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On the Cover: Downtown Wisconsin Dells  
©Wisconsin Dells Visitor & Convention Bureau



## EDITOR'S LETTER

It's finally spring. Even though I've been a proud Wisconsinite my entire life, I'm one of those residents who hibernates through much of winter, so when the snow starts to melt, it feels like anything is possible. I can get out and explore the world again. That feeling is even more pronounced this year.

Along with that spring thaw also comes the opportunity to start meeting outside again! In this issue, we present meeting and event planners with lots of ideas to get the most out of Wisconsin's beautiful weather. First, we start with Wisconsin Dells, known as the "Water Park Capital of the World," on Page 16. Wisconsin Dells is not only home to the largest concentration of indoor and outdoor water parks on Earth, but also plenty of wonderful meeting and event venues. Speaking of lots of meeting and event space, this issue takes you on a journey through the hugely popular Deer District on Page 22 as well. If you're looking to make your meeting or event a success, plan it where the champions work and play in Milwaukee.

For others looking to come out of hiding after winter, Wisconsin Meetings profiles a number of fun group outings, some indoor and some outdoor, on Page 30. These experiences can reinvigorate your team and bring them closer together through peals of laughter and long-lasting memories.

Then, on Page 26, we offer ideas on how to capitalize on your audience's relationship with their phones. Event apps, when correctly executed, can provide attendees with a wealth of information on your meeting and event. This invaluable tool can be a one-stop info shop, offering details on networking, polling, wayfinding and more. A well-done event app not only cuts down on the questions you need to answer, but also increases audience engagement and satisfaction, making it a win-win.

And last, but not least, when it comes to the value our industry provides, the planner we profile on Page 34 is an optimist. Beth Schnabel, the senior manager of events and experience at Filene Research Institute, says, "I'm coming out of the pandemic with a clearer sense of what it is that truly brings me joy in this world ... The power of connection is more important than ever and any planner should be proud they play even a small role in creating those experiences."

As always, enjoy the read!

Best,

*Carrie Mantey*  
Carrie Mantey  
Editor  
cmantey@ntmediagroup.com



If you're looking for the best meeting venues and suppliers that Wisconsin has to offer, check out [wisconsinmeetings.com](http://wisconsinmeetings.com).



*Although many restrictions have been lifted in the state, please note that some facilities highlighted in this issue may still be operating on limited hours or temporarily closed. Please contact each facility directly to confirm schedules and availability.*

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VOLUME: 20 ISSUE: 2

## PUBLISHER

### PUBLISHER

Barb Krause  
bak@ntmediagroup.com

### VICE PRESIDENT OF PUBLICATIONS

Becky Peck  
bpeck@ntmediagroup.com

## EDITORIAL

### EDITOR

Carrie Mantey  
cmantey@ntmediagroup.com

### GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Lauren Harrigan  
lharrigan@ntmediagroup.com

### DIGITAL DIRECTOR

Kristen Rouse

### SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER

Kristin Dvorak

### ACCOUNTING MANAGER

Kristin Hovestol

### PRINTING

LSC Communications

## SALES

### ADVERTISING COORDINATOR

Amy Jacobs  
ads@ntmediagroup.com

### ADVERTISING SALES MANAGER

Cindy Smith  
csmith@ntmediagroup.com

Wisconsin Meetings is a publication of Nei-Turner Media Group Inc. Gary E. Nei, Chairman; William Turner, President.

Wisconsin Meetings is distributed via direct mail, trade shows and conferences, four times per year to: Regional Professional Meeting Planners; Wisconsin Corporate Executives; Social, Military, Educational, Religious and Fraternal Organizations; Corporate Travel Agents; Sales and Marketing Executives; and Association Executives by Nei-Turner Media Group Inc., 400 Broad St., Unit D, Lake Geneva, WI 53147. Vol. 20, Issue 2 is dated April 2022.

Nei-Turner Media Group Inc. publishes At The Lake magazine, Experience Wisconsin, and custom publications about Wisconsin and other Midwestern states.

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Member of Meeting Professionals International — Wisconsin Chapter

## TO RECEIVE COPIES

[wisconsinmeetings.com](http://wisconsinmeetings.com)  
262-729-4471  
Fax: 262-729-4476  
cmantey@ntmediagroup.com



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## IN THE NEWS

### MONONA TERRACE EARNS PLATINUM LEED STATUS

Before the world was talking about green buildings, Frank Lloyd Wright pioneered an organic approach to architecture that honored the relationship between nature and man. He once said, "The good building is not one that hurts the landscape, but one which makes the landscape more beautiful than it was before the building was built." That's why Monona Terrace's Platinum LEED status means so much; it recognizes the legacy of its own renowned architect.

Last November, the U.S. Green Building Council certified Monona Terrace with a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design: Existing Building Operations and Maintenance Platinum status. The LEED rating system is recognized as the foremost program for buildings, homes and communities that are designed, constructed, maintained and operated for improved environmental and human health performance. In 2007, Monona Terrace became the first convention center in the nation to earn LEED Silver certification. It continued to increase its sustainability performance to earn LEED Gold certification in 2015 and LEED Platinum certification last year.

Performance highlights of Monona Terrace's LEED Platinum status include:

- An energy use rating 27% below similar facilities in comparable climates
- The reduction of water use to 43% below the LEED benchmark
- 100% offset of its non-electric carbon emissions
- Purchase of green energy to offset 100% of its electric power consumption.
- Continued conversion from fluorescent and metal-halide lighting to LED technology
- The composting of over 29,000 pounds of pre-consumer, organic kitchen waste

- The donation of approximately 5,500 pounds of food to charity each year
- Site gardens that host over 6,800 square feet of native plantings, which are used to reseed 162,000 square feet of green space in the city of Madison

Participating in LEED supports Madison's sustainability initiatives and distinguishes the venue as a green meetings industry leader. "Attaining LEED Platinum as a high-use facility reflects a commitment by Monona Terrace, event planners and our guests to responsible environmental stewardship, helping to showcase green events and demonstrate what's possible in our industry," according to Monona Terrace Executive Director Connie Thompson.

### MILWAUKEE IN THE RUNNING FOR REPUBLICAN NATIONAL CONVENTION

In February, the Site Selection Committee for the Republican National Convention visited Milwaukee, which is being considered alongside Nashville to host the 2024 convention. The committee reportedly made stops at Potawatomi Hotel & Casino, American Family Field, State Fair Park, 3rd St. Market Hall and Fiserv Forum.

### MPI PUBLISHES WINTER 2022 MEETINGS OUTLOOK REPORT

Meeting Professionals International (MPI) recently published its Winter Meetings Outlook, a quarterly report that identifies new trends and innovations to help planners budget and plan. A balancing market reveals signs of positive things to come — such as growing budgets and anticipated live attendance — however, complications such as the shifting desires of humans emerging from various degrees of societal lockdown, as well as a lack of qualified applicants in many meeting and hospitality roles continues to challenge industry professionals.

The "great resignation" continues to impact the meeting and event industry, with 60% of respondents indicating difficulty finding suitable staff — that's more than double the percentage of respondents who said the same last summer. However, 82% of respondents project favorable business conditions over the next year, back up to the level seen in the spring 2021 survey.

More than 50% of respondents currently or soon plan on requiring proof of vaccination for staff, contractors and in-person event participants. The percentage of respondents anticipating favorable live attendance over the next 12 months is at 75%, almost matching the all-time high seen in the summer 2021 survey.

"Following an omicron-fueled dip in positive projections last quarter, our most recent Meetings Outlook report demonstrates positive indicators in a number of areas,



including increasing optimism in projected in-person attendance and budget,” says Jessie States, vice president of MPI Academy.

“Fewer meeting professionals are expecting increases in digital or virtual attendance (down 41% since this time last year). Unpredictability continues to impact the buyer-seller balance in the marketplace. The biggest challenge continues to be employment, with 37.5% of organizations reporting that they are hiring full-time staff and 60% saying they are having problems filling roles. The implications of this are steep for an industry anticipating recovery — and an MPI focus this year will be helping organizations create and cultivate workplace cultures that attract and retain critical staff.”

## WILDERNESS RESORT IN UPGRADE MODE

Wilderness Resort in Wisconsin Dells is upgrading in 2022. First, the hotel is planning to completely renovate all of its 446 guest rooms with new paint, flooring, furniture, artwork, televisions and more. Renovations will begin in April and will be completed in late 2022. In late spring 2022, the Wild West Waterpark will also undergo a major renovation, adding two new slides and a Wild West-themed, multi-level, play-and-spray structure, to be completed in late 2022.

If you love space and the unknown frontier, you may want to check out the new escape room, Mission: Mars, which is coming to Wilderness on the Lake for summer 2022. The journey takes participants to Mars to recover the 2004 NASA Rover Opportunity's memory box and repair the rover (which has gone silent since 2018). Participants have 30 minutes to complete the challenge before a solar storm arrives.

The resort is also home to Glacier Canyon Conference Center, Sundara Inn & Spa, Wild Rock Golf Club, The Woods golf course, The Wild Abyss 3D black-light mini golf, a zip line tour and more. These options provide meeting and event planners with a whole host of incentives to have their attendees stay and play.

## NEW EXECUTIVE CHEF AT THE KIMPTON JOURNEYMAN

The Kimpton Journeyman Hotel in Milwaukee, along with its two restaurants,

Tre Rivali and The Outsider, recently named Brian Cripps as its new executive chef. Growing up in Jacksonville, Florida, Cripps' love of cooking started at a young age. After a move to California in his early 20s, he worked as a line cook at Laiola, a Spanish restaurant known for bold Mediterranean flavors. His culinary training continued as he honed his skills through Michelin-star restaurant experience.

Then, he moved to Milwaukee to become the executive chef at the Kimpton Journey-

man, where he now oversees daily operations and menu ideation. The Mediterranean-inspired menus are a nod to his roots, and he hopes to continue to bring simple, seasonal ingredients to guests and locals alike. [WM](#)




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## VENUE SPOTLIGHT

©ENGINE ROOM 102

# WORK OR PLAY — ENGINE ROOM 102 CAN HOST IT ALL

THIS NEW VENUE IN PORT WASHINGTON  
PROVIDES A BLANK SLATE FOR CLIENTS  
WITH DIVERSE NEEDS.

BY SUE SVEUM

If you're looking for an event space large enough to hold a group of 80, but small enough to make your event feel intimate, look no further than Port Washington's Engine Room 102.

Housed on the first floor of a historic 1929 firehouse, the event space provides the perfect setting for events ranging from birthday parties to corporate team building. And the venue has hosted both — as well as business meetings and even a few weddings.

Engine Room 102 is the result of a collaboration between friends Julia Behm and Andi Barber. When their husbands bought the building and renovated the upper level for their own business, Lake Financial Group, the vacant main floor beckoned. Blue Heron Event Hall previously occupied that space, so it seemed a natural choice for these two creative moms to take it over and make it their own.

"I love that it's a historic building," says Barber. "There are so many unique and beautiful aspects — and we have a lot of original pieces still intact from back then."

Behm adds that they knew the building was perfect as soon as they saw it. "The Spanish-style terra-cotta roof and tower create a beautiful, romantic look," she

explains. "But inside, we wanted to keep the event hall more neutral to give our clients a blank slate for their themes. We love the way it turned out."


Behm, whose background is in industrial product design, and Barber, a hair stylist and coach, have combined their expertise to create an event space to meet the needs and requirements for a wide variety of events — covering a range of types, tones and sizes.

The space is set up as an open concept, featuring a large tech-friendly room with a kitchen along the back wall, ready to accommodate everything from a business meeting to a banquet. An attached private courtyard with a small fire pit, patio seating and colorful Edison lights provides the perfect gathering place outside. "It's a lovely spot to linger when the weather is nice," according to Behm. "And the landscaped, terrace retaining wall makes a beautiful photo backdrop."

And the event hall's location can't be beat. Port Washington has a beautiful harbor just a few blocks away for charters — or simply boat-admiring — and the downtown area is a great place to stroll, shop and grab some ice cream.

While both Barber and Behm are happy to brainstorm ideas, and offer party and planning suggestions to those using their space, they don't staff the actual events. Instead, they compiled a list of local businesses and vendors that can supply everything from flowers and balloons to food and bartending services. "We're so grateful to have been embraced by our local community," says Behm, explaining that they're now paying it forward by recommending other local business to their clients.

"My favorite part is seeing how people use the space — what ideas they come up with, how creative they get, and the feeling and vibe that results," says Behm. "We have a beautiful, walkable location, reasonably priced, and we truly care about making your event wonderful."

Barber says this entrepreneurial experience has exceeded her expectations as far as how much fun they have on the job. "I love communicating with our guests and they're always so excited to be working with us," she notes. "We love knowing our guests are having a good time and making memories. What's not fun about that?" 



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



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## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

# SET YOURSELF FREE

## CLUTTER IN YOUR SPACE CAN LEAD TO A CLUTTERED, AND LESS PRODUCTIVE, BRAIN.

BY MOLLY ROSE TEUKE

---

*"Clutter makes everything so much worse."*  
— Chrissy Halton, blogger at [organizemyhouse.com](http://organizemyhouse.com)

Ever since Marie Kondo hit the big time with her best-selling book, *"The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing,"* and her popular Netflix series, *"Tidying Up with Marie Kondo,"* decluttering has become the holy grail. This is true at home and at work — and with so many of us now working from home, a cluttered home environment can be undermining our effectiveness both at work and in life.

Clutter might be defined as anything that violates Benjamin Franklin's "a place for everything, everything in its place" maxim. Sometimes, eliminating clutter is as simple as tidying up and putting things away. A pile of loose change, too many socks on the bedroom floor, books that spill out of bookshelves, stacks of magazines.

"Clutter symbolizes an unmade decision," says Christine Louise Hohlbaum, author of *"The Power of Slow: 101 Ways to Save Time in our 24/7 World."* "We look at something, stuff it away or drop it on a surface somewhere, and label it in our minds as 'to be handled later.' Clutter is the physical manifestation of procrastination, items in various stages of decision-making (or not)."

In 1927, pioneering psychiatrist Bluma Zeigarnik wrote, "Our minds quickly forget finished tasks. However, they are programmed to continually interrupt us with reminders of unfinished tasks." Until you make a decision on what to do with that "something," your

brain wants to keep it front and center, thanks to what neuroscientists call the Zeigarnik effect.

### CLUTTER AND PRODUCTIVITY

Picture this: You're trying to focus on a task and are continually distracted by a talk radio station you have on. That's an aural disruption. Now picture this: You're trying to focus on a task in the midst of a cluttered, visually "noisy" environment. Any time you glance up, your attention is caught by yesterday's coffee mug, paperwork that needs filing, reminders of phone calls that need returning, the ruler and scissors you used and didn't put away, the sticky note that reminds you to stop at the grocery store.

Clutter can also be too many open windows on your computer, notifications that are always on, an out-of-control email inbox, even excess photos on your photo app — anything that deflects your attention when you're trying to get something done. Self-care coach and blogger Eleanor Brown takes the definition a bit further: "Clutter is not just physical stuff. It's old ideas, toxic relationships and bad habits. Clutter is anything that does not support your better self."

Any time your brain perceives a data point — clutter of any kind — it struggles to attend to it, no matter how unimportant. Your brain needs to check it out before deciding whether it's a threat or some insignificant detail that's safe to ignore. You may not be aware of the mental struggle, but that doesn't make it less real. It's exhausting for your brain, whether or not you feel it physically.

In 1998, former high-tech executive Linda Stone coined the term "continuous partial attention." She had technology overload in mind, yet it works for clutter, too. She describes it as "an always on, anywhere, any time, any place behavior that creates an artificial sense of crisis. We are always on high alert ... In this state of always-on crisis, our adrenalized fight-or-flight mechanism kicks in." And, she adds, we have more attention- and stress-related diseases than ever before. Not to mention just more plain, old stress.

---

*With so many of us  
now working from  
home, a cluttered  
home environment can  
be undermining our  
effectiveness both at  
work and in life.*

That's because any time you adopt a fight-or-flight response, the stress hormone cortisol floods your brain, making you feel stressed, uncomfortable and unhappy. Cortisol washes out the more benign hormones and neurotransmitters dopamine and serotonin, which have the opposite effect: They make you feel good.

### 360-DEGREE IMPACT

It's tempting to deflect the notion that clutter is an issue. You may think it doesn't affect you, but science says otherwise. A vast and credible body of research in recent decades underscores that clutter's impact on the brain has an impact on you in many ways, both mental and physical.

Your brain has a hard time focusing in a cluttered environment. In one study, subjects performing a data input task made more mistakes when working in a cluttered environment than a tidy one. That old saw, "I can't hear myself think," could just as easily be, "I can't see myself think."

You lose a degree of impulse control. Inhibiting is an important part of your brain's job description. When you are surrounded by clutter, you weaken that critical brain function — inhibition — and you are more likely to act without benefit of the brain's braking system, whether it's making an impulse purchase or blurting out a remark better left unsaid. "We expect that, if an individual creates a messy environment, their surroundings would be more mentally depleting and lead to an even lower sense of personal control," researchers write in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

Your problem-solving skill diminishes in an untidy environment. Clutter hijacks mental resources you might otherwise use for creative thinking, brainstorming and problem solving.

Your short-term memory is compromised when you're surrounded by clutter. Research at the University of Toronto suggests that mental clutter is responsible, in part, for age-related memory loss. Physical clutter is one source of mental clutter.

You have a harder time reading emotions. Research at Cornell University used movies to learn what it takes to quickly and accurately read someone's facial expressions. Clutter



is not conducive to an accurate read. Filmmakers know this and cut the clutter when emotion is important to a scene. "What filmmakers are indirectly telling us is that clutter costs in visual perception," says James Cutting, chair of Cornell's Department of Psychology.

Clutter is consistently linked to weight gain. Some sources suggest that people who live in cluttered homes are 77% more likely to be overweight. No wonder home organizer Peter Walsh titled one of his books, "Lose the Clutter, Lose the Weight." "People can't make their best choices — their healthiest choices — in a cluttered, messy, disorganized home," he says.


You don't sleep as well in a cluttered bedroom either. Surrounded by "stuff," your brain has a harder time powering down and staying powered down. A few things left out might not have a big impact, but researchers from St. Lawrence University found "that those at risk of hoarding disorder may have serious complaints about sleep." Not necessarily hoarders, but those "at risk" of hoarding. In other words, serious clutterers.

### READY, SET, DECLUTTER!

If you're bothered by clutter, or are now convinced it's not good for you, and you

feel inspired to clean house, seize that motivation and get started.

Find a decluttering program that feels like a good fit for you. There's even [clutterersanonymous.org](http://clutterersanonymous.org) if you need moral support. As you tidy up, remind yourself that you're giving your brain a priceless gift, and making yourself — and possibly a lot of other people — happier, healthier and freer.

As American writer, historian and philosopher Will Durant wrote, "In my youth, I stressed freedom, and in my old age, I stress order. I have made the great discovery that liberty is a product of order." 



*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 hosts a weekly classical music program on WXPR-FM. You can reach her at [mollyrose@mollyrosecoaching.com](mailto:mollyrose@mollyrosecoaching.com).*





## PLANNER BASICS

©BROWN BOTTLE

# CATERING TO DIFFERING TASTES AND DIETS

THERE ARE PLENTY OF DISHES THAT CAN HELP YOU EASILY AND ELEGANTLY SIDESTEP ANY FOOD FAUX PAS.

BY KRISTINE HANSEN

Planning an event in which hundreds or thousands of attendees each follow wildly differing diets is like a dinner party on steroids. You can take the meat out of one signature dish, but there's still gluten or dairy — aspects that still will not satisfy plant-based dieters, gluten avoiders or the lactose intolerant.

The rise of interest in seeking out foods that follow dietary or religious preferences (vegan, vegetarian or kosher, for example) is a conundrum meeting and event planners have been coping with in recent years. Then add in the need to accommodate food allergies or sensitivities (no nuts, seafood or gluten), and there's even more to consider.

According to Ryne Harwick, the culinary director at Geneva National Resort & Club, which operates private events at the Hunt Club Steakhouse, it's pretty common to receive special dietary requests with each event booking. "We try to cover all of our bases in terms of every allergy that we can," he says.

The result of this shift in dining habits, however, can also be an opportunity for chefs to showcase their culinary ingenuity. "We're in the hospitality industry," says Harwick. "We're here to cook for them and not necessarily for ourselves."

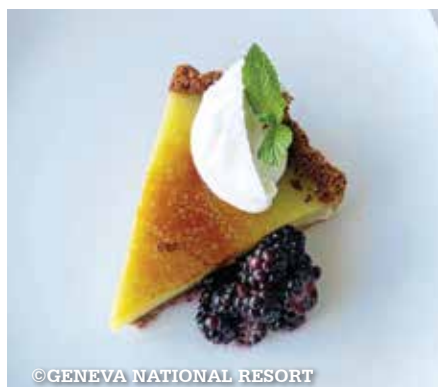
## FORMULATING A SMART STRATEGY

Key to solving the menu dilemma with ease is to "always have two to three options that fill the void for everyone," says Adam Miller, the corporate executive chef at F Street Hospitality, which caters at two of its Milwaukee-area restaurants (The Brown Bottle, Pizza Man and Bottle House 42), as well as through Noble Catering Company. "And keeping risky items off the table." This usually means avoiding a dish that includes flour or peanut oil. Another mantra that governs menu creation is using less gluten. Like with roux, a mixture of flour and fat cooked over high heat and added to sauce-strong recipes like lasagna, macaroni and cheese, or gumbos, there are other ways to get the same results without using flour.

Shellfish is only used by Miller for an entrée when it's requested by the event or meeting organizer. The same goes for anything that, because of a particular ingredient, would not work for most attendees. "It makes life easier having the main course or entrée at these meetings gluten-free," Miller admits. But he points to a passed appetizer that easily checks off all the boxes — drunken watermelon squares. These rum- and mint-soaked watermelon bites are garnished with chili, and, according to Miller, are a perennial hit at the events where they're served. So there are plenty of dishes out there that can easily and elegantly sidestep any food faux pas.



©NOBLE CATERING



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©BOTTLE HOUSE 42



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Often, it's about keeping the integrity of the dish and substituting only one ingredient. Recently, for example, Miller sat down with a couple of organizers who were planning the cuisine for an upcoming event. For the tasting, which included lamb chops and a couscous dish with tomato-based Romesco sauce, he swapped out the lamb for eggplant. "It's a full dish even without the lamb," says Miller.

## CATERING TO PLANT-BASED DIETS

If done well, meat-eaters will hardly notice the absence of meat in a dish. That's Miller's hope with the Spaghetti Squash + "Meatball" option on Pizza Man's catering menu. The dish not only lacks meat, but the Impossible™ meatballs are chickpea-based and the noodles are free of gluten since they're created from spaghetti squash. A traditional roasted tomato sauce rounds out the dish, so it's just as flavorful as its meat-based predecessor.

As another example, says Miller, "We do a tremendous amount of vegan cauliflower crusts." Due to increased demand, Pizza Man recently expanded the option to bake pizzas

with a cauliflower crust to three different pie sizes. It was originally offered in one size only.

While it's rare for an event to request the same diet for everyone, it has happened. Miller noticed it when the director or president of the company maintains a specific diet. Then, all of the meals are in alignment with one person's goals. "Sometimes it's almost easier to do a group meeting that's health-conscious," says Miller, as it no longer necessitates special provisions for some attendees' dishes.

Harwick recently worked on an event at Geneva National Resort & Club in which the majority of guests were Indian and followed a meat-free diet. While that isn't a common request — to have an all-vegetarian menu — he proved it can be done and done well.

These new food trends are allowing chefs working for venues like steakhouses, which are assumed to be solely "meat and potatoes" driven, to think outside the box. A butternut squash risotto at Hunt Club Steakhouse, for instance, is a refreshing option for a diner who does not eat steak. Similarly, the steakhouse's dessert menu is also almost all gluten-free. "Gluten-free

desserts are really big right now," says Harwick. "We have a flourless chocolate cake and our crème brûlée is also gluten-free."

## MORE DEMAND FOR ETHNIC DISHES

One trend that is working in catering services' favor as they reconfigure menus is that attendees want more ethnic offerings on their plate. And because these recipes are often vegetable-based or incorporate nontraditional ingredients (other than meat or carbs, which would normally trigger dietary concerns), it's a win-win for everyone. "They're wanting more ethnic dishes — couscous and curries, Indian and gluten-free," says Miller. "Less meat."

Among the most popular items on Noble Catering's menu are mini Korean pancakes, which use rice flour instead of regular flour, and contain shrimp, cabbage, soy glaze and chili sauce. Wild mushroom arancini is another popular request. With roasted mushrooms, American Grana cheese, truffle oil and sundried-tomato aioli, it satisfies vegetarians and adventurous eaters alike.

While box lunches with sandwiches and chips used to rule, says Miller, there's now a preference for salads and less conventional foods, which can have a positive impact on how a meeting or event is received by its attendees. [www.wisconsinmeetings.com](http://www.wisconsinmeetings.com)



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*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 also published "Wisconsin Cheese Cookbook," which is available on Amazon.com.*



# — DESTINATION — Wisconsin Dells

WISCONSIN DELLS ATTRACTS GROUPS WITH  
NEW WATER ATTRACTIONS AND ENTERTAINMENT  
OPTIONS TO ROUND OUT A PLETHORA OF VENUES.

By Ronnie Wendt

WILDERNESS RESORT ©WISCONSIN DELLS VISITOR & CONVENTION BUREAU

It's all systems go for meetings and events in Wisconsin Dells as the south-central Wisconsin community leaves the pandemic behind. In fact, the last vestige of the pandemic fell as **Ho-Chunk Gaming Wisconsin Dells** dropped its mask mandate in early March. "We are open for business and it's been a great year already," confirms Jessica Rieflin, director of sales at the Wisconsin Dells Visitor & Convention Bureau.

She predicts things will only get better as the community, known for its family friendliness, sprawling water parks, tourist attractions and impressive landscapes, heads further into 2022. Planners hosting meetings here will discover more venues, amenities and attractions than ever before in the "Water Park Capital of the World."

The community plans to debut Elm Street Plaza in July, a \$4.5 million, 35,000-square-foot entertainment venue. This impressive downtown locale will offer covered stages for live entertainment, lush landscaping and welcoming water features that treat the senses. Planned programming will heighten the experience. Think free nightly entertainment, seasonal celebrations, farmers markets and more. "It's definitely something groups will want to check out when they visit," Rieflin says. "We are very excited for the plaza to open. We believe it will attract many visitors downtown."

Event-goers hoping to bring their families along — or to partake in the city's water parks themselves — will not be disappointed. Afterhours fun now includes North America's first rotating water slide, known as Medusa's Slidewheel,





which spins as guests slide through. It's part of a 22,500-square-foot addition at **Mt. Olympus Water & Theme Park** that includes a new children's splash zone and other interactive water features.

**Wilderness Resort** adds to the thrills with two dueling water slides — a two-lane tube ride and a two-lane, headfirst mat racer. The resort also renovated its 446 guest rooms and added a themed, multilevel, play-and-spray structure. In more news, **Chula Vista Resort** will open a water slide attraction designed to dazzle sliders with a rainbow effect as they glide through. Wisconsin Dells adds to this a commanding



HO-CHUNK GAMING ©WISCONSIN DELLS VISITOR & CONVENTION BUREAU



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list of venues that are able to support meetings from 10 all the way up to 5,600 attendees, 8,000 hotel rooms, a foodie scene from burgers and fries to fine steaks and wines, and more attractions than one might find in a much larger city.

Fun is the word Rieflin uses to describe what planners can expect when hosting an event in the city named after the Dells of the Wisconsin River and known for its **Wisconsin Ducks** sightseeing excursions. "Attendees will have lots of fun here. They're going to feel like they're not really at a meeting," she says. "There's a buzz about meeting in Wisconsin Dells."

## Vast Venue Options

About 4 million visitors flock to Wisconsin Dells every year. While vacationers once comprised the bulk of this number, meeting and convention attendees are holding an increasing share. Wisconsin Dells and the Lake Delton area have responded to the influx with over 500,000 square feet of venue space. "We can accommodate anything from small retreats to very large conferences and trade shows," Rieflin says.

Planners will find another standout option for events at **Kalahari Resorts & Conventions**. The resort made a big splash in 2019 when





it opened a \$35 million expansion that more than doubled the size of its convention space. Now the center offers 212,000 square feet of flexible meeting space, making it the biggest in the state.

The venue has three sizable ballrooms, the largest of which is 52,000 square feet and able to seat 3,600 people at round tables. With a theater setup, this ballroom can either accommodate up to 8,600 attendees or break down into up to 10 rooms. "Our Africa Ballroom is in a separate space and there are two entrances to our convention center, so we can have two large conferences happening simultaneously without intermingling guests," says Kyra Popp, the corporate director of sales at Kalahari.

The pre-function space, with its natural light and comfortable lounges, is always a hit, too, according to Popp. "We do a lot of exhibits out here," she says. "And groups like to use the lounges for sponsorship opportunities."

The Chula Vista Resort attracts planners with its secluded, wooded location on the Wisconsin River, just north of downtown, and 200,000 square feet of flexible convention space. The on-site **Woodside Wisconsin Dells Center** features 90,000 square feet of unobstructed, multipurpose meeting space and 13,000 square feet of pre-function space, one of the largest venues available in the state. "It's a great facility for anything from sporting events to conventions and trade shows," Rieflin says. "It's our largest single meeting space." The resort also offers ballrooms with prime views on the atrium level, and a full roster of well-appointed meeting spaces and boardrooms.

The Wilderness Resort's **Glacier Canyon Conference Center** provides 56,000 square feet of conference space, numerous lodging options and ample afterhours activities — from championship golf to spa treatments and four-star dining. Although ideal for meetings of up to 400 people, the venue dishes up banquet space for up to 1,200 guests, private breakout rooms for meetings and conferences, and exquisite catering options.

"We have a beautiful setting outside, so we put windows at the back end of our ballrooms that overlook the canyon or the original golf course. Attendees can step outside on their breaks and planners can host receptions outside when the weather permits," says Shannon Timmerman, director of sales at the Wilderness Resort. She adds, "We set our professional conference center apart from our water park, so families and children never

walk through the meeting rooms or conference center unless they are very lost."

For a meeting needing a more intimate feel, check out **Sundara Inn & Spa**. Nestled in a pine forest on the outskirts of Wisconsin Dells, this venue can host small meetings, group gatherings and intimate corporate retreats of up to 111 people. The Mandala A and B rooms are flexible meeting spaces with amazing treetop views for receptions, dinners, classroom-style programs and theater-style events. If being away from the main resort sounds appealing, planners can host an event in the Woodland Reflection room that features floor-to-ceiling windows and scenic wildlife views. And its Avacaya boardroom offers seating for 12 around a European-style communal table with pleasant woodland and water feature overlooks.

"It's a really nice retreat-style atmosphere, with plenty of trails for walking meetings, which have become very popular," Rieflin says.

For a different pace, groups hoping to hedge their bets after hours might want to host their event at Ho-Chunk Gaming Wisconsin Dells in nearby Baraboo. This facility offers 30,000 square feet of convention space, 302 guest rooms, and a newly renovated, Vegas-style casino with 1,700 slot machines and regular on-site entertainment. Its Grand Ballroom seats up to 600 people, while smaller ballrooms are available for breakout sessions. "It's very popular with groups and all of its rooms were recently renovated," adds Rieflin.

### Food with All of the Fixings

Food is always on meeting-goers' minds, whether on-site or off. Fortunately, Wisconsin Dells serves up an array of menus to tickle every tastebud. "Our larger resorts offer on-site







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dining options with great menus. But if groups want to work with other catering companies, we have some to recommend,” acknowledges Rieflin.

Kalahari offers **Wisconsin Brew Pub**, where diners can delight in Wisconsin craft beers, cheese curds and craft cocktails, or the **Double Cut Steak House** for classic steaks and seafood. Chula Vista keeps people fed at **Kaminski’s Chop House**, considered one of America’s top chophouses; the **Tavern Restaurant** for low-key dining; and **Luigi’s Pizza**, just to name a few. Meanwhile, the Wilderness Resort provides a family-friendly American feast at **Camp Social**; burgers and shakes at **The Burger Bar**; and a premier steakhouse experience with **Field’s at the Wilderness**.

Another cannot-miss dining experience is **Ishnala**, an authentic Wisconsin supper club on the shores of Mirror Lake in Lake Delton. “They are known for their old-fashioned, Wisconsin duck, aged ribeye and lobster tails,” Rieflin says. “Their food is delicious and it’s a beautiful drive to get there, along a winding road with gorgeous terrain.”

The **Del-Bar Supper Club** has been pleasing palates with award-winning, mouth-watering steaks, oysters and salmon since 1943. The restaurant, owned by over three generations of the Wimmer family, offers private dining space for groups up to 100.

Visitors can also take in the music and am-



ISHNALA © WISCONSIN DELLS VISITOR & CONVENTION BUREAU

biance of **Redd’s Piano Bar and Lounge** at the Kalahari with fine wines and handcrafted cocktails. The resort’s **Latte Stone Brewing**, a small-batch nano brewpub, is a tasting room-style bar with craft brews and a Pacific Island tapas menu.

## Activities Abound

The pandemic recently pushed attendees outside for group activities and nature is what Wisconsin Dells does best. Four nearby state parks — Devil’s Lake State Park, Mirror Lake State Park, Rocky Arbor State Park and Natural Bridge State Park — provide miles of trails. Rieflin also recommends a trip to **New Life Lavender & Cherry Farm** for groups of up to 50. The 40-acre lavender farm not only cooks up farm-to-table meals, but also provides wagon tours that teach guests about lavender, cherries and bees.

Timmerman recommends tackling team zip lining at the Wilderness Canyon Zip Line. Groups can soar over the treetops, then take a behind-the-scenes tour of the resort’s **Take Flight** attraction, the first fly-ride attraction in Wisconsin. Popp suggests checking out the ferris wheel at **Tom Foolerys Adventure**

**Park** at the Kalahari: “We’ve had networking events on the ferris wheel, where people met up for appointments and mingled during the ride.”

Groups can team build while testing their axe-throwing skills at **Asgard Axe Throwing & Underworld Arcade**. On-site axe coaches push participants to become the best axe-throwers possible, and 28 craft beers on tap, tasty pizza and craft sandwiches complete the fun. Rieflin says, “We have so many experiences here.”

The Wisconsin Dells area offers something for everyone — including good, clean fun. The community delivers well-appointed meeting spaces, food for every budget and taste, and activities that thrill attendees and families alike. No matter where you decide to stay or what you decide to do when you’re here, attendees never get bored when meeting organizers host an event in Wisconsin Dells. [www.wisconsin-dells.com](#)



Ronnie Wendt is a freelance writer based in Waukesha, Wisconsin.



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# Breaking Down the Deer District

THIS UP-AND-COMING AREA OF MILWAUKEE OFFERS A PALETTE OF  
EVENT SPACES, EACH WITH A UNIQUE PERSONALITY,  
WITHIN A VILLAGE-LIKE ENVIRONMENT.

Story by Kristine Hansen  
Photos Courtesy of Deer District

**I**n July of 2021, Giannis Antetokounmpo and the Milwaukee Bucks catapulted into international fame upon winning the NBA Championship for the first time since 1971, thrusting the Brew City into the spotlight as well. Now, the 714,000-square-foot Fiserv Forum is fielding calls from companies — many in Wisconsin — wishing to ride the tails of this acclaim by hosting meetings and events only a few yards from where the players won Game 6 of the NBA Finals.

“Winning the NBA Finals definitely gave us a ton of exposure,” says Mallory Brigman, the director of event sales for the Fiserv Forum, Deer District and Milwaukee Bucks.

“We are a destination where they want to host their holiday party, kick-off sales meetings and off-site meeting receptions, running off the adrenaline of the NBA championship.” Thousands of Bucks fans packed the 30-acre Deer District just outside Fiserv Forum to watch the game broadcast on national television, showing off the three-year-old arena at the same time. It doesn’t hurt that ESPN broadcasted live from Gather at Deer District’s 6,000 square feet of event space overlooking Fiserv Forum either.

And because the Deer District offers a palette of event spaces from which to choose, many groups utilize several venues within the complex during a single meeting





or event. “Even just a 5-minute walk (between venues) changes the mindset,” says Brigman. “And you’re getting a variety of price points, so that we can really cater to what your needs are.” Dedicated on-site event coordination and that each venue offers a different food menu (all through Levy Catering) are other popular selling points. Because each spot has a unique personality, attendees aren’t subjected to the same food throughout and experience a village-like environment without ever hopping into a car.

Hosting the NBA Championship’s winning game wasn’t Milwaukee’s only recent national media exposure. While experiencing a near-miss in hosting the Democratic National Convention in 2020, cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the city still broadcast some events from the Deer District.

In short, the city’s popularity is spiking. Much of that has to do with the Deer District’s live, work and play aspects — all of which are strong. “It’s not only the place where you go for a game, concert or performance, but also where you stay to enjoy the atmosphere,” says Lindsey McKee, communications and group tour manager, Visit Milwaukee.

**Bonus:** When a concert or Milwaukee Bucks game is not on the calendar, groups can receive a behind-the-scenes tour as part of their meeting or event. “You can go see where Giannis’ locker is and the (Bucks players’) showers, which are so tall,” laughs McKee, who also points to the “incredible art collection” that includes a life-size buck crafted from the same materials used to make basketballs.

Want to host a meeting or event on site? Breaking down the options is a good place to start.

## Fiserv Forum

There are 10 spaces within the arena available to host meetings, with the largest being the 28,000-square-foot Arena Floor, that is, when it’s not in use for a concert or Bucks game. Groups of up to 2,000 can peruse an exhibit hall here, showcase a presentation on the NBA’s largest video screen or host a seated-dinner event. The second-largest space is the top-floor, 4,176-square-foot Panorama Club, so named for its panoramic views from the outdoor patio, with enough room for up to 450 people at a reception. The Jockey Club and the Atrium can hold up to 400 people each, while the 3,960-square-foot West Bend Lofts comfortably handles 370 and the BMO Club accommodates 300. Other, more intimate spaces include the Upper Concourse, Boardroom, Green Room and North Suite, which are perfect for groups of 12 to 50.

## Gather at Deer District

Gather’s 6,000 square feet of space capitalize on natural light filtering through walls of windows. This venue is flexible enough for traffic to flow into the adjacent outdoor patio through sliding-glass doors, a treat during the warmer months.





## The Beer Garden

Just because this is an outdoor space — and a nod to Milwaukee's Germanic immigrants during the late 1800s — doesn't mean it lacks the technology to host your event. A 40-foot screen is protected within a partially covered outdoor area.

## Mecca Sports Bar & Grill

Up to 750 guests can be served reception-style at this two-story bar and grill, anchored by a 42-foot-wide, high-definition screen and two bars. All in all, there are three levels of seating. Whether the forecast be sunny or rainy, garage doors provide flexibility for the space.

## Drink Wisconsinly

Considered a lifestyle brand thanks to not only its Deer District pub, but an apparel line, too, Drink Wisconsinly has the ability to host between 25 and 150 guests for a private event. Embracing "the positive energy of a tailgate party" and "the communal vibe of a corner tavern," the pub is a destination for Wisconsin sports fans.

## Good City Brewing

One of the microbrewer's three area locations — others are in Wauwatosa and on Milwaukee's East Side — this dog-friendly taproom's Oak Room caters to private events that



could include a business function or board meeting. Up to 20 people can be accommodated with a robust food menu.

## The Plaza

Activations in the 75,000-square-foot outdoor plaza can be folded into a meeting or event, too. There's the Christkindlmarket in November and December, or yoga sessions during the warmer months.

Come spring of 2023, a 205-room, nine-story hotel called The Trade Milwaukee Hotel — part of the Marriott Autograph Collection — will join these amenities in the northern end of the Deer District. A rooftop area, 8,700 square feet of event and meeting space on the second floor, a first-floor restaurant, and a ninth-floor eatery and lounge will all be available for groups to use.

"We are super excited that the Deer District is growing to offer more to our clients," says Brigman. "That now means we are a one-stop shop."

Another upcoming expansion is at the neighboring Wisconsin Center District, a complex at Fourth Street and Wisconsin Avenue, further elevating Milwaukee on the national meetings and events market stage. In November, the city broke ground on the \$420 million project, which when complete, will add 112,000 square feet to the exhibition hall, enlarging it to 300,000 square feet.

One corporation in Milwaukee is already utilizing both the Deer District and the Wisconsin Center District for its annual meeting: Northwestern Mutual. A stage at Fiserv Forum kicks off the meeting, followed by other activities at the Wisconsin Center, proof that the two districts are perfectly in sync for serving today's meetings and events industries. [wml](#)







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# Connecting with Attendees via Event Apps

EVENT APPS CAN PROVIDE ATTENDEES WITH EVERYTHING THEY NEED TO KNOW RIGHT AT THEIR FINGERTIPS, THEREBY BOOSTING ENGAGEMENT AND SATISFACTION.

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By Maura Keller

**T**oday, we live in a rapidly changing digital environment, and as a result, there's a plethora of technical products and strategies to make meetings better for attendees near and far. If orchestrated effectively, for example, event apps can provide attendees with a Swiss Army knife of tools for information, networking, polling, wayfinding, notes, downloads and more — all of which can improve attendee engagement and satisfaction throughout an entire event.

And with the extensive growth in mobile device use, planners are swiftly adopting the event apps that are flooding the market. Kera Wasserbach, meeting planner and owner of Traveling Event Planner, says that event apps can ensure audiences have a user-friendly tool at their disposal to help guide them through the information they need to get the most out of the event. "For planners, an app is a great place to put resources that attendees will need. It cuts down on questions on site at the event, as well as costs for printing materials," Wasserbach explains.

Stephanie Cox, CEO of Lumavate, a no-code app-building platform, says that, before you dive into the world of app building, think about what attendees would want from the meeting or event. Of course, the most important consideration is creating an intuitive user experience that draws in an attendee from the start and ensures every possible detail — the schedule, event sessions and speakers — is featured. Attendees also expect today's event apps to tell them about the sessions, point them in the right direction and answer any questions they may have. What's more, they expect the app to be aesthetically pleasing, too.



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## Where to Begin

An app homepage introduces attendees to the meeting or event, and quickly navigates them to the information they're seeking, advises Cox. Keep all pertinent details front and center, so attendees can easily find speaker biographies, and watch earlier presentations through embedded videos or live streams. "Integrations with ride-sharing tools, social media, and product or event information embedded in the app help create a seamless user experience," adds Cox.

When you include social media in your event app, it helps keep users engaged. There are a couple of different ways to add your favorite social channels: You can bring in a live feed of a Twitter handle to capture meeting updates and news, or you can curate a feed of the best Instagram posts.

According to Wasserbach, a clear schedule where attendees can click on a session and learn more is vital to have in an event app. Also, a chat option, where attendees can send and receive messages if they have questions, is a useful capability. But she warns, "One thing you don't want to forget is to include any extra activities — lunches, dinners, networking opportunities, and favorite local eating establishments and attractions. They are just as important to attendees as the logistics of the event."

Of course, the best and most current event apps will be able to integrate with other software being used by the meeting or event planner, especially registration. Planners should also be able to easily personalize the app and the information to fit their specific event.

"Make sure your app is easy to update and has many customization options if you want to get the most out of it," Wasserbach suggests. "Also, you should be able to track data throughout the conference and the time leading up to the conference. These are basic features in the latest conference apps. Check out EventMobi, Socio, CrowdCompass and any other apps that are at the forefront of the event industry. If these are out of your price range, you will still be able to use the information you gather to make strong comparisons and find the right app for your event."

## In the Details

Cox stresses that you only have a few seconds to make a good first impression before



users decide if they'll continue to use your app during the meeting or event. "Therefore, creating a logical layout with organized navigation is crucial in providing the best experience possible to attendees," she emphasizes.

In Wasserbach's opinion, the most important aspect of any event is connection. "People should feel connected to the speakers and to each other," she says. To that end, Wasserbach always looks for apps that have great speaker profiles, and allow attendees to make connections, chat with each other, personalize their profile and easily connect outside the app.

If you have more than one audience to connect on the event app, like sponsors or vendors, in addition to event-goers, there is even more to consider. "If you have sponsors or vendors, representation on the app is a strong selling point, and makes it easier for your vendors and attendees to connect," Wasserbach says. "In this case, communication with sponsors and vendors, strong branding opportunities and a map of where vendors are located are great features to have."

So how do you find the ideal partner to help with your app? Wasserbach recommends planners always check into the registration software they are using for the event first to see if it has an app available. Then see if it fits your needs. "If that fails, ask for recommendations from other event planners who plan events similar to yours," she says.

In contrast, Kevin Molesworth, president and owner at Brass Tacks Events, says he sources all of his app designers the same way he sources virtually all of his other vendors — through first-hand experience with them when he was an attendee at a conference, festival or event, and was impressed by their product. "I also use my global network of trusted live event professionals for recommendations," he says.

"Shopping for an app designer online, in the absence of the two methods I just mentioned, can be hit or miss, and is a risk that I'm not willing to take."

Cox says the largest misconception she runs into is that app building has to be done by a developer or outsourced to a marketing firm. "Progressive web apps and no-code integrations enable business users and marketers to design and build an app without developers," she explains. "In addition, there's more flexibility with updates and personalizing each user experience without using code."

So, how much does this convenient technology cost to design and implement? The price range of event apps is as varied as the events themselves. Typically starting from \$1,000 to upwards of \$20,000, event apps with the most popular features can be achieved for under \$5,000, according to experts. The apps that Molesworth has used, for example, have ranged from \$500 to \$3,500. "Those at the higher end of that range are truly customized, and seamlessly integrate event and sponsor branding," he says.

Regardless of the cost involved, when planned and executed correctly, experts agree that a well-designed event app can dramatically impact the effectiveness, communication flow, engagement and success of a meeting or event, leaving a lasting impression on both the planner and attendees. **WM**



*Based in Minneapolis, Maura Keller is a seasoned writer, editor and published author, with more than 24 years of experience. She has written about business, meetings, event design, marketing, health care and a wealth of other topics for dozens of regional and national publications, as well as Fortune 50 companies.*



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# A Twist on Team Building

**WISCONSIN OFFERS MANY NOVEL  
WAYS TO REKINDLE CONNECTIONS  
AND BUILD YOUR TEAM, ALL WHILE  
HAVING FUN.**

By Ronnie Wendt



**I**t's time to think about planning group outings or team-building events that rekindle the connections lost over a long Wisconsin winter. The standby networking event often involves cocktails and hors d'oeuvres with light music playing in the background. While those events have their place, why not choose fun group activities that allow team members to let loose and feel like kids again?

Wisconsin offers plenty of fun activities that can help stretch team-building skills. From go-carts and road races to river cruises and beer labs to spelunking and axe throwing, the Dairy State has something for every group and every budget.

### REV UP AND RACE

Road America, Elkhart Lake  
(800) 365-7223 | [roadamerica.com](http://roadamerica.com)



Groups seeking a thrill to talk about forever will find it in Road America's group adventure programs, which are hosted on 640 acres in Wisconsin's Kettle Moraine. From modest meetings for four participants to massive events for more than 10,000 guests, Road America has teams covered. The popular Karting Adventure, for example, teaches participants how to handle and race go-carts at high speeds on a challenging course. Or you can test your group's driving prowess as they race a Mazda MX-5 Miata after being coached by professional drivers.

High speed not your group's thing? Then the venue's Geocaching Adventure might be more your speed. Teams are tasked with finding assigned treasures (caches) on this technology-driven scavenger hunt. Each group receives a unique list of GPS coordinates and a golf cart, then sets off on an adventure to retrieve as many caches as they can within a time limit. Off-road driving adventures and event samplers (when groups experience a taste of each of the most popular group adventure programs) are also available. An 18-hole disc golf course presents an opportunity for another popular team builder.

Road America's adventure programs come with a fully equipped meeting room that accommodates groups of up to 300. The programs also

include complimentary snacks and beverages. Road America can dish up anything from boxed lunches to hot breakfasts, lunches or dinner. Staff photographers capture the memories of the day and professional video packages are also available upon request. You can cap off a long day by staying at the on-site cabins or The Chalet. Pricing varies by program and the number of participants.

### BOTTOMS UP

Delta Beer Lab, Madison  
[events@delta.beer](mailto:events@delta.beer) | [delta.beer](http://delta.beer)



Delta Beer Lab, a self-described community destination and brewery, brings people together. Its Social Laboratory/Taproom is welcoming to all, and available for groups and team-building events (shuffleboard, darts, board games). Smaller groups can reserve a section of the taproom for networking, food and drinks at no cost. Larger groups, or those seeking something more private or programmed, can book the site's Brewery/Warehouse space, next to the taproom, with bar service for groups of 60 to 140.

Present a meeting over suds with Delta Beer Lab's in-house digital projector, speakers and microphone. Seat your team at folding tables and chairs, or encourage mingling with cocktail tables. Delta Beer Lab doesn't charge a fee for reservations, but requires a minimum purchase of two drinks per person. This adds up to about \$15 to \$20 per participant. Space reservations are for three to four hours. Delta Beer Lab sticks to beer and cocktails, but can recommend caterers if groups crave food, too.

## GO SPELUNKING

Cave of the Mounds, Blue Mounds

(608) 437-3038 | [groups@caveofthemounds.com](mailto:groups@caveofthemounds.com)

[caveofthemounds.com](http://caveofthemounds.com)



Nestled in the rolling hills near Blue Mounds, the Cave of the Mounds is a natural limestone cave that has attracted visitors for more than 80 years. Your group can explore every inch of the geological phenomenon in a private VIP guided tour. To see every detail along its 1,692 feet of stalactites and stalagmites, add a light package to shine colored lights through the cave. Reserve group outings at least two weeks in advance. Regular admission starts at \$18.95, but discounts are available for groups larger than 10.

## FLOAT AWAY

Lake Lawn Queen, Delavan

(262) 725-9218 | [lakelawnresort.com](http://lakelawnresort.com)



Climb aboard the *Lake Lawn Queen*, Delavan Lake's two-level, 76-foot cruise boat. The vessel takes teams on a floating tour of Delavan Lake and its shores. While riding the waves, guests will see five iconic Frank Lloyd Wright homes and other historical landmarks, like the area's infamous Clock Tower and Pagoda. The cruise boat's open-air top deck offers comfy lounge seating where guests can sit and take in panoramic views. A climate-controlled main level offers an enclosed setting for cocktails, hors d'oeuvres or dinner. The *Lake Lawn Queen* presents full-service catering, bar service, and entertainment options that include a DJ or live entertainment.



## EAT, DRINK AND PLAY

Dave & Buster's, Wauwatosa and Madison

[daveandbusters.com](http://daveandbusters.com)

Have some laughs and indulge your group's inner teenager at Dave & Buster's in Wauwatosa. There's an arcade game for everyone, whether it's Pop-A-Shot, Pac-Man or Skee-Ball, in the Million Dollar Midway. Hold a group tournament at the new, life-size Hungry Hungry Hippos game. Collect tickets and redeem them for prizes. Dave & Buster's offers private function rooms for conferences, holiday parties, company presentations and exclusive events. You can even rent out the entire place. Bar and beverage packages are available for every budget. To schedule your next laugh-out-loud event, visit [daveandbusters.com/party-and-event-venues/adult-social-events](http://daveandbusters.com/party-and-event-venues/adult-social-events).

## DISCOVER YOUR INNER VIKING

Ironside Axe Club, Eau Claire

(715) 514-5845 | [eauclaire@ironsideaxeclub.com](mailto:eauclaire@ironsideaxeclub.com)

[ironsideaxeclub.com](http://ironsideaxeclub.com)



Ironside Axe Club calls on groups to release their inner viking. After a brief lesson on safety and technique, teams can challenge each other in an axe-throwing, team-building event. Fling axes for fun individually or break into teams to play a game similar to darts. Ironside Axe Club offers a lane for everyone — from the true competitor to the casual player. It can customize axe-throwing parties, team-building events, corporate outings and more. [www.ironsideaxeclub.com](http://www.ironsideaxeclub.com)



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## PLANNER PROFILE

# PROVING THE VALUE OF VIRTUAL AND HYBRID EXPERIENCES

EVENT PLANNER BETH SCHNABEL LOVES TO FOSTER SHARED EXPERIENCES, WHETHER IN PERSON, VIRTUAL OR HYBRID, SO EVERYONE CAN PARTICIPATE.

BY CARRIE MANTEY

Beth Schnabel, CMP, CED, CUDE, is the senior manager of events and experience at Filene Research Institute, an independent think tank for credit unions. "I started at Filene as a contractor to help build the IT team and fell in love with the work we do, so when the opportunity for a new event manager role opened a few years later, I raised my hand. I was fortunate enough the leadership took a chance on someone without formal experience and, 10 years later, here we are."

Although Schnabel may have not started out with an event planning education, she was quick to remedy that. "I'm a firm believer that we all have something to learn, so I am constantly looking at how I can continue to improve and grow. I joined the meetings and events industry six years ago, and my first goal was to earn my certified meeting professional (CMP) certification, which I saw as a way to prove to both myself and my employers the value I bring beyond just my passion for the job. Studying for my CMP not only helped me pass the exam, but I've also been able to put my new skills to the test at my organization and earned a promotion because of it."


Beyond her newfound education and on-the-job training, Schnabel brought her love of connection

to her career. "From very early on in my life, I have always felt the power of a shared experience. I was that friend who always wanted to plan the vacations, events or parties," she acknowledges. Although Schnabel is officially a team of one, she says she has the support of a group who works together on the design and execution of all Filene's events and experiences. When it comes to actual planning responsibilities, however, she manages the entire process from room blocks to audiovisual to banquet event orders to transportation.

According to Schnabel, Filene historically executes three to four research events, typically with approximately 150 attendees, and its annual conference, generally with around 250 attendees, each year. In the past, each event was on site, participants face to face, without any virtual elements or hybrid audiences. However, Schnabel reports that now, "after seeing the growth of member engagement at our virtual events over the past two years, we have transitioned to hybrid for all of our events. There is value in both mediums and ensuring we continue to address events in a way that creates a valuable experience for either audience is important for us."

Filene decided to make another strategic shift in 2022, partnering with another industry event to mitigate travel expenses for its attendees, while still executing a hybrid model for those unable to travel due to reduced travel budgets. "We tested this model in 2021 and found it was well-received. It adds some complexity to the planning, but if it helps our attendees make it to the event, that's all I can ask for. I'm hopeful that 2023 will see a return to a full in-person agenda with elements of virtual," Schnabel admits, however.

"There is real value in continuing to utilize a virtual platform to engage a broader audience at events," she continues. "As planners, we need to continue to grow our diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) competencies to create a sense of belonging for our attendees, and virtual execution is an additional layer. Ensuring our attendees can fully participate and engage is critical to the success of the event, and providing a virtual option allows those who either can't attend, or those who are unwilling due to health concerns, to take part."

An optimist, Schnabel concludes, "I'm striving to use COVID-19 challenges to create new opportunities by adding skills to my toolkit. I'm coming out of the pandemic with a clearer sense of what it is that truly brings me joy in this world, and meetings and events continue to do so. The power of connection is more important than ever and any planner should be proud they play even a small role in creating those experiences." 





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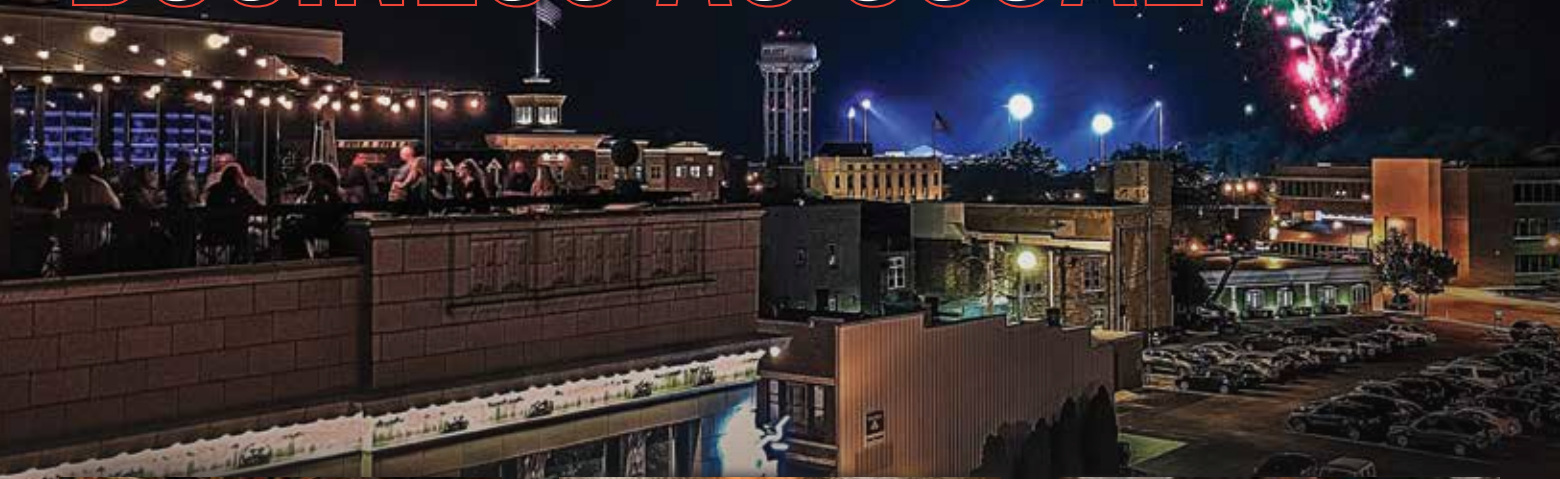


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