting room seats up to 100 people. The Expo includes a fully equipped commercial kitchen.

#### UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EAU CLAIRE DAVIES CENTER.

The university's W.R. Davies Student Center, located on the lower campus, offers 11 meeting rooms of different sizes to accommodate small, medium and large meetings. Its Ojibwe Grand Ballroom can accommodate up to 1,044 guests; the Dakota Ballroom up to 400 guests; and the Woodland Theater up to 200. Smaller meeting spaces are available for groups from 12 to 60.

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# ----- HOW TO SUPERSIZE EVENT SPONSORSHIPS

Strategies to conceptualize, price and sell sponsorships that help fund your event.

By Greg Gerber

Big meetings and events are expensive.

That's why planners seek sponsorships to help cover those costs.

However, it's no longer as simple as selling a banner or a mention in an event directory. Selling sponsorships requires skill and persistence to make them attractive to companies being bombarded with solicitations for marketing and promotion.

There are dozens of unique sponsorship opportunities at any event. The key is to use them to connect buyers and sellers in meaningful ways or to expose decision makers to a particular company, product or service. "Meeting planners shouldn't be afraid to ask what types of unique things others have done. That goes a long way toward not re-inventing the wheel."

—Tifani Jones, Corporate Director of Sales, Kalahari Resorts & Conventions

#### **BRANDED MEETING AREAS**

Tifani Jones, corporate director of sales for Kalahari Resorts & Conventions in Wisconsin Dells, helps meeting planners sell sponsorships for unique spaces within the facility.

"In our expanded convention center, we have two areas set aside for pre-function space that include versatile seating areas and lounge spaces off the lobby," she explains. "Planners sell that as premium exhibit space and they are ideal places for informal interaction."

By working with venues, planners can form brainstorming partnerships that often lead to creating hybrid events based on what others have done in the past.

"Meeting planners shouldn't be afraid to ask what types of unique things others have done," Jones says. "That goes a long way toward not re-inventing the wheel."

Resorts like the Kalahari often have special areas to use for sponsored events. For example, the resort offers an indoor theme park with 24 bowling lanes for rent. Groups can even rent the arcade or giant waterparks after hours for exclusive events.

"Groups can reserve the area for a few hours after the parks are closed to the public. That enables a fun opening reception or unique activity for all event participants to enjoy," says Jones. "Events can sell sponsorships to buyout the space for an exclusive event at which food can be catered as well." Venues will even rename rooms or activities after a sponsor with additional signage to draw attention to the space, like the Visa Pool Party or the Pepsi Exhibition Hall.

#### STRATEGIES FOR SELLING SPONSORSHIPS

Clark Sell is the founder and organizer of THAT Conference, an independent event connecting software professionals and companies invested in the tech space, but not considered "tech companies" per se.

He says the key to developing mutually beneficial sponsorships is to understand what motivates a company to get involved in the event. The motivation generally falls into four categories:

- Branding Either reinforcing a wellknown brand, introducing one to a new audience or fixing a tarnished brand to regain credibility with key customers.
- Recruiting Seeking to hire more staff.
- Sales Appealing to a group to buy a firm's products or services.
- Support Companies that like the event and want to invest in making it a success.

#### **PRICING FACTORS**

Determining a fair price for a sponsorship is based on two key factors — number of attendees and the type of participants.

"If your conference attracts corporate-level decision makers as the main participants, you can command much higher prices by creating opportunities for a firm to interact with those executives," says Alan DeYoung, sales and marketing director for the Wisconsin Emergency Medical Services Association (WEMSA).

For 35 years, WEMSA has orchestrated an annual conference that attracts firefighters, EMTs and paramedics from all over the state. WEMSA partially funds the event through sponsorship sales to 40 to 50 different organizations that pay between \$250 to \$25,000 to support the conference.

DeYoung has always bundled sponsorships into platinum, gold and silver packages, but he recently began offering unique sponsorships to help pay for specific activities or keynote speakers.

Selling packages works to gain support from firms looking for exposure and outreach. They're happy to sponsor an event attracting 5,000 people because it keeps the firm's name or logo in front of key constituents.

However, when seeking big dollar sponsorships, a unique, personalized proposal works best. Individual sponsorships give companies more attention than just being able to say, 'We're the gold or silver sponsor.'

"Companies are looking for more meaningful ways to connect with potential customers than just scanning a badge and sending a follow-up email after the conference," DeYoung explains. "They're looking for ways to connect personally with people that go beyond the 30 seconds a person stands in a booth.

"If a company caters to instructors, then sponsoring the speakers lounge gives the firm an opportunity to connect with trainers," he adds. "It's also a more casual interaction than engaging in sales talk all the time."

Sponsoring a lounge must go beyond renaming the room or putting up a sign. The sponsored area needs refreshments so people can grab a coffee or a soda as they check out a new product.

"Most decision makers are being barraged with messages to buy this or buy that. Attendees want a different type of interaction with companies, and lounge sponsorships make it easier to facilitate those conversations," says DeYoung.

#### **KNOW SPONSOR AUDIENCE**

Before pitching for support, learn about the audience your sponsors want to reach. That is the most time-consuming aspect of selling these opportunities, says DeYoung.

"You really need to know who their ideal customer is based on titles, level of education and other demographics," he explains. "So, if a company is interested in just reaching people from Wisconsin, but you attract people from all over the country, the firm is less likely to step up and pay for a major sponsorship."

Exclusivity can influence price, too. Creating a reception open only to corporate-level executives and allowing just one company to sponsor the event will fetch a much higher price than one open to anyone with multiple sponsors, says DeYoung.

Some firms will pay more to get in front of 100 fire chiefs, while other firms will pay more to get in front of 1,000 firefighters. Knowing the audience helps planners secure better sponsorships.

For example, if a firm's goal is to sell 10 ambulances, then a planner can bundle a package offering a booth next to one of the buffet lines, set up an ambulance in the paramedic's lounge and include a brochure of the new model in the welcome packet.

"You can easily invest an hour putting together a decent proposal," he adds. "But, at the same token, you can command more money by taking the extra time."

#### **COMPETITIVE AWARENESS**

Sell always monitors what happens at similar events around the country to see what they do to attract and retain sponsors.

"I want to know where we sit in relation to other events because the bucket is only so big for firms sponsoring multiple events," he explains. "We must deliver value at our conference that sponsors can't get anywhere else."

Event timing is important. Many firms set their promotional budget a year in advance. So, if planners solicit



#### 5 CREATIVE SPONSORSHIP IDEAS

Take a Picture. Attendees like to take pictures — and they enjoy sharing those photos online. Make photo taking easy by selling sponsored photo booths or photo walls that you place throughout the venue. Opt for branded Instagram frames, product-related props and themed backdrops for photo posing opportunities (and sponsorships). Don't forget the hashtag. You want sponsors to see the photos in use.

Swag Bags. Remember the bags full of cheap toys and trinkets that you once lugged home from birthday parties? Well, attendees love goodie bags as much as kids do. You can entice sponsors to put their logos on giveaway bags or to donate unique and usable logoed gifts for the bag.

**Brand the Venue.** Sell sponsorships to put branded skins over windows, brand specific areas within the venue, or put the branding on screens advertising the event on hotel televisions or outside meeting rooms. The sky really is the limit. You can sell sponsorships wherever attendees will be.

**Rest, Relax and Recharge.** Sell sponsorships for stations where attendees can rest, relax and recharge. Attendees always need a place to sit down, check their emails or recharge their phones. Ask companies to sponsor smartphone recharging stations, seating and provided water at designated areas of restoration, then put their logos everywhere, even on the water bottles.

There's an App for That. An event app provides a personalized experience for your attendees. Techsavvy attendees expect them. Cover the costs of your event app by selling sponsorships on it. Your sponsors will thank you for the granular data the app yields about event attendees. "Companies are looking for more meaningful ways to connect with potential customers than just scanning a badge and sending a follow-up email after the conference."

> —Alan DeYoung, Sales and Marketing Director, Wisconsin Emergency Medical Services Association

sponsorships in April for a September event, the companies likely allocated their money last December, he explains.

That scenario creates problems for Clark because he does not have a full-time staff and most members of his team have other jobs that make it difficult to make calls during business hours.

"I solicit each sponsorship personally and seek introductions through networking to meet face-to-face with the right person to tell our story and better understand the sponsor's needs and problems. That works better than a cold, informal transaction."

#### **RETURN ON INVESTMENT**

Vendors need a return on investment to justify the expense of sponsorship, and they validate that by the amount of direct touch with potential clients. So, creating activities that allow sponsors to meet and speak directly to customers is important, says Sell.

"Some companies can afford to spend millions of dollars for naming rights to a stadium. But, for others spending \$10,000 to sponsor an event may be a significant budget item," he explains.

It's not enough to give sponsors a list of attendee email addresses. The event must make it easy for sponsors to meet, communicate and exchange contact information with attendees. "We accept fewer sponsors at a higher investment on purpose," Sell explains. "We want a more engaging environment. So, we might take 30 to 40 sponsors rather than 80 to 100 just to have more authentic, intimate interactions among participants."

He also gives preferential treatment to companies involved in the community and the event already as well as to those who put time into helping plan the event.

"Firms that see sponsorship as a multiyear investment rather than a onetime cost often find their benefits compound exponentially," says Sell. "Our community sees those types of sponsorships as being more genuine because the companies interact with our audience all year, not just during the four-day show."

The bottom line is that sponsorships must ensure firms can connect with the right people.

"If people buying tickets aren't happy, then sponsorships don't matter because people won't attend the event or return next year," says Sell. "As an event, we need to be doing the right thing to deliver value for attendees and facilitate sales for sponsors."



Greg Gerber is an author, speaker and owner of Faithfire Media, reporting on faith-based topics. He splits his time between Wisconsin and Arizona. He is also the former owner of RV Daily Report.

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For more Originals stories visit *FoxCities.org/originals*, or contact Amy Rivera at *arivera@foxcities.org* to plan your original event. **G y © D** 

# Googeneense and the second sec

Score a hole in one by bringing your group to one of the state's top tournament courses.

It's no secret Wisconsin is a golf mecca. Yet, it wasn't until the last five years — bolstered by the U.S. Open coming to Wisconsin for the first time in 2017 — that the rest of the world found out about the state's stunning greens and fairways. Now the state hosts major championships like the PGA Championship and Legends Tour, Ryder Cup and more.

When golf celebs arrive in Wisconsin and these championships air on national television, this brings more exposure to the state's designer golf courses and community of top golfers. The resorts that host the tournaments also shine in the spotlight, giving a boost to the hospitality sector.

The possibilities are endless for corporations and businesses that wish to entertain clients or host incentive gatherings for employees during these star-studded events. Corporations and businesses also may want to host their own golf tourneys to give clients and employees a chance to golf the courses the pros do.

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#### **WHISTLING STRAIGHTS**

Come late September (Sept. 25-27), the Ryder Cup 2020 swings into Wisconsin for the first time.

Whistling Straits in Kohler, the site of three past PGA Championships, will host the biennial men's golf competition between teams from Europe and the United States. About 200,000 spectators are expected to converge on Kohler for the Ryder Cup, says Mike O'Reilly, golf operations manager at Kohler Hospitality and Real Estate.

Designed by Pete Dye, "the Straits Course is a physically challenging and visually intimidating golf course that tests even the best players in the world," O'Reilly says. "You have to strategize. Some holes may require a long iron off the tee to position yourself for a better shot into the green while others will require a driver off the tee."

Overlooking holes No. 9, 10 and 18 along with the Lake Michigan shoreline the Irish Barn at Whistling Straits will host more than a few intimate social gatherings (up to 120 inside; 200 with additional tent space) during the event.

"Guests can easily flow in and out, perhaps glimpsing sheep roaming the course," says O'Reilly. "The fieldstone structure is reminiscent of the Irish countryside, with the east wall open to the elements. Canvas walls with windows can be pulled down and space heaters turned on if needed." Another space for hosting events is the Champions' Locker Room, which in addition to having lockers, also includes a small kitchen area, televisions, loungestyle seating and a main room anchored by a fireplace.

#### **ERIN HILLS**

Erin Hills Golf Course ratcheted up its exposure by hosting the U.S. Open in 2017, marking the first year the event was held in Wisconsin. Around 200,000 fans flocked to the standard, 18-hole course in Erin, which is seven miles south of Hartford and 37 miles west of downtown Milwaukee. The crowd also included 165 players, 5,300 volunteers and 840 credentialed media.

Designed by a trio of architects (Michael Hurdzan, Ron Whitten and Dana Fry), "it's a difficult course because they designed it to challenge the best golfers in the world," says John Morrissett, competitions and marketing director at Erin Hills.

Tournaments aside, the course is unique in that "there are very few places open to the public that have only one golf course and also have lodging," he says. "It allows for a nice, intimate atmosphere, without shuttles going here and there."

At the 2017 U.S. Open, the intimate atmosphere enticed companies to host their own events on site. "There are over

25 hospitality tents that companies can buy to entertain key staff," says Morrissett.

The USGA selected Erin Hills as the host site for the 2025 U.S. Women's Open, set for May 29-June 1, 2025. Morrissett calls the tournament "the female equivalent of the U.S. Open." And notes that on the peak days (of the tournament), the event draws around 40,000 spectators. Erin Hills will offer hospitality tents, just like at the 2017 U.S. Open, for this event.

The course will also host the 2022 U.S. Mid-Amateur championships. Golfers will play the 2022 U.S. Mid-Amateur Sept. 10-15, 2022, with Blue Mound Golf and Country Club in Wauwatosa, Wis., serving as the stroke-play, co-host course.

Even if a tournament is not taking place, companies can book a meeting at Erin Hills. "We're a great venue for a board meeting or a presentation for between 20 and 25 people," says Morrissett. One option is to play after hours at a new putting course installed last year, which lights up at night. This is especially attractive for non-competitive golfers in the group.

"Sometimes people can feel intimidated if they're not as accomplished as other golfers in the group. People can go out there with a drink in hand and have a good time," he says. The course takes about 45 minutes to complete, at a relaxed pace.

#### Other Notable Courses in the State

#### SENTRYWORLD, STEVENS POINT

SentryWorld, an 18-hole parkland course, hosted the USGA's 71st U.S. Girls' Junior Championship to great acclaim in 2019. Though this year, the tour will not stop in Stevens Point, it is still a notable course to play. Robert Trent Jones Jr. designed the 18-hole course in the early 1980s, then returned 30 years later to update and improve its design. The 22-month renowned flower-bed hole) but added fairway play, ground game approaches and diverse recovery. SentryWorld offers sports complex on the grounds already but will break ground on a new boutique hotel soon. SentryWorld plans to open the hotel in 2021.

#### SAND VALLEY, NEKOOSA

Open since 2017, and designed by Ben Crenshaw and Bill Coore, Golf Magazine dubbed Sand Valley Golf Course "the best new course you can play" the year of its opening. Mammoth Dunes received the same honor when it opened in 2018.

# WILD ROCK GOLF CLUB, WISCONSIN DELLS

Will Rock in Wisconsin Dells is a rugged, 18-hole championship course designed by Mike Hurdzan and Dana Fry (creators of Erin Hills), that winds through and around a former quarry. Greens are expansive and fast. Five sets of tees allow for a variety of skill levels. Check out the 30-mile view available—on a clear day— from the elevated sixth tee.

#### TRAPPERS TURN GOLF CLUB, WISCONSIN DELLS

Designed by two-time U.S. Open champ Andy North, on June 1 this golf club's Lake and Canyon courses (nine holes each) host the Trappers Turn Pro-Am. (There is also the Arbor course.) Next summer, North's 12-hole short course opens for play.









#### GENEVA NATIONAL RESORT & CLUB

This May, Geneva National Resort & Club in Lake Geneva — which hosted the Ladies Professional Golf Association Cup Finals in 2019 — rolls out 32 new oncourse suites designed for entertaining during tournaments. With sleek, modern interiors and nature views, they range between 630 and 850 square feet and are either a Deluxe King Suite or a Deluxe Two-Queen Suite. Guests can also stay at The Ridge Hotel, a sister property that features 146 guest rooms.

The resort will introduce the suites in time for the LPGA Amateur Cup (July 29-Aug. 1), with 400 women competing, says Director of Sales Rob Booth. In 2019 Geneva National hosted the Wisconsin State Open on its Palmer and Trevino courses.

Arnold Palmer, a starchitect in the golfdesign world designed the Palmer Course at Geneva National. The other two courses were designed by golf greats Gary Player and Lee Trevino.

"Legends designed our courses," says Booth. "We have 54 holes. Few facilities in the state have three courses on property. This allows us to host larger events. Our courses are definitely challenging. However, we have five sets of tee boxes to accommodate all golfers, from beginners to pros."

Companies often use the club's 12,000

square feet of function space, including "our classic Lowell Board Room, clubby Lake Geneva Room, refined-rustic Legends Room and three well-appointed banquet rooms," says Booth. Groups of between five and 500 people can easily find an option that fits.

As a site for state PGA tournaments, Grand Geneva Resort & Spa (also in Lake Geneva), offers the 7,000-yard Brute course, "one of the most challenging layouts in the Midwest and is considered one of Wisconsin's best golf courses. The greens can be quick and challenging," says Golf Sales Manager Ben Pinzer. "The hilly, tree-lined terrain features sloping fairways punctuated by large sand traps and sculpted water hazards that add aesthetic beauty."

Described as a "tight, shot-makers' course," the Scottish-inspired, links-style Highlands — the resort's other course, designed by Pete Dye and Jack Nicklaus with a later transformation by Bob Cupp — "transports golfers to Scotland, without them having to own a passport or 'hop the pond,'" says Pinzer.

Hospitality extends to meetings and events for business groups in attendance. Overnight accommodations and dining at five venues — including Geneva Chophouse — are in addition to 62,000 square feet of conference space. Groups can tack on a round of golf during the warmer months and unique team-building activities come winter, like an indoor climbing wall or extreme sled-building.

#### **UNIVERSITY RIDGE**

University Ridge plays host to the American Family Senior PGA/Legends Tour every year. This year is no exception with the tour stopping in Madison from May 30-June 7.

The course, named by Golf Week as the No. 5 campus course in the nation in 2019, is home to the men's and the women's golf teams for the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The front nine holes meander over lush grasslands while the back nine work through the densest of Wisconsin's woodlands.

Steve Stricker, 12-time PGA TOUR winner and five-time PGA TOUR Champions winner, will again play and host the 2020 event. Proceeds from the event are donated to the Steve Stricker American Family Insurance Foundation, with a portion going to the American Family Children's Hospital and the rest to other state-wide charities. The events from 2016 through 2018 raised nearly \$5 million for 185 charities.



Kristine Hansen is a freelance writer based in Milwaukee. She writes about food and drink, design and travel for a mix of regional and national audiences. Her clients

include ArchitecturalDigest.com, Fodors. com, Vogue.com, Midwest Living magazine and Milwaukee magazine. She recently published Wisconsin Cheese Cookbook, which is available on Amazon.com.

# SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION







DESTINATION

**37 JANESVILLE 38 OSHKOSH 39 REAL RACINE** 

inside

#### 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 visitors bureaus (CVBs) 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 requests for proposals, 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 is memorable.

In this issue, we focus on the great meeting and convention destinations of Janesville, 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 these communities are the right fit for your group and, if so, include 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**

JANESVILLE

# **QUICK FACTS**

#### CONTACT INFORMATION

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

#### **DISTANCE FROM**

Madison: 40 miles Milwaukee: 70 miles

#### COMMUNITY INFORMATION Population: 64,359

Number of hotel rooms: 888 Largest meeting facility: 15,000 sq. ft. Largest exhibit facility: 12,000 sq. ft. Airport: Chicago O'Hare International Airport

Chicago: 120 miles Minneapolis: 305 miles When you meet in Janesville, Wisconsin's Great Outside, you'll find a combination of hospitality, amenities, ambiance, convenience and affordability. Discover our variety of meeting and banquet spaces along with our wide selection of hotels, restaurants and attractions.

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Easy interstate access from anywhere in the Midwest makes Janesville's location perfect for district or regional conferences. The proximity of five major airports and top-notch ground transportation services make travel trouble-free for national meetings as well.

Be sure to ask about our "Get Money Back" promotion. Meeting planners could qualify for a cash rebate of \$200.



### **DESTINATION SHOWCASE**

### OSHKOSH CONVENTION & VISITOR'S BUREAU

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Make your next meeting positively memorable with the help of our Event Experts. We guarantee you will find yourself enjoying more than just meeting time in Wisconsin's Event City – experience more at VisitOshkosh.com.

## **QUICK FACTS**

#### 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



### **DESTINATION SHOWCASE**

**REAL RACINE** 

## **QUICK FACTS**

#### 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 ROM Chicago: 68 miles Minneapolis: 356 miles Real Racine will provide outstanding services to accommodate your event's needs. See a vibrant community that is ready to excite and wow your attendees without hurting your budget.

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#### RONER HONER HONER

Six steps to boost event security and better prepare for an emergency. By Ronnie Wendt

On October 1, 2017, a gunman in Las Vegas carried out the deadliest mass shooting in American history. Fifty-eight people died, and the shooter injured hundreds more at an outdoor music festival.

SEC

The massacre — and other mass shootings like it — cast a light on what can happen when someone with ill intent tries to harm people assembled for a meeting or event.



Today, the spread of the coronavirus is also shining a spotlight on emergency preparedness. Meeting organizers intent on keeping attendees safe must take steps to prevent illness and pre-plan their responses if people do become ill.

These national issues create a heightened awareness of "the possibility of something going wrong," says JoEllen Graber, president of MPI Wisconsin Chapter. "These things are happening, and planners need to think about them."

Lisa Sommer Devlin's legal practice focuses on hospitality law. Over the last 25 years, she has gained a reputation as an authority in hotel and venue contracts, event security and liability issues. Devlin doesn't mince words about planners' responsibilities in emergencies.

"You need to recognize your risk and your responsibility for dealing with that risk," she says. "Those are tough questions. Is it the event organizer's responsibility to put in metal detectors and screen everyone? Is it their role to prevent people from getting sick? What is reasonable to expect?"

The attorney with Phoenix, Ariz.-based Devlin Law Firm reports responsibility begins with asking questions: Where is the event being held? Who will attend? Is there anything about the event that might lead to specific dangers? Is it being held outdoors? Do you need to think about weather dangers? Does the venue itself present specific risks? Will you serve alcohol?

"There are no hard and fast rules," Devlin says. "You must look at each event based on its particular circumstances, then plan appropriately."

#### **ONE: PLAN FOR DISASTER**

The existence of dangers, such as an active shooter or even the more-recent coronavirus, hasn't "hit home in Wisconsin as much as it has in other places," Graber warns.

But it must, she adds.

"You need a plan in place in case something happens. Disaster plans must look at if X happens, then Y happens next, followed by Z," she says.

Graber suggests that planners create a disaster binder for every event and share that document with every stakeholder, from volunteer workers to investors to third-party vendors.

"A disaster binder looks at identifiable emergencies," she says. "For example, in food poisoning, who do you contact? What steps do you take after a shooting? Include contact lists for everyone involved in "There are no hard and fast rules. You must look at each event based on its particular circumstances, then plan appropriately."

#### Lisa Sommer Devlin, Risk Attorney, Devlin Law Firm

the event and contact information for emergency services."

#### **TWO: TRAIN FOR THE WORST**

A disaster plan is just the starting point. It means little if the document rests on a shelf gathering dust.

"A lot of events are run by on-site staff and volunteers, who are there for the day," Graber says. "Planners should hold preevent meetings so everyone knows what the event is, who should be there, and what to look for. It's essential to educate everyone working the event. It's just good customer service."

She also recommends participating in educational opportunities offered by MPI-Wisconsin. "Educate yourself to prepare for emergencies," she says. "You hope you never need to use these skills, but it's beneficial to prepare."

MPI-Wisconsin recently held active shooter training. This educational opportunity helped planners prepare their responses to active shooter events. Another MPI-Wisconsin event concentrated on emergency preparedness when dealing with food poisoning or the spread of a deadly virus.

"We had all these people who were sick and we didn't know why — in our training scenario," she says. "We had to plan who we would call and the steps we would take."

Training extends to attendees. Though event organizers should not spread information that incites fear, Graber says they should make attendees aware of the exits, basic emergency information, and stress that if they see something, they should say something. "People fear speaking up but if they see something that's not right, we must encourage them to say something," she says.

#### **THREE: KNOW YOUR ATTENDEES**

Attendees make or break an event; without them an event will fail. However, attendees must be comfortable sharing identifying details about themselves to verify their identities when they arrive. Gone are the days when planners left event badges on a table for attendees to pick up.

"Planners must make sure that everybody there is supposed to be there," Graber says. "With security, that is an important area to concentrate on. Make sure everyone has a badge and that the badges go to the right people."

Be sure to ask for identifying information during the registration process, including emergency contact information. Then place a person at the check-in desk to hand out badges and check IDs, she advises.

On-site event check-in kiosks and custom badge printing solutions allow attendees to step up to the kiosk, select their name, email and company, or scan a QR code provided in the registration process, to check-in and receive their badge. Graber says, "This may not seem like high security, but you need to have identifying information to put into the kiosk. It's far more secure than having badges on a table."

Though facial recognition technology may be too pricey for many events, Graber notes it too can heighten security. This software uses a person's likeness to identify and register them in a quick (just a few seconds) and secure way. The software scans each person and their ID at check in and runs this information against criminal records to verify their identity and make sure they are not a threat. The software also notifies event organizers when someone walks by without providing their information.

"This is high technology, and very expensive, but it's worthy of consideration," Graber says.

#### FOUR: LEAVE IT TO THE VENUE

Venues, not meeting organizers, carry primary responsibility for security, Devlin stresses. However, she warns that planners cannot assume every venue has security plans in place.

"Ask them about their security plans," she says. "Most venues won't give you specific

"You need a plan in place in case something happens. Disaster plans must look at if X happens, then Y happens next, followed by Z."

> JoEllen Graber, President, MPI Wisconsin Chapter

details. They won't tell you we have hidden cameras here and alarm systems there, but they will tell you the basics. You can review that information with your security team to decide if you need more security."

The nature of a meeting can create a case for added security. A gun show presents very different security needs than an event for hairstylists. An event with local speakers presents differing security needs than one attracting global-level VIPs. "If you have the president of a multinational corporation coming to speak, you'll need enhanced security," she says. "A gem show where exhibitors bring in stones worth hundreds of thousands of dollars requires more security than most venues provide. Security depends on what your event is, where it is being held and what you'll be doing at it."

A trade show requires additional security, adds Graber. "You want to make sure security patrols the venue at night and that it's locked securely. Your vendors need to feel comfortable leaving their stuff at night," she says.

If a venue lacks security, Graber says this fact arms planners with information to negotiate better rates. "If you're not seeing something you need, you can negotiate for it," she says. "If it's something the venue cannot or will not provide, you can ask for a discount so you can hire a third-party to do it."

Devlin advises that planners avoid taking on alcohol serving. She says that serving alcohol "is best left up to the venue. Let them carry the proper insurance, train the people, and make those decisions. Then you are not exposed to any liability because you're not involved in serving alcohol."

#### **FIVE: GET EXPERT ADVICE**

Security missteps expose meeting organizers to liability. Hiring a third-party expert for security suggestions and emergency planning can prevent problems down the road. "If something happens, this shows you tried to make reasonable predictions and took reasonable steps to do the right thing," Devlin says. "However, if the security expert tells you to do A, B and C, and you decided not to do C, it can show you did not exercise reasonable care."

But planners can employ cost-benefit arguments if something happens, and they didn't do all that the consultant recommended, she says. If the security expert recommended metal detectors, armed guards, drug-sniffing dogs and expensive technology, planners can assess the risk, evaluate what they can afford and the nature of the event, then do what makes sense.

"If an attendee gets injured and sues, they must prove negligence. They must prove the sponsor, or venue, had a responsibility to keep them safe. Then they must prove that the sponsor or venue did not meet that responsibility," she says. "The question becomes: Were the security measures reasonable? Or did they fall below the standard of what is reasonable? Could they have foreseen that risk? Could they have prevented it? Planners may not be able to prevent a mass shooting. But they can prevent trips and falls by making sure aisles are clear. They can plan for weather events at an outdoor exhibit. And, they can plan for medical emergencies."

#### **SIX: INVEST IN RISK INSURANCE**

Accidents happen. For this reason, Devlin recommends investing in risk management insurance.

"Insurance protects you from things you cannot control," she says. "Insurance provides a defense when accidents happen. Insurance covers the settlement when someone makes a claim."

She worries when event organizers claim they cannot afford insurance. "That's a red flag," she says. "I don't think anyone can afford not to have insurance."

Meeting planners may not be able to prevent the unthinkable, but they can prepare for it. Following these six steps puts planners on the road to better emergency preparedness.



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# Just Add Vater

For a unique and beautiful atmosphere for your next meeting or event, look no further than a Wisconsin lakeside venue.

By Shelby Deering



The fresh breeze. The sound of waves. The glistening water touched by sunlight. Although this may sound like a vacation wonderland, it is also a place where people can make professional connections and employees can better their careers. A lakeside venue brings a relaxed, eye-catching ambiance to any meeting or event. It's a feel that Daniel McCluskey, marketing services specialist/event planner at National Guardian Life Insurance Company, experiences firsthand while planning events for 10 to 300 people at The Edgewater in Madison.

"The advantage is being right on the water, which gives a vibe and atmosphere you can't get anywhere else. I am into experiences, and the experience you get by the lake is amazing," McCluskey says.



He believes planning a lakeside event differs little from planning a traditional, indoor event since the process is smooth and the property accounts for every detail. "The Edgewater makes it easy," he says. "They have plenty of indoor and outdoor waterfacing event spaces where you can really impress whomever you are entertaining."

On Lake Mendota in Madison, the 72-yearold Edgewater offers The Grand Plaza outdoor space that accommodates up to 350 guests along with eight indoor meeting rooms and private dining spaces.

Elkhart Lake is home to The Osthoff Resort, famed for its 38,000 square feet of functional indoor space plus the idyllic lawns, lakefront and 500 feet of sand beach made for outdoor events.

Nestled alongside a Geneva Lake harbor, The Abbey Resort is a Fontana mainstay that provides Harbor Patios and lawns readied with stunning views and a variety of indoor spaces, one located inside the tallest A-frame in North America.

Head north to Trego's Heartwood Resort & Conference Center. It has several types of indoor and outdoor meeting spaces, from decks, patios, and green space to bars and a full-scale lodge; all offering pristine lakefront views.

Lake Lawn Resort has resided on the shores of Delavan Lake in Southeast Wisconsin since the 19th century. Today, it's known for 32,000 square feet of flexible meeting space, including a conference center that's receiving a floor-to-ceiling renovation and outdoor spaces like a charming paver courtyard.

For a truly unique lakeside experience — on an island! — plan an event at Birchwood's Stout's Island Lodge on Red Cedar Lake.



"The advantage is being right on the water, which gives a vibe and atmosphere you can't get anywhere else."

Daniel McCluskey, Event Planner, National Guardian Life Insurance Company

With rooms seating 24 to 70 people and the ability to top the outdoor South Lawn with a tent (complete with power and lighting), it's guaranteed to be an event that attendees won't soon forget.

#### Things to Consider

Lakeside events, while beautiful and memorable in many respects, can carry additional considerations.



First, factor in the weather. Chad Buros, director of sales and marketing at The Osthoff Resort, says, "Although it could be sunny and pleasant earlier in the day, summer storms can form quickly, so you need a backup location for all outdoor events."

Before the event, find out when the venue consults with planners about changing to an indoor space. Dan Dolan, director of sales and marketing at The Abbey Resort, explains, "Our standard is to consult with our customers and make a change at least three hours before an outdoor event."

Mosquitoes and other bugs are a given in Wisconsin, but they need not bring down an event. For instance, at The Abbey, event banquet managers keep insect repellent on hand for guests. Dana Morlock, director of sales and marketing at Heartwood Resort & Conference Center, adds, "While Heartwood uses insect-repelling techniques to reduce outdoor pests, the indoor backup space is an insurance policy for happy guests during occasional [pest] outbreaks."



Many venues cover their bases with nearby indoor restroom facilities and power to provide lighting and heat. Dolan advises, "It's better to have an overnight site visit than a quick tour. For outdoor events, you can see the venue you might have in the evening and can test the lighting and get ideas to enhance the venue."

Lastly, with the proximity to the water, you want to keep guests' comfort and safety in mind. For example, Heartwood Resort & Conference Center holds events on a private lake which means motorized vessels won't create noise. Terri Bain, director of sales at Lake Lawn Resort, suggests, "Review the guest list and check for any attendees that may have mobility issues to



make sure they are safe and have the best possible experience."

#### A Lakeside Paradíse

Carly Dubek, event coordinator at Stout's Island Lodge, shares that lakeside events provide "opportunities to catch a breath of fresh air." They also offer experiences you cannot replicate anywhere else.

Each resort carries its own unique activities for lakeside events. At The Osthoff, guests enjoy the same AAA Four Diamond menu relished indoors — savoring dishes buffet-style — then finish the evening with a bonfire and s'mores. The Abbey showcases historic boat cruises and sunrise yoga sessions. Heartwood Resort





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### If You Need'a Plan B...

Rain. Lightning. Wind. No one can control what Mother Nature does on the day of a lakeside event. That's why it's key to have a "Plan B" in place. Our experts are here to share info and advice.

Amy Supple of The Edgewater: "All outdoor events at The Edgewater include an indoor backup space and/or a large tent that covers The Grand Plaza."

Chad Buros of The Osthoff Resort: "We always reserve inside space as a backup for any outdoor events. Our conference services managers work with each planner and together we decide if it is best to go ahead with the outdoor event or move it inside."

Dan Dolan of The Abbey Resort: "One consideration when thinking about an outdoor event is asking how you can duplicate as much of the experience if you need to move it indoors."

Dana Morlock of Heartwood Resort & Conference Center: "The outdoor spaces at Heartwood Resort are next to an indoor backup that features the same lake views and services to ensure poor weather doesn't cause plans to alter much."

Terri Bain of Lake Lawn Resort: "Having a well-thought-out backup plans for your event is crucial for a successful event outdoors. Working with our experienced team of professionals makes it easier to identify the 'must haves' for the event backup space inside."

Carly Dubek of Stout's Island Lodge: "I cannot stress flexibility more when hosting an event at Stout's Island. You are on an island; therefore, you should plan for it. There may be limited options during storms, in excessive heat or if the power goes out."

& Conference Center not only features flawless Northwoods views but also offers a lakeside lawn for outdoor games like croquet and bocce ball.

Lake Lawn Resort has its fair share of watersports along with its own 76-foot private tour boat called the Lake Lawn Queen. Stout's Island Lodge strives for "complete tranquility," as Dubek calls it, resulting in a "Limited Connectivity" policy (Wi-Fi is available for groups, but the resort encourages guests to keep phone use to a minimum). The Edgewater's outdoor space magically transforms into an ice rink every winter.

The bottom line is that lakeside vistas create a sense of calm that's hard to come by in traditional event venues. Amy Supple, chief operating officer and senior vice president of The Edgewater, puts it best, saying, "Nothing awakens your sense of creativity or peace like a view of the lake."

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every event are to collaborate, create and celebrate. Our experienced staff will share our expertise because we understand that food is an integral part to the success of any event."

- Scott Recob, General Manager, Centerplate

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# **BUSINESS MINDED**

WITH A MASTER'S DEGREE IN MARKETING, PLANNER TERRI YANKE USES HER EXPERIENCES AS A RETAIL MARKETER AND BUYER TO SHAPE HOW SHE APPROACHES EVENT PLANNING. BY AMY WUNDERLIN

> Terri Yanke always had a knack for events — even before she made a career out of planning them. In high school, college and as she navigated the business world, Yanke always found herself planning.

> "In retrospect, I've been planning events since high school ... but it has never been my job to do events," she says.

Until now.

After working as a buyer and marketer in the retail industry for many years, Yanke started Eventful Advantage, blending her business education and knowledge with her innate ability to plan a great event.

"When I started my business, I threw a wide net to see where I would find myself. I found I could do every type of event, but the place where I really added value — and where my greatest ideas came — were in collaboration with businesses," she says.

Yanke focuses on her client's return on investment (ROI) by zeroing in on their purpose and goals for an event. She says it is important to talk with the decision makers to identify what they hope to achieve with their event.

"That's where my marketing background kicks in," she says, noting that these discussions are necessary because ultimately clients know their businesses best. These conversations help planners individualize and customize events. "Don't take a cookie-cutter approach because every situation's a little different," she adds. "There are concepts you can share but tweak them to be specific to their purpose, their event and their goals."

Yanke's marketing experience also instills upon her the need to stay on top of trends. Every year she plans "inspiration trips" to see what's happening in other parts of the world. Europe, for example, still inspires trends in the fashion world.

"When you create a product, you've got to create it way ahead of time, so you are guessing and predicting what people will want in a year's time. That is what I am talking about when I am looking at how I do events differently," she explains. "[In retail] the white space on the floor is what doesn't exist yet that could sell. That is how I approach the combination of business and event planning — by analyzing what's going on in the world right now."

She sees a growing desire for more experiences at events as a primary trend. "There's a whole trend to turn off devices and actually connect with people," she says.

Planners create positive experiences, Yanke says, when they touch on all five senses as attendees interact at an event.

"An experience is a psychological thing. It makes you remember," Yanke says, further explaining that positive memories influence sales or brand appeal. "When someone has a positive experience, it becomes a long-term memory. To create a lasting impression, make sure you touch upon all the senses and actually get attendees involved."

For example, at a networking event, the sense of touch can have a major impact as people interact by shaking hands or by playing an icebreaker game that helps them get to know each other. Food is another great way to incorporate multiple sensory experiences. At a recent event, Yanke hired chefs that cooked to order, which got attendees involved and created a nice aroma giving the room a homey feel.

Besides creating shared experiences, Yanke finds attendees want businesses to show vulnerability and personality. They want to understand the reasons behind a company's actions, she says.

"The time is right for this approach — having events to grow your business and thinking of them as more than just a party but as a valued part of your marketing strategy," she says.

Yanke further warns that planners can't be afraid to think outside of the box. "Don't be afraid to borrow an idea, and tweak it to make it work for you," she concludes.



Amy Wunderlin is a freelance writer based in Fort Atkinson, Wis.



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