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WINTER 2021

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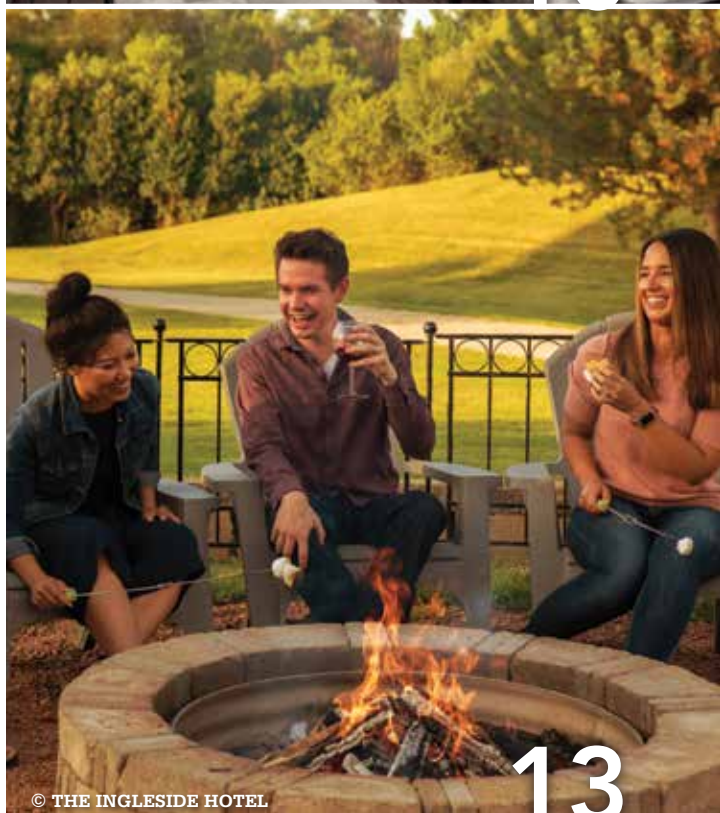
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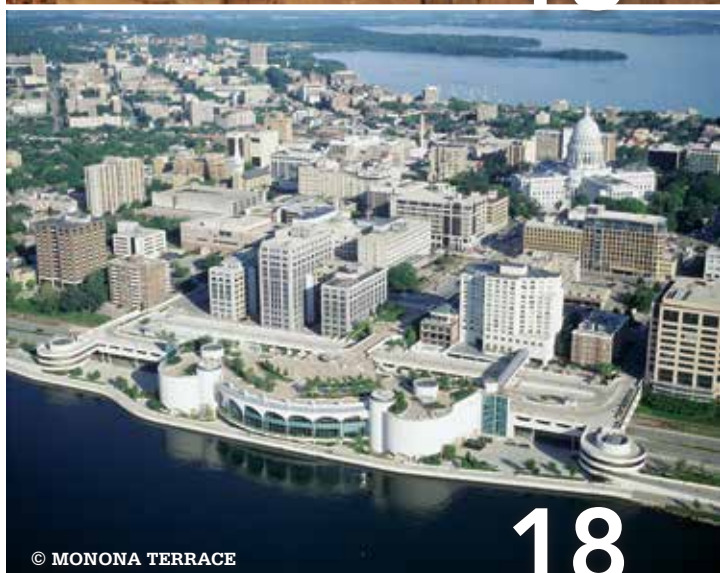
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## EDITOR'S LETTER

The start of a new year is always an opportunity to refresh and recharge. Never has this been so needed than in 2021! I'm sure I speak for all of you in saying that I'm ready to put 2020 behind me and look forward to a new year.

With this issue, it's time for celebration as we unveil the Best of Wisconsin Meetings award winners! Turn to Page 13 if you're eager to see the results of our reader's choice survey. Keep in mind that these vendors not only met and exceeded customer expectations, but they did it in the disruptive environment of 2020, proving true dedication to their customers and the industry.

As you read this issue of Wisconsin Meetings, remember that, due to public health restrictions, some properties may be temporarily closed or functioning at partial capacity. This disclaimer reminds us that, while COVID-19 deeply impacted the meetings and events industry in 2020, we have everything to look forward to this year. For example, as a result of the practice of social distancing, small group events and meetings are experiencing a rebirth and leading some meeting planners to lean toward hosting in more luxurious venues. (See Page 10.)

Moreover, many industry leaders are forecasting that meetings and events will begin to recover later this year as vaccines become more widely distributed and, with that, a rebound in confidence. The industry is only going to benefit from more people feeling safe to travel freely. We get a step closer to that every day.

Our capital city is the featured destination in this issue. Madison offers meeting and event attendees the ability to explore the city on foot in the fresh air and open spaces. (See Page 18.)

Key to the city's development as a Midwest meetings hotspot was Destination Madison president and CEO Deb Archer, who recently retired from the organization. We take a look back at her career and talk to her about the destination's future. (See Page 28.)

While demand is increasing for face-to-face events and travel, the popularization of hybrid meetings is here to stay. While they were always hovering on the horizon, without the push from COVID-19, many meetings and events planners wouldn't have had as much incentive to start their journey on upskilling for these new competencies. Now they are busy learning how to seamlessly fit the physical and digital experience together. It takes a team with a diverse skillset to overcome that hurdle, but with obstacles often come opportunities in disguise.

It's also that integration of distinct personalities and capabilities that future meeting planners will strive to achieve as the industry shifts toward a more inclusive and equitable environment. (See Page 24.)

Virtually everyone acknowledges that, no matter what happens in the future, there's always going to be a desire and need for in-person meetings and events to foster the serendipity that spurs collaboration.

Thanks for reading Wisconsin Meetings.

Carrie Mantey  
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## IN THE NEWS

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### THE MONONA TERRACE STUDIO

Madison-based Monona Terrace is now offering an in-house studio with the digital infrastructure, technical expertise and full-time audiovisual staff to take meetings virtual. The studio has the ability to execute hybrid or fully virtual events, online polling, live Q&A, and picture-in-picture views of the presenter and presentations with multiple platforms. The facility also provides the flexibility to collaborate with outside vendors to help manage hybrid or virtual meetings and events.

The studio uses two separate internet service providers with unique paths, both over fiber connections and wireless links, into the facility to ensure that the internet connection is continuously operable. Other features include:

- A 40-gigabit building fiber backbone
- Gigabit Ethernet to the show floor
- Redundant firewalls and network core
- Onsite network technicians
- Voice (phone) service and support
- A 45- by 15-foot screen
- GBAC STAR cleaning accreditation



### VISIT MILWAUKEE COORDINATOR NAMED EQUAL RIGHTS COMMISSION CHAIR

Tony Snell, VISIT Milwaukee volunteer and staffing coordinator, was recently appointed chair of the City of Milwaukee Equal Rights Commission. Earlier in 2020, he was appointed by the mayor of Milwaukee to serve a second three-year term and was elected vice chair.

The Equal Rights Commission, as it is known today, was

made official in 1994, although it served Milwaukee for 76 years over the course of its evolution. Initially serving as the first point of contact for concerns and complaints of unfair treatment, the commission soon grew to take greater action, as well as include more protected categories — from race and sexual orientation to housing and employment.



### SUPPORT GROWS FOR HOTEL INDUSTRY'S SAFE STAY

Support for the American Hotel & Lodging Association's (AHLA) Safe Stay initiative continues to grow with endorsements coming from scientists, physicians, and public health experts in epidemiology and infectious disease.

The new endorsements come from the Infectious Diseases Society of America, the Association for Linen Management (which represents personnel involved in the textile care industry), as well as a certified industrial hygienist and former infectious diseases epidemiologist with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO), Dr. Murray Cohen. Safe Stay is an industry-wide initiative focused on enhanced hotel cleaning practices, social interactions and workplace protocols to meet the new health and safety challenges and expectations presented by COVID-19.

The latest version of the Safe Stay protocols includes CDC guidance on hotel operations, including meetings and events. Safe Stay includes direction on elevator operations, food service operations and workplace health safety plans. The guidelines also feature the latest CDC recommendations on daily room cleanings to limit in-person contact.



### NEW DESTINATION MADISON PRESIDENT AND CEO NAMED

Ellie Westman Chin has been chosen as Destination Madison's new president and CEO. She recently served as the president and CEO for Visit Franklin in Tennessee. Westman Chin's successful track record of increasing the economic impact of visitor spending, working with city leaders to continue to develop exceptional attractions, commitment to resident education and community outreach on the impact of tourism, and close work with public health on COVID-19 response and recovery were all key factors for the board's selection. [www](#)



## VENUE SPOTLIGHT

© GREATER GREEN BAY CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

# NEW RESCH EXPO CREATES CONVENTION EXCITEMENT

GREEN BAY IS ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT  
THE ONE-OF-A-KIND, STATE-OF-THE-ART  
EVENT SPACE.

BY SUE SVEUM

The excitement is palpable around Green Bay — and despite the proximity, it's not about the Packers. This enthusiasm is for the opening of the brand-new Resch Expo in Ashwaubenon — a \$93 million project resulting in an event space unlike any other in northeastern Wisconsin.

"For over 60 years, the Brown County Veterans Memorial Arena served the community well here," says Brenda Krainik, director of marketing and communication at the Greater Green Bay Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB). "But as time passed, the need for larger flat show space and indoor sports events grew." And from that seed, the Resch Expo was born. The project broke ground in July 2019 and opened in January.

"Everybody is so excited about this state-of-the-art building and thrilled to have it in this area," she says. "People have been going to local shows here for years — it's part of the fabric of the community."

The CVB will work hand in hand with PMI Entertainment Group, the team of event producers in charge of running the facility. The collaboration is a bonus for event planners. "They'll get a full team behind them," Krainik says. "It makes a world of difference to team up with someone who knows the staff."

The excitement extends far beyond the immediate community. "The space is so flexible, it can be used for

many different types of events," says Krainik. "A continuous show floor with no columns can facilitate sports events like wrestling, volleyball, billiards, gymnastics, cheerleading, cornhole and so much more."

And several event spaces on the building's outdoor plaza are great for indoor/outdoor networking events and receptions. "Planners interested in offering something different could have an early morning yoga session on the turf or food trucks adjacent to the beer garden," suggests Krainik.


The building features three large overhead bays for easy load-in so vehicles can be driven directly into the building for display or unloading. "It's the place for RV, camping and boat shows," she says. "There's no other place in northeast Wisconsin with such a large flat space."

That's one reason why the 125,000-square-foot facility is also a perfect fit for large equipment shows, which can now be held indoors. "Before, large equipment shows had to be held partially outside, but now everything easily fits inside, so the space can be used any time of the year," she explains. "It really changes the dynamic."

Depending on the size of each show, the Resch Expo can accommodate up to three different events at one time. "And each exhibit hall has a room set aside for planners to use as a home base," Krainik says.

On the second level, there are six expandable break-out rooms for educational seminars, event storage or show headquarters — each with their own audiovisual and temperature controls. Furthermore, the facility's kitchen simplifies food service, and an upstairs cocktail bar can accommodate networking and private parties.

The perks don't end at the exit sign either. "The expo complex features an outdoor balcony with a heated floor that wraps around the Lambeau and plaza side, with benches that overlook the entire stadium area," says Krainik. "It's an amazing view of America's most historically iconic football stadium — Lambeau Field!"

The ease of use and flexibility of the building are what make it so spectacular, mentions Krainik. "The facility's free-flow design opens directly into the lobby of the adjacent 10,000-seat Resch Center," she says. "For large groups, there isn't another event space like this in the state. The ability to combine the two venues is a huge advantage for large events looking at Midwestern destinations." 



*Sue Sveum is a freelance writer based in the Madison, Wis. area.*



## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

# SMILE AND THE WORLD GETS BRIGHTER

SCIENCE REVEALS THE POWER OF A SMILE.

BY MOLLY ROSE TEUKE

*"A smile is a curve that sets everything straight."*  
— Phyllis Diller, actor and comedian

Welcome 2021! I was happy to bid 2020 goodbye and good riddance. COVID-19 is still with us, but the prospect of a new year (and a vaccine) makes me smile. Granted, few people see my smile anymore because I'm so often masked, but it turns out a smile is one of the best things you can do for yourself. Greeting the new year with a smile sets you up for a good day, a good week, and all of 2021 and beyond. Your willingness to smile can even predict marital success and how long you live.

### SMILE FOR LOVE AND LONG LIFE

In his 2013 book, *"The Tell: The Little Clues that Reveal Big Truths About Who We Are,"* Matthew Hertenstein of DePauw University compared smiles in yearbook photos with life experiences for people from their early 20s to their late 80s. "Those who smiled the least in their photos were five times more likely to divorce at some point in their lives relative to those who smiled the most," he reports. While his work does not show cause and effect, it does suggest that people who smile are doing something right.

Researchers also found that evaluating smiles from 1950s-era photographs of Major League Baseball players could help predict who would live the longest. Even controlling for possible distorting factors, players who showed a genuine smile had an average life expectancy of 80. Those whose smile didn't make it to their eyes lived, on average, 75 years. The poker-faced players lived, on average, 73 years.

### WORK THOSE MUSCLES, FEEL THE HIGH

A genuine "felt smile" engages two essential muscles: the zygomaticus major, which raises the corners of the mouth, and the orbicularis oculi, which surrounds the eyes and raises the cheeks. If your smile falls short of your eyes, scientists call it a "social smile." That's not a bad thing; it just doesn't have the same impact as a full-on dual-muscle smile. It's true that frowning uses more muscle power than smiling, but it doesn't make you feel as good.

"When your muscles say you're happy, you're more likely to see the world around you in a positive way," says Dr. Fernando Marmolejo-Ramos of the University of South Australia. "We found that, when you forcefully practice smiling, it stimulates the amygdala — the emotional center of the brain — which releases neurotransmitters to encourage an emotionally positive state."

Those neurotransmitters include dopamine, known as the "feel-good" hormone; endorphins, which are known to diminish sensitivity to pain (perhaps even the pain of having to wear a mask every day?); and serotonin, known as your brain's natural antidepressant.

When you think about something that makes you happy — say, a supply of good chocolate or finding \$20 stashed in the pocket of an old coat — you activate your brain's reward center. A smile, your own or someone else's, activates the same reward center, hence the release of those feel-good neurotransmitters. Heard of a runner's high? Turns out a smile can give you the same kind of emotional kick without the sweat.

### WHICH CAME FIRST?

In research from the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, psychologist Judith Grob found that, when you express emotion on your face, you're more likely to be guided by the emotion, whether it's a frown or a smile.

Dr. Michael Lewis, a researcher at Cardiff University in Wales, adds that, when we experience emotion, our bodies reinforce it. "It's like a feedback loop," he says. Research suggests that patients who frown during an unpleasant procedure report feeling more pain.

Marmolejo-Ramos confirms this link between action and perception. "In a nutshell," he says, "perceptual and motor systems are intertwined when we emotionally process stimuli." Or as Grob puts it: "I smile, so I must be happy."

### WHAT, ME SMILE?

So what is taking us so long to adopt smiling as a health activity that should rank right up there with exercise and good nutrition? If an apple a day keeps the doctor away and laughter is the best medicine, what happened to the smile?



Smiles were not always, well, smiled upon. In “A Brief History of the Smile,” Angus Trumble notes there was a time when big smiles were “associated with madness, lewdness, loudness, drunkenness, all sorts of states of being that were not particularly decorous.”

By the 20th century, however, we started warming up to smiles. Researchers at the University of California – Berkeley looked at 38,000 American high school yearbook photos across 10 decades. They measured how broadly people smiled (lip curvature) and concluded that smiles gained considerable popularity over the course of the century.

These days, it’s accepted that people who smile appear more likeable, courteous, trustworthy and attractive. “A smile is the best makeup any girl can wear,” according to American icon Marilyn Monroe.

### SMILE LIKE A PRO


We lose the propensity to smile as we age. Children smile like champs — 400 times a day. Happy grownups smile maybe 40 to 50 times a day. The rest of us? A paltry 20 times a day.

If you don’t smile much, you can change that.

First, practice making your smile obvious. You heard that people know whether you’re smiling, even on the phone. To make sure others “hear” your smile, visualize something or someone or someplace that makes you really, really happy. Imagine it before you pick up the phone and your smile will be audible.

Second, get in the habit of smiling. Forget the phrase: “Nice guys finish last.” Accept that smiling gets you further in life, and smile every time you wash your hands or pour a cup of coffee.

Third, practice when no one’s watching. When you get it right, you’ll feel your body relax a little and it will shift how your day plays out. Follow the advice of Japanese multimedia artist and peace activist Yoko Ono, “Smile in the mirror. Do that every morning and you’ll start to see a big difference in your life.”

The great news about the smile is that it isn’t just your own smile that can raise your spirits. Smiling is perhaps even more contagious than the coronavirus or will be when we can safely ditch the masks. Just as we yawn when we see someone else yawn, we smile when we see someone else smile. Hence the advice, variously attributed to Dolly Parton, Zig Ziglar and others, “If you meet someone without a smile, give them one of yours.” It’s the gift that keeps on giving. 



*Molly Rose Teuke has an enduring curiosity about what makes our brains tick. Pre-COVID-19, she offered a program for Nicolet College called Getting Your Brain on Your Side and delivered brain-based leadership training for the NeuroLeadership Institute, a global leader in the performance arena. She also hosted a weekly classical music program on WXPR-FM, which will resume post-COVID-19. You can reach her at [mollyrosecoaching.com](http://mollyrosecoaching.com).*

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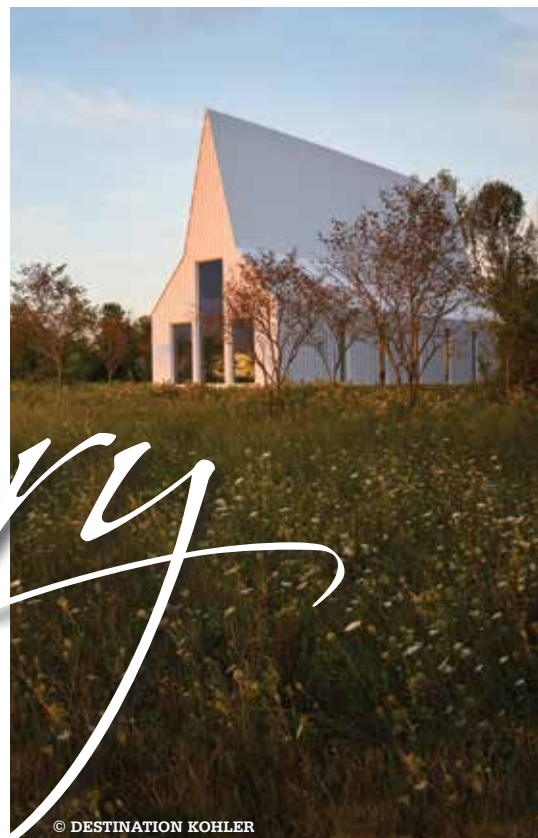


# ELEVATED TO A LIFE OF

# Luxury



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© DESTINATION KOHLER

With meetings shrinking in size due to concerns of spreading COVID-19, could this be the time to explore hosting at a luxury property?

By Kristine Hansen



WILD ROCK GOLF CLUB  
© SUNDARA INN & SPA

Wisconsin is home to several high-end hotels — from Sundara Inn & Spa's health and wellness environment in Wisconsin Dells to The American Club's traditional elegance in the company town of Kohler, as well as properties in Lake Geneva and Door County. Whether it's a boutique hotel just outside of Milwaukee or a sprawling resort surrounded by hundreds of acres of blissful nature, many of these properties offer plenty of outdoor space to plan events year-round. The following are just some of the luxe properties the state has to offer.

## *Hotel Goodwin, Beloit*

A new year-round lounge on the rooftop — decked out with heaters, a fire pit and hanging ball lights — at this boutique hotel accommodates up to 48 people for a seated event and 75 for cocktails. Reserving the 1,000-square-foot lounge includes access to an additional 775 square feet outdoors. Meanwhile, the Velvet Buffalo, the hotel's dinner-only restaurant specializing in modern Italian cuisine, can be contracted to serve food and drink.

"It's flexible for how we can set it up and perfect for small groups," says Carly Malacina, manager of Geronimo Hospitality Group's lodging and event sales. A local health-care group, she says, recently booked all 34 guest rooms and utilized the rooftop



© GERONIMO HOSPITALITY GROUP



space. The event also included a shareholder meeting at the nearby Beloit Club and an activity at the Ironworks Hotel, Hotel Goodwin's sister property that's located a short walk away. As a matter of fact, flipflopping between the two hotels is "a nice change of scenery so you're not in the same meeting room all day," Malacina says.

## *Sundara Inn & Spa, Wisconsin Dells*

General manager John Morris reports that, despite the pandemic, bookings for leisure guest stays and small-group events are up. Tucked into a pine forest already set up for social distancing, this property boasts a vast indoor space of 80,000 feet. Its more than



© SUNDARA INN & SPA

30 guest rooms are spacious (some with two stories and all with balconies), room-service dining is available and there are three pools (two of which are outdoors, heated and open year-round). Group options include snowshoeing, hiking or gathering around fire pits.

For meetings, "Our sweet spot is in the 10- to 20-person group," says Morris. Another sweet spot? "People who want to make wellness part of the meeting," he mentions, referring to a roster of fitness classes, a world-class spa and a therapeutic salt chamber. "You really don't see anything like this in the upper Midwest. You've got to go to Colorado, California or Arizona."

## *Deltafield Hotel, Deltafield*

In this tiny, charming and walkable town of 7,552 residents — only a 30-minute drive from downtown Milwaukee — there are a variety of experiences offered through its only boutique hotel.



© GERONIMO HOSPITALITY GROUP

It's a one-stop shop as the hotel owns the gym next door (for team-building exercises, private yoga sessions or simply sticking to a fitness regime), as well as the Blue Collar Coffee Company a few blocks away. With only 38 guest rooms, a group buyout is a breeze.

A glass wall recently installed at I.d., the hotel's contemporary-design dining room, ensures deeper privacy and folds in access to a veranda warmed by heaters. "Sometimes we'll have cocktails out there or lunch," says Kim Ash, the catering and sales manager. Two indoor rooms are also available: the Wine Room (up to 11 people) and Cushing Room (between 24 and 60 people). Guest rooms are larger than 400 square feet, and include whirlpool tubs, Kohler rain showers and Keurig coffee makers. Hiking, cross-country skiing or snowshoeing at Lapham Peak are popular group activities.

## *Destination Kohler, Kohler*

Most people know Kohler — the company town that's home to the luxury-plumbing manufacturer — for The American Club (including The Immigrant Restaurant), but now there is a less traditional meeting site that overlooks Lake Michigan. Unveiled in 2020, the minimalist, very modern and nondenominational Straits Chapel, designed by a Milwaukee-area architecture firm, The Kubala Washatko Architects, features a high-end sound system and preprogrammed lighting options. The cross can be removed and pews rearranged for a more secular feel.



© DESTINATION KOHLER

Another ideal spot to host a meeting is at Blackwolf Run, with two levels of outdoor dining heated by lamps as well as a fire pit. Caverna (which replaced Cucina Italian restaurant recently) additionally installed new heat lamps and a small tented area, plus five geodomes for private groups. Moreover, a group can rent out The Greenhouse, a stained-glass structure imported from England, within the courtyard for serving coffee drinks or cocktails.

Winter Wonderland, just like it sounds, is a Norman Rockwell-esque scene of snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, a warming barn with a bar and televisions, and curling and ice bowling (in another barn). "It would be a great location for a group where they could rent out the whole facility," says Christine Loose, vice president of lodging and wellness at Destination Kohler. "This is Wisconsin, right? How else do you compete with the beaches in Florida or Mexico?" Kohler's team can also arrange outdoor yoga classes in the woods and candlelight walks.


## Grand Geneva Resort & Spa, Lake Geneva

This luxe property's amenities can easily pack in a few days of socially distanced experiences. This includes 62,000 square feet of meeting space with access to outdoor lawn and patio areas, plus the 2,900-square-foot Chalet and 5,400-square-foot Pavilion. "Additionally, we have 1,300 acres where we can place outdoor tents in unique areas to take in the views of the Wisconsin countryside," says Brad Lyles, the resort's director of sales and marketing.

"The Mountain Top at Grand Geneva offers guests a variety



of outdoor winter sports experiences," he continues. "During meeting breaks, guests may enjoy some of the best skiing, snowboarding, sledding and ice skating in Wisconsin. Extreme sled-building is another popular outdoor winter team-building activity." For this activity, teams construct a sled out of commonly found materials and household items, then compete in the areas of distance, speed and creativity. Another team-building opportunity that Grand Geneva Resort & Spa staff can organize for a group is an outdoor Grand Race, a scavenger hunt of sorts.

Moreover, groups don't have to leave the property to eat because all three of the resort's eateries offer private dining: Geneva ChopHouse (with an outdoor terrace featuring a hearth), Ristorante Brissago (every dish is an ode to a different region of Italy) and Grand Café (serving healthy cuisine in a casual environment). 



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.

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# THE BEST OF *Wisconsin* MEETINGS

Competition in the meetings and events world is fiercer than ever, especially with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the following vendors came out on top.

By Carrie Mantey

*W*isconsin Meetings concludes each year by tallying the results of our Best of Wisconsin Meetings annual readers' poll. Discovering our readers' choices for the best the Dairy State has to offer is like opening a gift. Even more intriguing is comparing how sentiments shift from year to year.

Judging from this year's responses, competition in the meetings and events world is fiercer than ever, especially with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, a time when uncertainty magnifies the importance of customer satisfaction. Today's suppliers must be vigilant to provide fresh ideas, products, services and amenities, while offering top-of-the-line customer support. And they must innovate while staying within the confines of their budgets. It's even more difficult in a turbulent economy with public safety guidelines in constant flux.

The names that follow are your selections for vendors that meet and exceed customer expectations. While the following properties and organizations may not be fully functional at this time due to varying local health requirements, they have proven their dedication to their customers and the industry in 2020.



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## BEST LARGE CONVENTION CENTER:

### Wisconsin Center, Milwaukee

Located in the heart of bustling downtown Milwaukee, the Wisconsin Center has 188,695 square feet of contiguous exhibit space and a 37,506-square-foot ballroom with capacity for 3,150 diners and ample corporate theater utilities. An additional 39,364 square feet of meeting space can be partitioned into as many as 28 meeting and break-out rooms equipped for satellite links, video teleconferencing, data transmission, and other telecommunications and audiovisual technology. With radiating natural light, unique, local art and the largest ballroom in Milwaukee, the Wisconsin Center has the space and amenities you need — from electricity to internet, catering to cleaning — to amplify your meeting or event. [wisconsincenter.com](http://wisconsincenter.com)



## BEST CONFERENCE CENTER:

### The Madison Concourse Hotel and Governor's Club, Madison

Wisconsin Meetings readers clearly can't get enough of The Madison Concourse Hotel and Governor's Club, the largest convention hotel in Madison, which won this same category last year as well. Capable of accommodating everything from small strategic planning sessions to large conventions, the hotel offers 373 guest rooms and 27,000 square feet of flexible meeting space, including 28 meeting rooms and six hospitality suites. Its meeting spaces are large enough to make arranging socially distant gatherings a breeze, plus meetings and events can easily scale up with virtual meeting technology. Furthermore, guests may feast their eyes on breathtaking views of the state Capitol — which is just steps away from the hotel — from the private Governor's Club lounge. [concoursehotel.com](http://concoursehotel.com)

## BEST BOUTIQUE HOTEL PROPERTY WITH MEETING SPACE:

### Kimpton Journeyman Hotel, Milwaukee

Experience lavish style and amenities at the Kimpton Journeyman Hotel. The hotel, located in Milwaukee's historic Third Ward district, offers several types of event space to choose from — a ballroom, flexible meeting rooms, and a rooftop restaurant and bar — on three different floors, along with ample catering options. If you're looking for a venue with some personality, high-quality food and service, choose from the intimate 486-square-foot La Sala Private Dining Room or the 2,809-square-foot Assembly Hall. If your attendees are feeling adventurous, they can pick up a Journeyman Leather Backpack at reception to accompany them through the city in true urban style. [journeymanhotel.com](http://journeymanhotel.com)



## BEST RECEPTION FACILITY:

### The Osthoff Resort, Elkhart Lake

Readers highly suggest you consider The Osthoff Resort, which hugs 500 feet of pristine shoreline on Elkhart Lake in eastern Wisconsin, for receptions. Winning the Best Lakeshore Resort in 2018, the Osthoff features first-class meeting and event space, and well-appointed guest suites for groups from 10 to 1,500. The resort offers 38,000 square feet of elegant function space, group and team-building activities, bicycle and watersports rentals, and all the technology required to make your meeting a success. Its largest meeting room, the Grand Libelle Ballroom, is ideal for theater-style presentations and receptions, yet soundproof sliding panels can divide the ballroom into smaller meeting rooms to increase flexibility. [osthoff.com](http://osthoff.com)

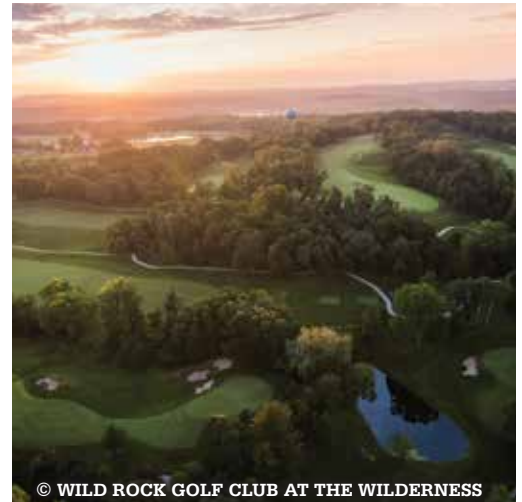




## BEST GOLF COURSE/RESORT FOR AN OUTING:

### Wild Rock Golf Club at the Wilderness, Wisconsin Dells

Golf outings held at Wild Rock Golf Club score a perfect round again, having nabbed the same category in 2019. Event coordination staff will assist in setting up your foursomes, coordinating course hole events, booking overnight accommodations and planning your meal service in the rustic dining room. The goal is to take the stress off of the planner, so you can enjoy the day on a beautiful course! As part of the Wilderness Resort, planners have access to the nearby Glacier Canyon Conference Center with over 56,000 square feet of meeting space that can be broken into a variety of meeting rooms, including a large banquet room that can seat up to 1,200 people. For smaller gatherings, there's the Wild Rock Clubhouse, an open-air covered patio that's picture-perfect for pre- and post-golf receptions tied to meeting events. [wildrockgolf.com](http://wildrockgolf.com)



## BEST CASINO WITH MEETING SPACE:

### Potawatomi Hotel & Casino, Milwaukee

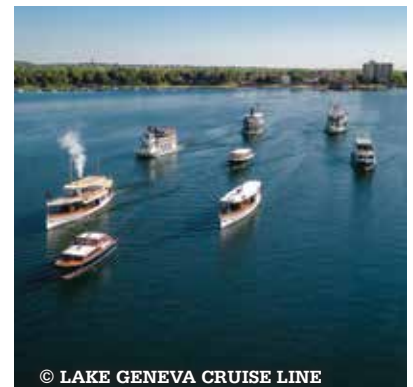
Wisconsin Meetings readers say Potawatomi Hotel & Casino pays big when it comes to being the best casino with meeting space in the state. Intimate or grand, laidback or lavish, whatever your vision is for your event, you can find it at Potawatomi, which offers over 60,000 square feet of meeting space for events up to 3,000 people in downtown Milwaukee. Its Events Center is the largest option, providing more than 32,000 square feet of space, whereas its Innovation dedicated boardroom is ideal for business meetings of 14 people or less. The casino also boasts of a night scene with an assortment of delicious dining options, gaming action and world-class entertainment. [paysbig.com](http://paysbig.com)



## BEST GROUP OUTING:

### Lake Geneva Cruise Line, Lake Geneva

Fresh air and fresh ideas! Readers have consistently chosen Lake Geneva Cruise Line's eight beautiful boats and exceptional service as the top outing for meetings and groups. The fleet of well-appointed boats accommodates groups of one to 200 or charter multiple boats for larger group outings. If team-building is your goal, try the company's popular geo-challenge cruise. Or plan a cocktail cruise that takes you to Pier 290 restaurant for a lakeside dining experience, and cruise back with dessert and an amazing sunset. Host your corporate event in an atmosphere that rejuvenates your staff and impresses your clients. Readers say a day on the water with Lake Geneva Cruise Line can't be beat. [cruiselakegeneva.com](http://cruiselakegeneva.com)



## BEST LAKESHORE RESORT:

### Blue Harbor Resort, Sheboygan

Blue Harbor Resort is the ultimate lakeside retreat. Conveniently located on the shoreline of Lake Michigan in the Harbor Centre District of Sheboygan, the sprawling resort and conference venue provides beautiful indoor and outdoor meeting spaces that are customizable to your needs — from the 9,882-square-foot Grand Ballroom all the way down to the 300-square-foot Captain's Landing Boardroom. The resort boasts more than 16,800 square feet of convention space, an indoor waterpark, a spa and salon, restaurants, retail shops, luxurious accommodations and stunning surroundings — including scenic Lake Michigan right outside your window. Blue Harbor also offers a ton of team-building activities on both land and water. [blueharborresort.com](http://blueharborresort.com)





© CAMBRIA HOTEL MILWAUKEE DOWNTOWN

## HOTEL WITH THE BEST SERVICE:

### Cambria Hotel Milwaukee Downtown, Milwaukee

According to Wisconsin Meetings readers, the Cambria Hotel Milwaukee Downtown prioritizes its customers above all else. "Cambria Hotel Milwaukee is built on the concept of threading our property into community. We pride ourselves on ensuring that our team is armed with the knowledge of the market we call home, as well as the extensive history of our city. We take the '10-5 rule' to new levels by ensuring we interact with all of our guests, and go above and beyond, which includes ensuring that every guest is a part of our 'camfam,'" says Tara Wurtz, director of sales and marketing. The 10-5 rule is a guideline widely used in the hospitality industry that dictates that staff members smile and make direct eye contact when 10 feet from guests, and verbally greet the guest when within 5 feet. [choicehotels.com](http://choicehotels.com)

## BEST PROPERTY FOR A CORPORATE RETREAT:

### Grand Geneva Resort & Spa, Lake Geneva

Like in 2019, Wisconsin Meetings readers recognize Grand Geneva Resort & Spa as being the state's best property for a corporate retreat. Readers like that the former Playboy Club offers a host of options for attendees after hours. Being situated on 1,300 acres in the woodlands affords guests a variety of options for both group and free time — from horseback riding, biking, hiking and golf in the summer to skiing in the winter. Meanwhile, the resort's 62,000 square feet of meeting and event space can accommodate from 10 to 1,500 guests in style. Team-building opportunities include hiking, rock climbing, sand volleyball, picnicking and more. A variety of restaurants suit every culinary taste. [grandgeneva.com](http://grandgeneva.com)



© GRAND GENEVA RESORT & SPA

## VENUE WITH THE BEST OUTDOOR RECEPTION SPACE:

### The Ingleside Hotel, Pewaukee

Holding a meeting or event in Lake Country offers plenty of opportunities for beautiful outdoor scenes and facilities, as well as contemporary hospitality. The Ingleside Hotel offers a refreshing change of pace from the conventional meeting and conference destinations with trails for hiking and wide-open spaces for team-building right outside your door. Whether you host a dinner banquet, boardroom session or tech-savvy sales presentation, the hotel provides an inspirational setting with more than 40,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor space, and 20 private event spaces, accommodating events for groups of two to 720 people. [theinglesidehotel.com](http://theinglesidehotel.com)



© THE INGLESIDE HOTEL



## CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU WITH THE BEST MEETING AND CONVENTION SUPPORT:

### VISIT Milwaukee, Milwaukee

VISIT Milwaukee knows how to help host an event. Its sales and event experience teams consistently score high on post-conference surveys — an achievement they're incredibly proud of. Peggy Williams-Smith, VISIT Milwaukee president and CEO, says, "VISIT Milwaukee takes pride in providing first-class service to conventions and events from the first proposal to the event wrap-up. Our sales team goes above and beyond to assure planners have chosen the right venues, hotels and timing for their events. Once a planner decides to book, the power of our full staff is behind them to support their event and ensure it's their best yet. From pre-promotion to the day the event begins, our event experience team handles the myriad details that make events successful. Lastly, our team of 100+ volunteers are ready to roll out the red carpet for guests as soon as they land at Milwaukee's General Mitchell International Airport." [visitmilwaukee.org](http://visitmilwaukee.org) 



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— DESTINATION —

# Madison

IN AN ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH FRESH AIR AND OPEN SPACES ARE VALUED, MADISON CHECKS ALL THE BOXES FOR MIXING MEETINGS AND EVENTS WITH SCENIC BEAUTY.

By Melanie Radzicki McManus

© MONONA TERRACE

*"What Madison has in its downtown that other places don't is easy access to the outdoors. If you're at a downtown convention here, you can walk out the door and rent a bike, boat or kayak; go for a stroll in one of several parks; or walk down State Street."*

— Rob Gard, *Destination Madison*

Fresh air and lots of space are hot commodities today, and are likely to remain so. That's great news for Madison, especially as it pertains to the meetings and events industry. Wisconsin's capital, with a population of more than 250,000, is not only home to a wide variety of prime meeting venues, but it's also an outdoor paradise. Downtown Madison is snuggled between scenic lakes Mendota and Monona, cradles a 1,200-acre arboretum nearby, and boasts an extensive, sports-centric network of bike paths, water routes, hiking trails and more.





"What Madison has in its downtown that other places don't is easy access to the outdoors," says Rob Gard, director of public relations and communications for Destination Madison. "If you're at a downtown convention here, you can walk out the door and rent a bike, boat or kayak; go for a stroll in one of several parks; or walk down State Street."

And you don't have to worry as much about bumping into the throngs of people you would encounter in a major city, says John Leinen, Destination Madison's

vice president of convention sales and services. "You're not out on the sidewalk walking shoulder to shoulder."

Leinen says the city is home to approximately 800,000 square feet of meeting space and 9,000 hotel rooms, with the largest venue being the Alliant Energy Center. The Alliant Energy Center features 100,000 square feet of exhibit space; 150,000 square feet of convention, conference and meeting space; and nearly 300,000 square feet of pavilion space via two pavilions well-suited to agriculture

and livestock groups, sporting events and hobby enthusiasts. Two popular clients are the Midwest Horse Fair, which draws more than 60,000 people annually, and the CrossFit Games.

The other major meeting venue is Monona Terrace, a Frank Lloyd Wright-designed community and convention center that took nearly 60 years to come to life. But it was worth the wait. The striking curvilinear facility projects out over Lake Monona, with massive banks of windows that allow the sparkling water to spill inside.



Its rooftop is on the same level as Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, which links the building with the city's Capitol Square. And a step outside the back door puts you on the paved 20-mile Capital City State Trail.

Laura MacIsaac, Monona Terrace's director of sales, says the facility has 85,000 square feet of indoor meeting space, including a 37,200-square-foot exhibition hall and a 13,500-square-foot ballroom. A rooftop garden and café adds another 68,000 square feet of space. This means that, even with COVID-19-era space restrictions, there's plenty of room to spread out. In addition, Wright's organic architectural style and warm, earth-tone décor make the space soothing.

"There are no hard corners here, just lots of curves, which are meant to emulate the waves of Lake Monona," MacIsaac says. "Even the shadows that the light throws are curved. People are always delighted at how beautiful and calming it is here."

Recently, Monona Terrace unveiled a new conference studio to facilitate virtual meetings, plus nabbed a prestigious Global Biorisk Advisory Council (GBAC) STAR accreditation for cleaning, disinfection and infectious-disease prevention. "This is like a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification, but for cleaning," explains MacIsaac. "We want visitors and our staff to feel safe here."

### ***Lots of Options for Meeting and Sleeping***

While the city's two main meeting spaces don't contain lodging, hospitality is not an issue. Several spacious hotels are clustered near the Alliant Energy Center, while the Hilton Madison is conveniently connected to Monona Terrace via a covered walkway. And, of course, many of the city's meeting venues are tucked into hotels like The Madison Concourse Hotel and Governor's Club.

The popular Madison Concourse Hotel sits on the Capitol Square and offers 27,000 square feet of flexible meeting space, including 28 meeting rooms, six hospitality suites and a 10,200-square-foot grand ballroom. The recently renovated Governor's



BRITTINGHAM BOATS/© FOCAL FLAME PHOTOGRAPHY

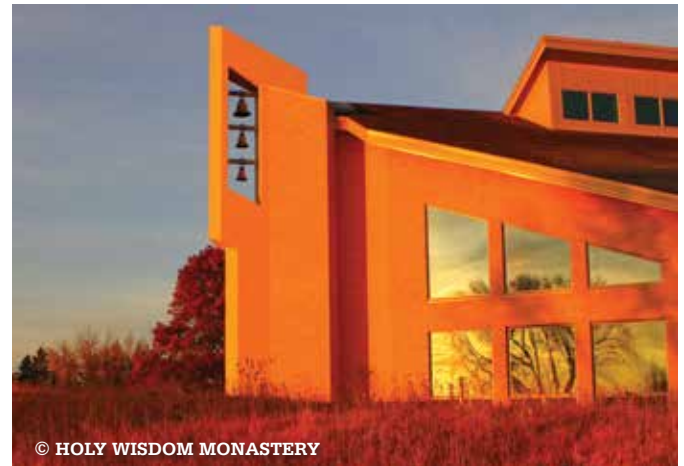


© ALLIANT ENERGY CENTER



© THE MADISON CONCOURSE HOTEL





Club completes the offerings. Reserved for guests staying on certain floors, the 12th-floor Governor's Club lounge provides exceptional views of the Capitol.

Steve Zanoni, general manager, says the hotel's sweet spot is hosting groups in the 200- to 350-person range, although it attracts a lot of smaller and mid-sized groups as well. "We have a lot of rooms in diverse sizes and that's a great advantage."

Like Monona Terrace, The Madison Concourse Hotel has a GBAC STAR accreditation. And Zanoni says its culinary options are impressive: "We have a fantastic culinary team that can do things larger groups don't expect, like customize the

menus and incorporate a lot of locally sourced products."

Of course, not everyone is looking for a large meeting venue or a traditional one. For smaller groups searching for the unique, Madison has plenty of choices, too. The new Hotel Indigo has one meeting room that can hold up to 80, plus 144 guest rooms. The boutique hotel was created in a building that was once home to Mautz Paint Co. and reflects this heritage, featuring bright pops of color, historic photos, and even a small display case filled with old paintbrushes, paint cans and more.

Garver Feed Mill began as a sugar beet

processing facility in 1906, transitioning to a feed mill and granary in 1929. Nearly a century later, in 2019, it reopened as a local artisan food production center after extensive renovations. Today, Garver Feed Mill can host meetings for up to 500 inside, with another 280 outdoors, while guests check out its unique eateries, including Ian's Pizza, Calliope Ice Cream and Ledger Coffee Roasters.

At Olbrich Botanical Gardens, there are three rooms for rent that can accommodate 200 and all of them have beautiful views of the gardens. The Overture Center for the Arts, a spectacular performing arts center and art gallery downtown, has 16 unique meeting spaces that can hold from two dozen to 2,000 attendees. The meeting spaces include several theaters, a lounge and the impressive, light-filled Overture Hall Lobby. But perhaps one of the most unexpected meeting facilities in the area is Holy Wisdom Monastery.

Holy Wisdom is an ecumenical Benedictine monastery with meeting space for up to 300. Even better, it's perched on acres of land that include 4 miles of trails, a glacial lake, restored prairie, apple orchard and killer views of Lake Mendota. It's also adjacent to Governor Nelson State Park.

## Planner's Perspective

For the last decade, Megan Leadholm, associate director of the Wisconsin Nurses Association, has been planning meetings at the Monona Terrace. In fact, she just may be the facility's biggest fan.

### WHAT SHE LIKES BEST:

I never have to think twice about our programs. I know they will come off without a hitch.

### WHAT EXHIBITORS AND ATTENDEES LIKE BEST:

Our exhibitors love it when they're in the Grand Terrace, which looks out over the lake. Our attendees love to have meals in there, too.

### WHAT SHE LIKES ABOUT ITS LOCALE:

Even on a short break, you can walk around the lake. From spring through fall, you can walk up to the famous farmers market on the Square, look inside the Capitol or walk down State Street, all without moving your car.



Monica Jefcoat, personal retreat and event coordinator, says the monastery hosts many spiritual groups, in addition to nonprofit corporations, businesses and more. "We're especially popular with groups looking to do health and wellness or spirituality retreats," she says.

The monastery can accommodate more than 20 people overnight via its retreat and guest house, plus two cottage-like hermitages set in the woods. Guests are welcome to enjoy all of the outdoor spaces, plus use the monastery's library and chapel, join daily prayer services, sign on for any guided hikes or building tours, and even use complimentary snowshoes in the winter.

Not surprisingly, the No. 1 reason people enjoy meeting at the monastery is its beautiful setting and outdoor offerings. But they also love the food, according to Jefcoat. "Chef Robert is outstanding," she says. "He prepares lots of food from scratch, often using produce and herbs grown in our gardens. He's especially known for his brownies and baba ganoush."

### **Destination Madison Here to Help**

No matter where you're meeting and staying, Destination Madison wants to help ensure smooth planning. Recently, the group unveiled its innovative One City. One Contract. program, which helps streamline the meeting process by offering

planners one contract for all of their hotel blocks. The program is for groups using either Monona Terrace or the Alliant Energy Center, and which need more than 200 peak rooms. It also aims to mitigate risk with features such as not needing attrition values to be locked in until 11 months out (through 2024).

Destination Madison was also a major force behind the creation of Essential Madison Experiences, which offer a wide variety of ways for people to immerse themselves in signature Madison adventures. One great example is Bitters Boot Camp. Bitters are an important ingredient in Wisconsin's signature cocktail, the Old Fashioned. During the Bitters Boot Camp, participants enjoy a flight of Old Fashioned drinks, each with a distinct flavor, then blend their own bitters to take home.

The Olbrich Botanical Gardens Experience involves a guided sensory tour of the gardens or conservatory during which participants can see, smell, taste and touch some of the plants, both common and exotic. Before leaving, everyone

receives a craft cocktail inspired by some of the plants on the tour. Leinen says many groups use these Essential Experiences as team-building activities or offer them to attendees as after-hours options.

Of course, the current state of business in Wisconsin and across the nation is in flux, thanks to the coronavirus. Regardless, experts across a variety of fields predict that, even after COVID-19 is vanquished, people will continue to look for opportunities to be outside. And that will keep Madison a popular spot for meetings. **WMM**



*Melanie Radzicki McManus often writes about Wisconsin from her home in Sun Prairie, Wis. In 2015, she received the Lowell Thomas Grand award as an honorable*

*mention Travel Writer of the Year. Lowell Thomas awards are considered the most prestigious travel writing awards in North America.*





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## MANITOWOC



### QUICK FACTS

#### CONTACT INFORMATION

RaeAnn Thomas  
920-686-3077  
4221 Calumet Ave.  
Manitowoc, WI 54220  
rthomas@manitowoc.info  
manitowoc.info

#### COMMUNITY INFORMATION

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

#### DISTANCE FROM

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Milwaukee: 81 miles

Green Bay: 42 miles  
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TWO RIVERS



# Come One, Come All

**Make meetings and events more  
welcoming and inclusive.**

By Ronnie Wendt



Meetings and events matter. These organized experiences bring people together to share ideas, develop strategies and build community. But to have an impact, events must provide a welcoming environment for all involved. Whether it's race, gender or religion, Cheri Davis, owner and planner of Cheri Denise Events in Mequon, advises keeping a group's demographics in mind when planning everything from entertainment to speakers to the food that's served.

"People are now asking, 'How can we be more inclusive? How can we make sure

people of diverse cultures feel more welcome at our events?'" Davis says. "I now have clients specifically asking for diverse vendors at their events. That's how it starts. When people become more aware of inclusivity, they create events that are more inclusive."

You can foster awareness by defining inclusivity. Webster's Dictionary defines inclusivity as: "the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those having physical or mental disabilities or belonging to other minority groups."

Dr. Alisia Moutry, owner of 4AM Consulting in Milwaukee, works with educators and companies to develop an equity culture within their ranks. She stresses that meetings and events become more inclusive "when the people who lead the event and the people in the room are not isolated by gender or race."

Inclusivity requires breaking down traditional barriers. Davis recommends planners humble themselves, and not act like experts in meeting the needs of all races, cultures and genders. "Do not be afraid to ask questions and acknowledge



that you do not know the needs of everyone," she says. "Then ask, 'Whom can we contact to ask questions in a comfortable setting, and have an open-minded discussion with no one putting up defenses or being offensive?'"

Davis further suggests planners approach diversity and inclusiveness with an open mind: "Making a meeting more inclusive and more diverse is an opportunity, not a challenge. Everybody wins when all attendees feel like they belong."

### *Know Your Demographics*

Making assumptions about what groups want is a big mistake, Moutry notes. It's when planners assume they understand a group's makeup and its needs, then make plans in a vacuum.

"People assume they understand and know the experiences of everyone within the group. Then they plan with those assumptions" in mind, Moutry says. "But how do they know what the group needs? Was there a survey that went out that told them what the group needed? The first step should be a needs assessment. Otherwise, you can do great things, but they may not be what people want or need because you did not talk to them first."

Assessing needs can be a formal exercise or as simple as an honest conversation. In Milwaukee, Marcus Hotels & Resorts owns The Pfister Hotel, Saint Kate - The Arts Hotel and the Hilton Milwaukee City Center. Dana Johnson, market director of sales for Marcus Hotels & Resorts, reports that she learns more about a group when planners, venue representatives and key members of a group sit down for a conversation. "It doesn't have to be formal. Start by asking about the group. What is the age range? Where will they be coming from? And drill down from there," she says. "From these organic conversations, a lot of ideas and insights about a group come to light."

For example, in the discovery phase of a gaming event, Johnson learned that some attendees were introverted and uncomfortable in crowds. The conversation led to training venue staff on how to recognize problems and help when attendees were overwhelmed.

Davis recommends asking specific questions to better understand the group. What diverse cultures may attend? What percentage of your group represents different cultures, races and genders? What languages do they speak? What dietary needs do they have? What are their religious practices? What customs do they practice daily?

The answers can help planners define the group and its needs. For example, if the research shows a large group of Hindu attendees, it's important to recognize that they pray at dawn and dusk, and that men and women pray separately. Planning a mixer at dusk interferes with this practice. "You need to be aware of these customs and set your timeline around them," notes Davis.

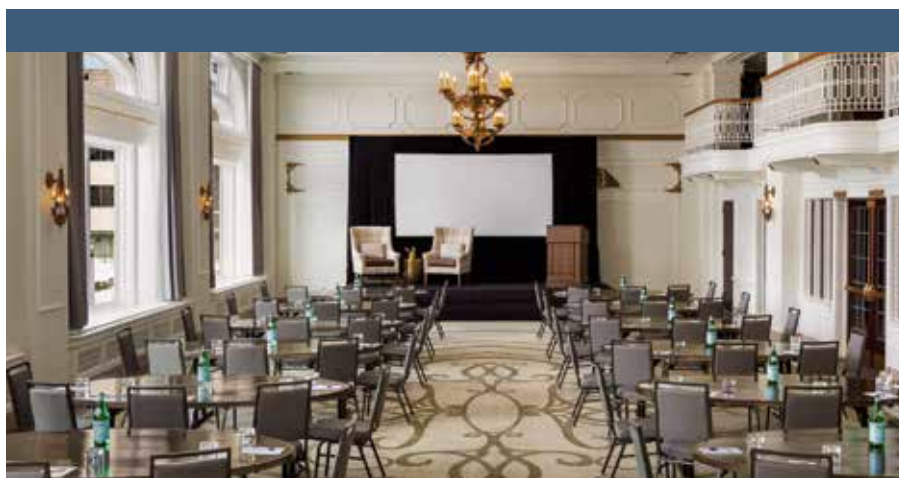
### *Four Things that Make a Meeting Great*

"There are four things that make an event no matter what type of event it is: food, drinks, décor and entertainment," Davis says. Once you know the demographics, "focus on these things. Mix them up to meet the needs of all attendees."

For instance, if an event has a percentage of Asian and Indian attendees, explore ways to adjust the food and beverage offerings. Perhaps add sushi, sake or hot teas, or incorporate a curry dish. "All of the food doesn't have to cater to a single group, but food should represent a mixture of the cultures in attendance," she says. "Food is always a win-win. So are beverages. Just open yourself up to a variety of dishes and offer a taste of other cultures, even if it's just one dish."

Johnson suggests an "around the world" food event that offers cuisines from across the globe. The food tasting may include a sushi bar, food with a Latin flair, or dishes from Germany and France. She recommends planners hire venues that partner with chefs specializing in a particular ethnic cuisine to ensure its authenticity.

"No venue can honestly say their chefs do every cuisine authentically," she says. "We are open to working with local restaurants to provide authentic cuisines."



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## FOUR TIPS FOR MORE INCLUSIVE MEETINGS

### 1. GIVE EVERYONE A SEAT AT THE TABLE

• Attendees will come from a range of ages, religions, disabilities and ethnicities. Make sure planning meetings represent the voices of all groups. "This says you want to hear from folks who look or think differently," Dr. Alisia Moutry, owner of 4AM Consulting, says. "It also prevents planners from doing something that those attendees find offensive. The worst thing you can do is plan an event without every group at the table. You miss out on thoughts or ideas that can meet their needs. And, if you don't bounce ideas off the entire group, you may have good intentions, but the result is something people find offensive."

### 2. CONSIDER A DIVERSITY SESSION

• Diversity panels and sessions open the conversation, giving groups a chance to connect and learn from each

other. Choose diverse speakers for the panel, then dig into why diversity is important, and what people can do to foster diversity and inclusivity. Plan ways to keep the conversation going after the session, whether through online or offline events.

### 3. DON'T TAKE IT TOO FAR

• Planning an event that only offers Latino music, decorations and food for a small percentage of Latinos at a meeting may seem like a good idea, but it can make individuals feel singled out. No matter the group you hope to welcome, it's best to craft a meeting that offers a nice blend of options for all attendees.

### 4. MEASURE RESULTS

• Measure the impact of your diversity actions to establish best practices for future events. "If we don't measure and benchmark the results, we can't progress," says Moutry.

Base décor around the cultures present. Maybe select an Asian-inspired theme, hang red lanterns, use gold accents and pick tall, exotic flowers, or embrace the colors of a Latin fiesta, and put splashes of red, white and green throughout. "Ask questions about the group's customs and culture," Davis says. "Then add in colors, accessories and décor that create the atmosphere you want."

Knowing a group's demographics also helps when choosing speakers, activities

and entertainment. "If you are hosting a women's event, for example, you don't want an all-male speaker panel. Some women might not care, but that can upset others," Davis says.

As you are planning, curate speakers carefully. Look at feedback speakers received from previous groups. How well did they hold the audience's attention? Did the presented information offer any takeaways? Also consider speakers that can address a varied group.

Plan activities in which people can learn about each other and other cultures. Maybe your team can address diversity through artwork, suggests Johnson. Saint Kate, for example, displays artwork that speaks to various groups and cultures. Planners can even make a guided tour of the artwork part of the event. One of Saint Kate's featured artists, for example, is Charity White, a figurative ceramicist, artist educator and community activist who creates life-sized sculptures of marginalized people. "Her work explores ideas like inclusion and exclusion," Johnson says.

She adds, "An art tour is a great way to exercise the body and the brain while learning more about other races and cultures."

### *Remember Special Needs*

Work with venues to accommodate restricted diets, offer non-alcoholic drinks, design room layouts that are accessible to wheelchair users, and find ways for hearing- and vision-impaired attendees to take part in sessions and events.

"It's also important to address everyone's learning style," adds Moutry. "There will be auditory, visual and kinesthetic learners in your group. If everything you provide is auditory, you will lose people."

Remember to consider the bathrooms, adds Johnson. "We change public bathrooms to non-gendered for events. When hosting events that are 90% women, we change some men's restrooms to women's restrooms. We also take a guest room out of service during large events that are mostly women. We put a refrigerator in the room, and snacks and drinks to accommodate breastfeeding women, so they don't have to pump in a public bathroom."

### *Planner and Vendor Diversity*

Before planning a meeting around a specific group, it's important that planning teams and vendors also reflect diversity, according to Davis. "You need a planner with experience and a diverse vendor pool to create an inclusive event," she says.

A planner with the right connections can readily find the entertainment, speakers, décor and food vendors the event needs. "I did a few Indian events and I made a



point of building relationships with those vendors,” Davis says. “Now I have the connections I need for those events. If


*“An art tour is a great way to exercise the body and the brain while learning more about other races and cultures.”*

—Dana Johnson,  
Marcus Hotels & Resorts

someone is seeking an Indian drummer, for instance, I know whom to call and I know they will answer my call. With certain cultures, you need to build those relationships; some are very private and you have to break through that wall, but once they see you are sincere, humble and dedicated to your craft, it’s no problem.”

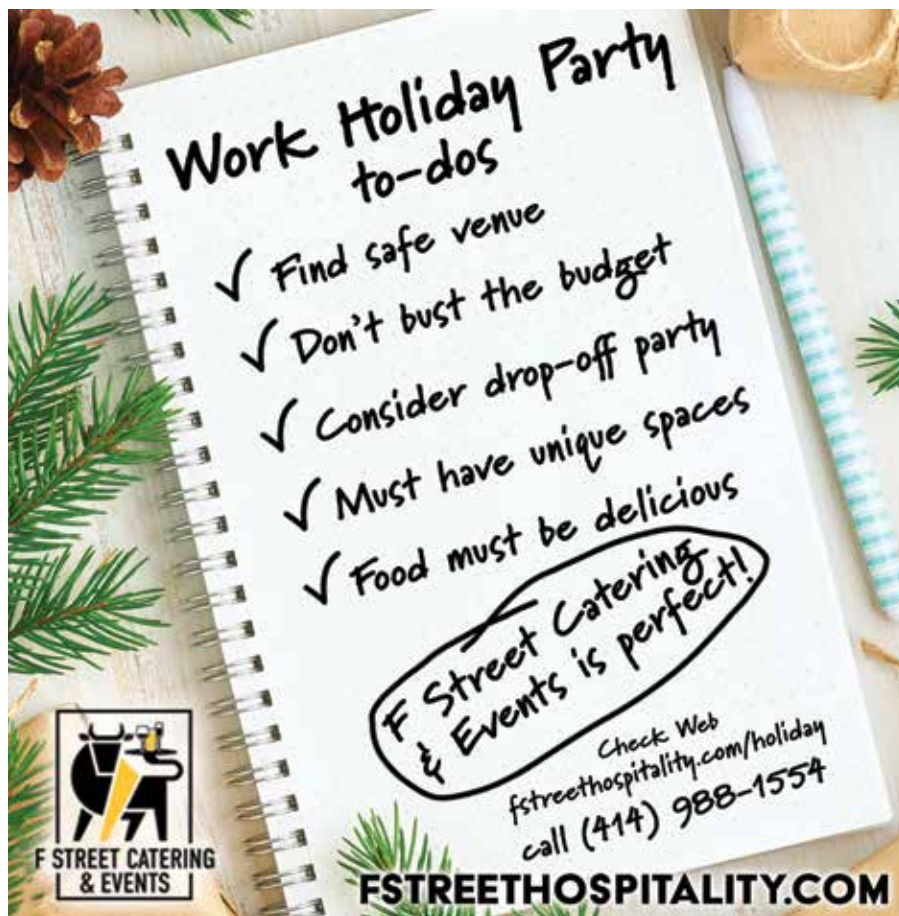
Consider your planning team’s diversity, she adds. Making sure the team represents marginalized groups makes a difference. Assembling a team that represents both men and women, the LGBTQ community, and other races, religions and cultures goes a long way when creating more inclusive events. “This has to be deliberate and it has to be your true intention,” Davis says. “You cannot put a person on your team just to show diversity.”

Consider help from venues that partner with diverse groups. Marcus Hotels & Resorts partners with the Milwaukee Urban League, Hispanic Professionals of Greater Milwaukee and the Wisconsin LGBT Chamber of Commerce, for example, and supports them through philanthropic efforts. These groups help venues find vendors and resources that meet the needs of diverse groups.

Inclusive meeting design must be intentional. Discover the needs of your group, then plan a meeting around them. 



Ronnie Wendt is a freelance writer based in Waukesha, Wis. She specializes in writing about the tourism, meetings and events industries.



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## A LASTING LEGACY

PRESIDENT AND CEO DEB ARCHER'S IMPACT  
ON THE MEETINGS AND EVENTS INDUSTRY  
ENDURES AFTER HER DEPARTURE  
FROM DESTINATION MADISON.

BY RONNIE WENDT

© DESTINATION MADISON

For 25 years, Deb Archer has been one of Madison's biggest advocates, championing the city as a great destination for leisure travel as well as events. As president and CEO of Destination Madison (formerly the Greater Madison Convention & Visitors Bureau), Archer stepped down from her post at the end of 2020, but not before garnering one last award and a prestigious one at that — the governor's Tourism Legacy Award.

The award follows a remarkable list of achievements. Under Archer's leadership, Destination Madison received recognition as Wisconsin's Most Helpful Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) and several Wisconsin Department of Tourism Trailblazer awards.

Jason Ilstrup, president of Downtown Madison Inc., however, lists Archer's greatest achievement as the legacy she leaves behind. "Deb raised the profile of Madison. As a smaller midwestern city, Madison doesn't like to brag, doesn't like to think big, doesn't like to dream. Deb

allowed our community to see itself as something bigger, something we should all be proud of and someplace where we should stretch our thinking," he says.

"Deb thinks big and she brings everyone along with her. Her indelible mark is her creativity, her fearlessness and her generosity of spirit, all of which helped create a vibrant Madison for all of us to enjoy."

Greg Frank, board chair of Destination Madison, echoes Ilstrup's sentiments in a statement announcing Archer's retirement, "Deb Archer's mark on Madison and Dane County will last far beyond her years leading Destination Madison."

### GROWING MADISON MEETINGS AND EVENTS

Archer came to Destination Madison from Kansas City in 1994 as construction began on the Monona Terrace convention center. It was the incredible opportunity the new building presented and the crystal-clear, beautifully glistening lake that greeted her as she drove into the city that attracted her

to the role. (That and a fiancé who already lived and worked in the city.)

She landed the vice president of sales position at Destination Madison after spending nearly 10 years as the associate director of sales for the Kansas City CVB, and six years as the executive director of the Park City CVB and Chamber of Commerce. Because Archer knew and understood the value of a strong sales team, her first act was to build out the sales team in Madison.

"We needed to build a convention and sales department," she says. "Monona Terrace was definitely the catalyst for growth because it brought business downtown. We found that, if you bring business downtown, the sales team can bring business here."

This philosophy bore out in the years that followed. The Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired Monona Terrace opened in 1997 and the Overture Center for the Arts followed in 2004. As these venues and others opened, the city's meetings and events business flourished.

A growing airport and a thriving downtown helped Archer, who was promoted to CEO of Destination Madison in 1995, and her team secure events like the Gold Wing Road Riders Association's annual international Wing Ding event, which brought in over 13,000 Honda Gold Wing riders and other touring motorcycles to Madison in 2014. Furthermore, they helped grow the Taste of Madison into a notable event featuring the fares of more than 80 restaurants and offering over 35 live music performances. It also aided the launch of the Madison Marathon until the CVB sold both events to Madison Festivals Inc.

Then the Ironman Triathlon came to the Dairy State in 2002. The knockout success of this event helped Archer put another feather in the city's cap as she led the formation of the Madison Area Sports Commission (MASC) in 2010. The biggest "get" forming the MASC was the CrossFit Games, an event that led to MASC receiving recognition as National Sports Commission of the Year in 2018.

"The city's presence as a destination grew with the construction of the Monona





© FOCAL FLAME PHOTOGRAPHY

Terrace, a stunning building that attracted national attention,” she says. “But what keeps people coming back is Madison’s walkability, its incredible food scene, and clean, beautiful and safe neighborhoods. There are 14 million people within a four-hour drive of here and there is also the allure of the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s elite faculty.”

### COVID-19 IMPACTS

In 2019, Destination Madison and the Madison Area Sports Commission, and the 153 meetings and events they brought in, netted an economic impact of more than \$67 million. The visitor spending tally came to \$1.4 billion in 2019 and more than \$6 billion over the previous five years.

***“Deb allowed our community to see itself as something bigger, something we should all be proud of and someplace where we should stretch our thinking.”***

*— Jason Ilstrup,  
Downtown Madison Inc.*

COVID-19 has dampened the 2019 high. Archer describes Madison’s hospitality industry as being in “critical condition.” At

the onset of 2020, 22,600 residents held hospitality-related jobs and hundreds of businesses thrived because of visitor spending. Today, many of those individuals are out of work, or temporarily or permanently out of business. Destination Madison is also suffering the effects, furloughing or permanently laying off one-third of its staff.

Peers recognize Archer for her handling of tenuous moments and tough times, reports Janet Sperstad, meeting and event management program director of Madison Area Technical College, noting she remained calm, steadfast, strong and compassionate during the pandemic. “She is so respected in the industry. It’s not what she says — it is what she does and how she does it. With integrity,” says Sperstad. “She showed other female leaders that you can be compassionate and strong. She is a hallmark in our industry as a female leader. She mentored many women in our industry, me included.”

Even as Madison reels from the aftereffects of the pandemic, Archer remains positive. She credits her positivity to the great Destination Madison team, who she says has been “resilient, innovative and committed. We can only get through this together,” she says. “We have to do whatever it takes, so we put on our thinking caps to figure out how we can support public health.”

While Archer acknowledges her team for

### GREATEST HITS

“Deb changed people’s perceptions of Madison and Wisconsin. She thought creatively to attract major events to our community. By creating an even more robust tourism economy in Madison, she significantly added to the quality of life for every Madisonian.” — Jason Ilstrup, Downtown Madison Inc.

“Deb elevated Madison on a national platform that other CVBs dream about.” — Janet Sperstad, Madison Area Technical College

### MEMORABLE MOMENTS

“Countless times I’ve seen Deb rolling up her sleeves, working at the events she helps bring to Madison. Whether it’s the Ironman Triathlon, CrossFit Games, World Dairy Expo or a small conference at the Monona Terrace, Deb is always there with a smile on her face, wearing the event’s T-shirt and helping visitors to ensure they have a fun and successful stay. Deb’s never-ending spirit for Madison will last with our community for years to come.” — Jason Ilstrup, Downtown Madison Inc.

### TAKE TWO

“I’m taking others’ advice to not make too many changes too fast. To take time to breathe and relax. I’ve worked for 50 years, and need to adjust my body clock and my mind. I plan to spend my time with family and friends, and am planning a trip to central Europe and a bike trip along the East Coast.” — Deb Archer

its actions, others (like Ilstrup) applaud Archer’s leadership for the area’s ability to navigate the new normal. “From the start of the pandemic, Deb understood the devastating effects COVID-19 would have on our community and the tourism sector. She acted quickly and decisively to ensure her community had the resources needed to survive the immediate crisis, all while keeping her own organization going,” says Ilstrup. “Deb created coalitions to find commonalities, advocate to local officials

with one voice, and gather large amounts of data to find innovative solutions to ensure there is an equilibrium between people's health and the economy."

## CORONAVIRUS-INSPIRED CREATIVITY

Years earlier, Archer and her team designed the One City. One Contract. initiative to promote the growth of meetings and events. Through the first-of-its-kind streamlined program, planners sign one master contract for city hotels across multiple brands. The contract outlines terms and processes, such as force majeure, indemnification and how venues administer cut-off dates. Hotels simply issue an addendum to the master contract that secures negotiated rates and concessions.

Since March 2020, Destination Madison has revised the One City. One Contract. program to address the needs of the new normal. The CVB worked with local hotels to create a policy (which is effective through 2024) with no attrition risk until 11 months out from an event. The policy applies to groups needing over 200 rooms, and using either the Monona Terrace or Alliant Energy Center.

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***"Together with an industry that is eager, hungry and creative, and new leadership, I know this destination will emerge as a leader, and a sought-after place to hold meetings and sports events, and spend leisure time."***

*– Deb Archer*

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"The change says to planners, 'We know you will not know what your room blocks are until you experience them.' Hotels now let planners lock in their rooms, but they don't have to lock in all of them. They can lock in a percentage of the rooms they need, and leave the remaining rooms as a courtesy block until the customer or the hotel needs those rooms," according to Archer.



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Destination Madison also launched the Explore Outdoor Madison campaign to direct residents and regional visitors toward local outdoor activities. The campaign highlights the fun activities and natural physical distancing found on the city's five lakes and 240 miles of bike trails, and in hundreds of parks.

"Explore Outdoor Madison got the word out about all of the ways people can enjoy themselves in this great city," she says. "We also supported the Mask Up Madison campaign to promote public health."

Though Madison remains in the throes of the pandemic with many venues partially or fully closed, Archer's optimism remains high. She remarks, "This is the time to plan, to apply and to dream."

She adds that it's also time for someone new to take the reins at Destination Madison. (Ellie Westman Chin was recently named as Destination Madison's new president and CEO. See In the News on Page 6.) In the meantime, Archer plans to join her husband in retirement and focus her energies on her infant granddaughter.

"I know this may not seem like an ideal time for me to depart the organization, but honestly, I think it could prove to be an ideal time," she wrote in a blog announcing her retirement. "As our community and industry strives to



©DESTINATION MADISON

recover, there is an amazingly talented group of professionals at Destination Madison, and we have a board and industry and community partners that most organizations like ours would covet. Together with an industry that is eager, hungry and creative, and new leadership, I know this destination will emerge as a leader, and a sought-after place to hold meetings and sports events, and spend leisure time." **WM**



Ronnie Wendt is a freelance writer based in Waukesha, Wis. She specializes in writing about the meetings, events and tourism industries.



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#### DINING

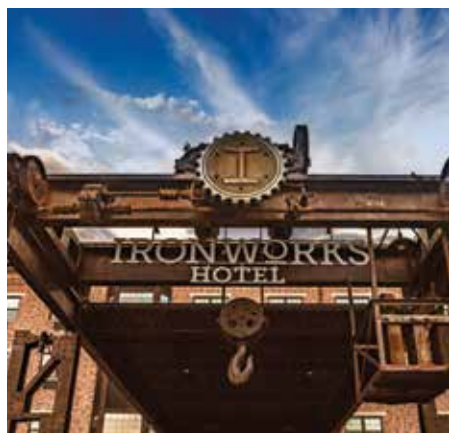
[720] RECEPTION CAPACITY  
 [540] RECEPTION WITH DINING  
 [YES] ON-SITE RESTAURANT  
 [YES] LOUNGE / ENTERTAINMENT

#### MEETING SPACE

[40,000] MEETING SPACE (SQ. FT.)  
 [20] # OF MEETING ROOMS  
 [NO] OPEN CATERING  
 [YES] ON-SITE CATERING

#### OTHER

[YES] HIGH-SPEED WIRELESS  
 [YES] FITNESS / POOL / WATERPARK  
 [NO] SPA



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**a:** 500 Pleasant St., Beloit, WI 53511  
**t:** 608-362-5500  
**w:** ironworkshotelbeloit.com

#### DINING

[200] RECEPTION CAPACITY  
 [200] PRIVATE DINING CAPACITY  
 [380] TOTAL DINING CAPACITY  
 [YES] ON-SITE RESTAURANT  
 [YES] LOUNGE / ENTERTAINMENT

#### MEETING SPACE

[4,100] MEETING SPACE (SQ. FT.)  
 [6] # OF MEETING ROOMS  
 [200] MEETING CAPACITY  
 [YES] ON-SITE CATERING

#### OTHER

[YES] HIGH-SPEED WIRELESS  
 [YES] FITNESS CENTER

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**tf:** 800-356-8293  
**w:** [concoursehotel.com](http://concoursehotel.com)

#### DINING

[1,800] RECEPTION CAPACITY  
 [1,000] PRIVATE DINING CAPACITY  
 [700] RECEPTION WITH DINING  
 [2,000] TOTAL DINING CAPACITY  
 [YES] ON-SITE RESTAURANT  
 [YES] LOUNGE / ENTERTAINMENT

#### MEETING SPACE

[27,000] MEETING SPACE (SQ. FT.)  
 [27] # OF MEETING ROOMS  
 [1,500] MEETING CAPACITY  
 [NO] OPEN CATERING  
 [YES] ON-SITE CATERING

#### OTHER

[YES] HIGH-SPEED WIRELESS  
 [YES] FITNESS / POOL  
 [NO] SPA



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**w:** [redlion.com](http://redlion.com)  
**w:** [fcexhibitioncenter.com](http://fcexhibitioncenter.com)

#### DINING

[1,500] RECEPTION CAPACITY  
 [1,200] PRIVATE DINING CAPACITY  
 [1,000] RECEPTION WITH DINING  
 [1,200] TOTAL DINING CAPACITY  
 [5] ON-SITE RESTAURANT  
 [YES] LOUNGE / ENTERTAINMENT

#### MEETING SPACE

[40,000] MEETING SPACE (SQ. FT.)  
 [26] # OF MEETING ROOMS  
 [1,750] MEETING CAPACITY  
 [NO] OPEN CATERING  
 [YES] ON-SITE CATERING

#### OTHER

[YES] HIGH-SPEED WIRELESS  
 [YES] FITNESS / POOL  
 [NO] SPA



## DESTINATIONS



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Pictured: Rotary Botanical Gardens

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**t:** 920-686-3077  
**w:** [manitowoc.info](http://manitowoc.info) **e:** [rthomas@manitowoc.info](mailto:rthomas@manitowoc.info)



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**w:** [visitwaukesha.org/meetings](http://visitwaukesha.org/meetings) **e:** [meet@visitwaukesha.org](mailto:meet@visitwaukesha.org)



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**t:** 920-699-2249  
**w:** milfordhills.com

### MEETING SPACE

[7,961] MEETING SPACE (SQ. FT.)  
 [382] MEETING CAPACITY  
 [5] # OF MEETING ROOMS

### DINING

[225] BANQUET CAPACITY  
 [YES] ON-SITE CATERING

### TRADE SHOWS

[7,961] FUNCTIONAL SPACE (SQ. FT.)  
 [7,961] EXHIBIT SPACE (SQ. FT.)



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**w:** mononaterace.com

### MEETING SPACE

[85,000] MEETING SPACE (SQ. FT.)  
 [3,300] MEETING CAPACITY  
 [21] # OF MEETING ROOMS

### DINING

[2,000] BANQUET CAPACITY  
 [YES] ON-SITE CATERING

### TRADE SHOWS

[85,000] FUNCTIONAL SPACE (SQ. FT.)  
 [40,000] EXHIBIT SPACE (SQ. FT.)

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