

AUGUST 2008

successful

meetings

THE AUTHORITY ON MEETINGS & INCENTIVES

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of inspiration.

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What's New On

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The Cheese Stands Alone

By now, most people have been to a wine tasting. But far fewer have gone to an event dedicated to wine's favorite and often less-celebrated partner: cheese.

To learn more about cheese tastings, planners can consult with Gaylord Hotels' *Maitre Fromager*, Richard Peterson. Peterson launched the cheese program at the Gaylord's signature restaurant, the Old Hickory Steakhouse, after studying at New York's Artisanal Cheese Center. Now, in addition to cheese courses with dinner at every property's Old Hickory Steakhouse, he offers customizable cheese tastings, seminars, and education events for groups of all sizes.

"The most popular event is the wine and cheese reception," Peterson says. In these, he pairs as many (or as few) cheeses as planners request with wines to match each selection. Depending on the size of the group and the type of environment desired, these receptions can either be seated or buffet-style. In the seated versions, attendees are educated in a classroom-style setting about the wine and cheese pairings set up in front of each seat, in much the same way large wine classes are organized.

(This type of session is particularly well suited for larger groups.) In the buffet-style receptions, attendees visit "action stations," where each cheese is cut, plated, and explained, along with a paired wine.

During his events, Peterson discusses the history of making cheese, the various cheese-producing regions, and what to look for and consider when tasting cheese. "These seminars are fun and interactive, and we have the time to really dive into it," he says. Depending on the group's preference, Peterson will also pair cheeses with whiskeys and beers, in addition to wine.

The events can be held in any of the Gaylords' myriad event spaces and restaurants, or even off site; Peterson recently taught a cheese and whiskey pairing in George Washington's distillery in Mount Vernon, VA.

"These being convention hotels, we know how to cater to the entire range of our guests' tastes," he says. "From the savvy, well-traveled diners to blue-collar workers to conventioners to people on a budget, we can make it accessible to all groups."

By Suzie Amer



Cheese Course

Starts at: \$20 per person for three cheeses, including accompaniments (quince paste, fig cake, Marcona almonds, and so on). Wine priced on consumption.