

MeetingNews

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Fit for a King:
Tarver King uses
farm-to-table
approach at
Goodstone Inn
& Estate
page 6

The Industry Strikes Back

Meetings constituents fight negative perception

By Rayna Katz

Following reports of recently bailed out financial companies holding big meetings and events, the meetings and incentive travel business is under attack—by the general media, the public, and consequently the government—like never before.

As a result, the industry has mobilized an unprecedented, all-hands-on-deck response with a coalition of industry associations and corporations to create legislative and public relations campaigns, as well as unique research, intended to show the importance of meetings and business travel. In addition, individual organizations and members of the field have developed their own retorts.

“Sometimes, a crisis like this creates a call

to action,” said Christine Duffy, president and CEO of Maritz Travel, and a key driving force behind the coalition that, at press time, included Meeting Professionals International, the American Hotel & Lodging Association, International Association of Exhibitions and Events, Professional Convention Management Association, Destination Marketing Association International, Site (formerly the Society of Incentive & Travel Executives), and U.S. Travel Association, as well as some meetings and travel management firms. At press time in late February, Duffy et al intended to ask hoteliers to come aboard, too.

In early February, the Treasury Department proposed a “rule” that all companies that got

continued on page 48

Planners Feel Jobs Are Safe

But in harsh downturn, their staying power is being tested

By Julie Barker

Layoffs are on everyone’s mind: In January, the U.S. shed 598,000 jobs, after cutting over one million in the prior two months.

But, surprisingly, of the 301 planners who responded to MeetingNews Exclusive Research, most felt secure about their jobs.

When asked “to what degree are you worried about your job in 2009?” just 9 percent of respondents were “very worried.” Those who were “somewhat worried” numbered 44 percent. “Not worried” got the biggest response: 47 percent.

continued on page 20

Convention Centers

OMNI FORT WORTH PROPELS CITY'S NEW MOMENTUM

The recently opened anchor hotel is the force behind Fort Worth's record convention bookings.

see page 18

Planners Guide to Florida

We have hot meetings deals, market intelligence on large and small destinations, and firsthand planner accounts on doing business in the state.

starts on page 22

Value Meetings

CHEAP MEETS

Four pages of listings of meetings deals and group packages, organized by region, in the U.S., Mexico, Caribbean, Europe, and Canada.

starts on page 12

Destinations

TENNESSEE

Nashville sets the stage for Music City Center, with imminent vote on the new convention facility; Memphis reports it has already gained 200,000 convention room nights this year; Gaylord Opryland's new group menus focus on value and quality.

see page 44

BOSTON

The big Arisia science fiction convention invades the Hyatt Regency Cambridge annually. In an Event Report, we infiltrate the festivities.

see page 46

DALLAS-FORT WORTH

Dallas approves Omni and the developer for its convention hotel; Wildcatter Ranch in Graham, TX, caters retreats.

see page 47

Destination Insider: *Tennessee*

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Stage Set for Music City Center in Nashville

A project that has been talked about for a decade will take a big step forward with a vote this month by the Nashville Metro Council to “turn loose some bigger dollar amounts” for a new \$595 million, 1.2-million-sf convention center, said Butch Spyridon, president of the Nashville Convention & Visitors Bureau.

“We take nothing for granted, but we feel very comfortable [about the vote],” said Spyridon. “The city really understands the value of this industry.” Ground-breaking is expected to take place this summer.

The Music City Center is vital, according to Spyridon. Scheduled for a 2012 completion, the

new center will offer a 375,000-sf exhibit hall, a 60,000-sf ballroom, and a 3,000-seat theater.

Spyridon is optimistic about Nashville’s future, despite a 7-percent drop in business from 2007 to 2008. “You have to be bold and smart to take a calculated risk,” he said, referring to the new venue.

So far, the risk is paying off. “We already have 100,000 room nights on the books for 2013 to 2019,” said Spyridon. “The prospect of this building has gotten us through some doors we’ve never been able to enter before.”

A “buzz campaign” for the center, as Spyridon calls it, launched last December, with a music video produced by the CVB; “Music Calls Us Home” touts the appeal of Music City.

“It’s been a tremendous hit,” said Spyridon. “I’ve had people tell me it’s the best [representation] they’ve ever seen of what this city’s really about.” The video is currently airing on Great American Country television network and can be seen on the CVB’s website.

“This new center will take us into the next generation of hot cities,” said Spyridon.

Knoxville’s TouchKnow&Go Kiosks Are a First for Tennessee

Visitors to Knoxville now can let their fingers do the walking, 21st century-style, at four new electronic kiosks that provide information on restaurants, shops, and tourist sites, as well as some other local attractions.

The first of their kind in Tennessee, the Touch-Know&Go kiosks are located at the Knoxville Visitors Center, at the Knoxville Convention Center, and in the Market Square District. Users can locate restaurants, shops, golf courses, transportation, and area attractions, and print out

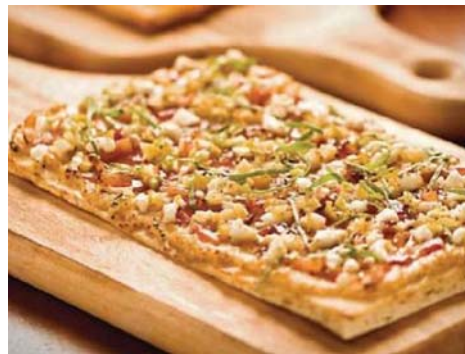
maps and directions. Mobile and online versions are available at www.touchknowandgo.com. Listings are formatted alphabetically. Each listing has a short, informational summary.

“When you’re attending a convention, you don’t have a lot of time to figure out where you’re going to eat that night, or how far an attraction is from your hotel,” said Erin Burns Freeman, spokeswoman for the Knoxville Tourism & Sports Corp. “This is a way for us to take Southern hospitality to a new level.”

Gaylord Opryland Resort Serves Up Group Menus Mixing Low Cost, Quality

For planners whose budgets are becoming increasingly leaner, Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center, in Nashville, rolled out its Straight Forward Meetings Menu in February. The offerings are intended to be “sensitive to the needs of our clients in this very stressful year” without compromising on quality, said property spokeswoman Kim Keelor. “It’s the same award-winning quality at budget-friendly prices,” she said. The property serves two million meals for about 1,500 conferences each year.

Executive chef Michael Swann developed menus that provide guests with a different dining experience each day of their event. Items include grilled lobster macaroni and cheese, Iowa pork chop with plum glaze, pan-seared Adriatic snapper with artichokes, and seasonal vegetables.



A tomato and cheese dish, on a discount

The kitchen will be forced to be creative in finding lower-priced options without sacrificing quality, but the staff is happy to make the adjustment, Swann said.

“We have to look at things that are more economical, like making our own sausage, or doing a braised short-rib or lamb shank instead of filet mignon,” said Swann. “It takes more ingenuity in the kitchen, but the end result is a five-star meal that’s more affordable for our customers.”

Memphis Already Has 200,000 Convention Room Nights Booked

Memphis has hit a milestone with 200,000 room nights already booked for 2009—a near 30-percent increase over 2008.

“We’ve been very aggressive,” said John Oros, executive vice president and COO of the Memphis Convention & Visitors Bureau, in explaining the increase. “The more people find out about us, the more they like us. This is a record year for us.”

Oros admitted that “the current climate has put a damper on some of the hotel projects we’re looking into.”

But, he added that he is “excited” about the new 200-room, luxury Peabody Suites, a sister hotel to the historic Peabody Memphis. The project recently went back to the drawing board, said Kelly Earnest, Peabody Memphis’ spokeswoman.

“Initially, we were just going to have the second and third floors of Peabody Place mall,” said Earnest. “Now, we’re taking the space on the first floor, as well.” The Peabody Suites is scheduled for completion in 2010. ○

—Section written by Julie Catalano