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Small Market Meetings

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By Vickie Mitchell
Small Market Meetings

Eighteen years ago, the National Sports Center (NSC), 25 minutes north of downtown Minneapolis in Blaine, Minn., was a simple sod farm. Flat as a pancake griddle and covered with thick, healthy turf, the farmland was the perfect place to grow young soccer fields.

Since then, the former farm has become the largest amateur sports complex in the world, a claim that Barclay Kruse, the NSC's chief communications manager, has no problem making. "I'm quite sure we are — I've never seen anything in the world quite like us."

Blaine, population 50,000 and still growing, is among a number of small cities and suburbs that have become heavy hitters in the sports competition market thanks to superb sports facilities.

Some of the facilities are city or state owned; others represent partnerships of private investors with cities, counties or states.

They have succeeded in putting cities on the map among players and fans, most through an initial emphasis on a single sport. Yet, most are now diversified, as demand for sports venues has grown beyond soccer, baseball and basketball.

Beaches, mountains draw fall meetings

Fall, with its crisp air and cool nights, seems an incongruent time to go to the beach, but for those in the meeting business, Cape Cod, Mass., can make sense from a mental as well as a fiscal standpoint.

"The Cape is a serene destination in the fall, not as high-priced as in the summer," said Patti Lloyd, vice president of sales for the Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce.

That could explain why Lloyd's

phone was ringing in mid-February with inquiries from meeting planners from Missouri, New Hampshire and Washington, D.C., to name a few.

At northern beach destinations, natural beauty remains as summer crowds evaporate and the threat of hurricanes diminishes. For example, Traverse City, Mich., is at its most brilliant in the fall,

See *Falling*, page 12



The National Sports Center in the Minneapolis suburb of Blaine, Minn., built its reputation on youth soccer competitions, including the Schwartz USA Cup, above. Since it opened 18 years ago, the NSC has become known as the largest amateur sports complex in the world.

By Alex Carroll, courtesy National Sports Center

For example, the NSC, which built a reputation through soccer, has found that its turf works well for niche markets such as rugby, disc sports and lacrosse. "We'll be hosting the Bingham Cup in 2010, which is the world gay rugby

championships," said Kruse.

At a time when meeting business has declined, sports competitions stream along.

"From the sports end, we continue to increase at a 15 percent clip," said

Richard Sanders, vice president of sports marketing for the Panama City Beach CVB.

Here is a look at five facilities.

See *Sports*, page 9

Pennsylvania Meeting Guide



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South Padre Island bounces back from Dolly's damage

SOUTH PADRE ISLAND, Texas — Meeting business is getting back to normal on South Padre Island, where in late July Hurricane Dolly delivered a knock-out punch at the height of tourist season.

Dolly's blow to South Padre was overshadowed by the damage Hurricane Ike wrought Sept. 13 on Galveston, six to

seven hours north of Padre Island.

"There's no question that the Galveston area's damage overall was much worse than ours," said Dan Quandt, executive director of the South Padre Island Convention and Visitors Bureau. "But in terms of meeting and hotel facilities, I think we got hit much worse."

The SPI Convention Centre, within sight of the golf, was seriously damaged by the storm. It was closed for repairs from late July until early October, and although all interior repairs have been completed, crews continue to work on its roof, according to Quandt.

See *Millions*, page 2

Inside

Long Island's many faces
Beachy, bustling, breathtaking — all are adjectives that describe Long Island, N.Y. See page 14.



Beau Rivage reDOUX

The premier resort on Mississippi's Gulf Coast makes a miraculous return with added features. See page 30.



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By Ann Wilmer

Small Market Meetings

Whether you want to rub elbows with old money, leave footprints in the sand or breathe in the excitement of New York City for a fraction of the cost, Long Island is a versatile destination for meetings.

Well served by boats and airports, jets and North America's busiest commuter railroad, Long Island resembles a lobster with Brooklyn as its tail and two claws (called forks) that stretch toward Cape Cod. It is 120 miles long and 20 miles across at its widest point.

Long Island has many faces. It can be "beachy" or bustling or breathtaking. It has 1,180 miles of shoreline, imposing bluffs and lush vineyards, Edgy New York style coxcois with farm stands and fishing villages.

Its 150 meeting and banquet venues offer 1.5 million square feet of space, and diversions from swimming with sharks and dining alongside an Apollo Lunar Module to elegant breakfasts in the island's most exclusive town.

Ships, whales and shops

Every hour, a ferry sets out across Long Island Sound from Bridgeport, Conn. It ties up in Port Jefferson, a delightful, walkable town of 7,500 on Long Island's north shore.

Once known for shipbuilding and whaling, Port Jefferson is now known for its shops, restaurants and 10 beautifully restored old buildings called Danford's Hotel and Marina. Danford's has 12,000 square feet of meeting space and 86 guest rooms, 10 with wood-burning fireplaces.

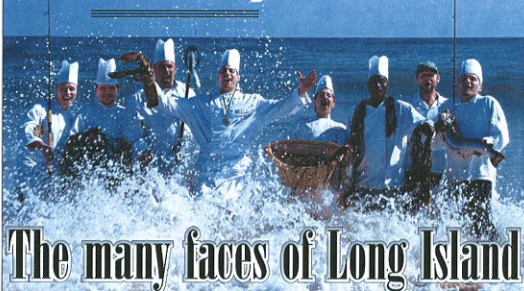
Last year, the owners completed an \$8 million renovation that turned the hotel, some of whose buildings once housed an ice cream shop and a boxing emporium, into a sophisticated boutique hotel with flat-screen televisions, iPod docks and rain showers.

"It used to be shippy," said Theresa Coppola, director of sales. "We gathered everything to the studs and spent



The most massive of Long Island's Gilded Age mansions is 127-room Oheka Castle in Huntington, N.Y. Rescued from ruin, the home is now a member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World.

Town Meeting



The many faces of Long Island

Chefs from Curvey's Inn in Montauk, N.Y., grab a crustacean and take to the Long Island surf to make a point—lobster bakes are their specialty.

\$50,000 on each room."

Each room is different, turning the quirks and angles of the old buildings into interesting assets.

One of the meeting rooms is a high-ceilinged upstairs loft where sails were once made. Another, called Harbor View, seats 50 people beside windows that overlook boats bobbing in the hotel's 75-slip marina.

While Port Jefferson was known for ships and whales, other parts of Long Island are remembered for opulence.

Take the Gold Coast

Along the north shore, on the fringes of New York City, Long Island's Gold Coast is where the rich and famous of the Gilded Age built fabulous mansions in the early 1900s. The Woolworths, the Vanderbilts, the Astors and the Fricks all

summered there.

Eventually, most of those mansions became money pits; their towers and turrets crumbled or fell to wrecking balls as developers reworked the valuable land.

One of the survivors is the Glen Cove Mansion Hotel and Conference Center, once the summer home of Standard Oil's John Pratt.

Imposing on 55 acres, the brick Georgian estate retains the gracious feel of old wealth with its high windows, mellow wood and majestic outdoor spaces.

Forty minutes from Manhattan and New York's airports, it has 187 guest rooms and is best suited for groups of 150 to 180.

Glen Cove opened in 1965 as the first International Association of Conference Centers (IACC) conference center in the United States. Recent renovations helped earn it *Successful Meetings* magazine's Pinnacle Award in 2008, as well as *Corporate & Incentive Travel* magazine's Award of Excellence. There are 25,000 square feet of meeting space in 28 meeting rooms.

The most fabulous mansion along the Gold Coast in Huntington, N.Y., is Oheka Castle, built in 1919 atop an artificial hill so it would occupy the highest point on Long Island. It was immortalized as Xanadu in the opening scenes of the 1941 film classic *Citizen Kane*.

Built by financier and philanthropist

Otto Herman Kahn, it is the second-largest residence ever built in the United States, with 127 rooms. Only The Biltmore Estate in Asheville, N.C., beats that with 250 rooms.

Oheka Castle was rescued from ruin in 1984 by developer Gary Melius, who spent \$30 million to restore it. Now one of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World, it would be an inspiring setting for an executive retreat with 32 guest rooms, 23 acres of formal gardens and space for events for up to 400 people.

Out east

"Out east," at the other end of Long Island, the elegance is understated. From Westhampton to the Montauk Point Lighthouse on the tip of the island's south fork, or claw, the area is known for expensive homes, luxurious yachts and beaches that vie with Florida and Hawaii for inclusion on Dr. Beach's top 10 list.

The 80-year-old Montauk Yacht Club Resort and Marina will reopen next month after completing the second phase of a multimillion-dollar renovation of its meeting facilities and guest rooms. The sprawling facility on 32 acres has a new blue nautical theme and furnishings.

Its 10,000 square feet of meeting space includes a ballroom, breakout rooms and a patio that overlooks a marina for 232 boats. Among the 107 guest rooms are 23 villa cottages, and a large lawn can be rented for corporate events.

Long Island has many faces. It can be "beachy" or bustling or breathtaking.

Carl Fisher, the entrepreneur who in the 1920s turned a sparsely populated barrier island off Miami into Miami Beach, built the original club in 1929.

Fisher set out to duplicate that feat on Long Island, but the Great Depression put an end to his dream. Before Fisher lost everything, the membership roster in his Montauk Yacht Club included J.P. Morgan, Nelson Doubleday, Edsel Ford and Vincent Astor.

Around the point on the southern side of the island, family-run Gurney's Inn, also in Montauk, had a more modest beginning. For 82 years, it has been Long Island's only oceanfront resort, with 109 accommodations that include a mix of rooms and cottages. Half of the rooms overlook the ocean, as does the fitness center.

Eight rooms provide 10,000 square feet of meeting space. Even its beach has wireless Internet access.

Food and fitness are fashionable there, including a corporate health program and heart-healthy meals.

"Gurney's is famous for its Thalasso spa," said Ingrid Lemme, director of marketing. It emphasizes the benefits of seawater. The pool is filled from the sea, then heated to 84 degrees.

In season, there are yoga classes and lobster bakes on the beach. Team activities range from building castles in the sand to fishing and nature hikes. Year-

round you can warm up in the sauna and then plunge into the ocean, just for the health of it.

West of Montauk, two hours from Manhattan and a short shuttle ride to what Dr. Beach calls the fourth-best beach in the country, the Southampton Inn has host meetings for up to 90 people in its five meeting rooms and 2,300-square-foot ballroom.



Courtesy Montauk Yacht Club

The Montauk Yacht Club, built in the late 1820s by entrepreneur Carl Fisher, has wrapped up an extensive renovation.

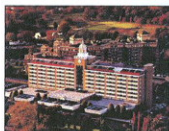
A quick look at Long Island

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What's new: The 150-room Allegria Hotel and Spa, Long Island's first oceanfront hotel west of the Hamptons, is scheduled to open this spring on Long Beach. It will have a 200-seat ballroom and a spa. The Long Island Marriott, the Hyatt Regency Wind Watch and the Danford's Hotel and Marina have completed major renovations. The East Wind Inn opened a spa last fall. The Southampton Inn's ballroom was redone in 2008. Bethpage State Park's Black Course golf course will host the U.S. Open Championship in June. It is one of 60 public golf courses on the island and one of two municipal courses ever to host this tournament. Coopers Beach in Southampton and Main Beach in East Hampton made Dr. Beach's list of the Top 10 Beaches for 2008.

Rooms: Long Island has more than 17,000 guest rooms in 369 properties that range from luxury hotels to country inns and bed-and-breakfasts. Some are seasonal; roughly half are available year-round. There are 150 sites for meetings and social gatherings.

Getting there: New York's two major airports — John F. Kennedy International and LaGuardia — serve Long Island, as does smaller MacArthur Airport in the center of the island. The Long Island Railroad connects many communities with New York, and the Hampton Jitney provides daily service between Manhattan and eastern Long Island. Two year-round ferries connect Long Island and Connecticut, one between Port Jefferson and Bridgeport, Conn., and the other between Orient Point and New London, Conn. Garden City, L.I., is two and a half hours from Philadelphia, four hours from Boston and five hours from Washington.



Courtesy Garden City Hotel

The historic Garden City Hotel is 35 minutes from Manhattan by train.



After the meeting,
take everybody
out for fish.

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commuter railroad and ferry services to the mainland, it's easy to get here, too. But not always so easy to leave. Learn more at **1-877-386-6654, ext. 306**, or at discoverlongisland.com/meetings.







The inn is within walking distance of Southampton's fashionable shops and restaurants. After meetings, there's golf, fishing, tennis and sailing. Cindy Smith, president of Image Quest, recently organized a Mergers and Acquisitions Summit using the inn's facilities.

"With several billionaires in the audience, expectations were high at this conference," she said. "The inn's staff was amenable and easy, and their answer was always yes."

The 90 guest rooms have new bathrooms, beds and carpets. A charming courtyard, used for dining and events, recalls a narrow European street.

Many international travelers stay there, said Tony Cotigola, sales director. They take advantage of the favorable exchange rate at the 200-store Tanger Outlet Center 20 minutes away.

Vines, sharks and strikingly different

A nearby alternative to shopping is "Luscany, or so it seems."

Long Island now has a thriving wine industry with 30 vineyards in former potato fields. Most, but not all, are on the rural north fork.

The 55-acre Wolfier Estate Vineyard



Event venues are dramatically different at Atlantic Marine World, from the White Inn, above, to outdoor diners by a hot pond, right.

in Sagaponack, N.Y., is perfect for a wine tasting and dinner for up to 175, or for a small meeting in the vineyard's quaint terra-cotta-tiled room with french doors that open to the grapes.

Wolfier Estate Vineyard produces 15,000 cases of wine a year. It's also home to owner Christian Wolfier's championship jumping horses and an annual competition called the Hampton Classic. Atlantic Marine World, Long Island's aquarium, opened in 2001 in Riverhead. It is available for meetings or events for

up to 600. You can take microtours to an island, snorkel in a pond with fish from all over the world or swim with the sharks.

Geico, the country's third-largest private passenger auto insurer, recently organized a family fun day there for employees in its Long Island regional office.

As part of the day's activities, vice president John Pham and an associate, whose name was drawn from a hat, donned wet suits and diving gear. Down they went in a cage into a tank with 10 circling sharks while everyone watched, transfixed.

"Everyone enjoyed them," said Carol Hodkin, a Geico human resources manager who helped organize the event. "John said the shark dive was really cool."

A "strikingly different" place for an after-meeting get-together is 300 Long Island. In addition to its 49 public bowling lanes, it has a private lounge with a bar, catered food and nine private rooms.

The big and the small

The largest meeting facility on Long Island is the Inn and Spa at East Wind in Wading River. On 25 acres, it has 73,000 square feet of meeting and banquet space and a 10,000-square-foot spa that opened in 2007. Its well-equipped conference center can host events for 2 to 2,000 people. That's the good news.

The bad news is that there are only 50 guest rooms. It was built for weddings, receptions and events.

Owner Ken Barra employs his own landscapers and carpenters, and the buildings and grounds are impeccable.

"The staff here notices everything and takes care of it at once," said Caryn DeVivo, the corporate sales manager,

who had noticed a light bulb out on her way into work that morning. "I took my coat off and went back to change it, and it had already been fixed. It's a cultural thing here."

East Hampton, with its beautiful old homes and swan lake, is the most exclusive community in the Hamptons. The Mill House Inn, one of the island's smallest hotels, would be a stunning retreat for a small high-end retreat.

Zagat named the Mill House Inn to its list "One of the 50 Top Small Hotels in the U.S." in 2007 and 2008. It has 10 rooms.

"Their biggest asset," *Harper's Bazaar* said in July 2008, "has to be the breakfast, a veritable feast with everything from crayfish to eggnog French toast or fresh mozzarella pizza!"

Up island

Among Long Island's many attractions, proximity to New York is one of the strongest. The city is so close that two of its five boroughs — Brooklyn and Queens — are on Long Island.

From the Allegria, a new hotel set to open this spring on Long Beach, you can see the ocean and the New York skyline.

But Long Island hotels cost less and tax less, and parking is free.

"Easily, Long Island hotels are the half price of what you'd pay in Manhattan," said Michael Bonawandt, director of sales and marketing for the Hyatt Registry Wind Watch.

Smack in the middle of Long Island, the Hyatt sits atop the island's second-

Events take off at aviation museum

At 7:52 a.m. on May 20, 1927, aviator Charles Lindbergh revved up his airplane's engine and took off from Long Island's Roosevelt Field. Armed with four sandwiches and two canteens of water, he barely missed a tractor and electrical wires as his tiny plane, loaded with 451 pounds of fuel, lotted into the air.

Thirty-three hours and 30 minutes later, he landed the Spirit of St. Louis at Le Bourget Airport in Paris. Daring and determination had won him the \$25,000 Orteig Prize and a place in history as the first person to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean.

The stories of Lindbergh and other legends of aviation history are vibrant, beneath a museum's firmly planted in the fat plains of Long Island, where the aircraft industry grew to be the island's largest employer for much of the 20th century.

Stories of accomplishment and ingenuity in aviation through two world wars, the Great Depression and the Space Age will inspire all who visit Long Island's Cradle of Aviation Museum, which sits in the midst of what was once a geographically natural airfield (now mostly paved parking lots), not far from Roosevelt Field (now a shopping mall).

The museum is an uplifting choice for meetings and receptions. In addition to its soaring atrium lobby, its galleries are available for events.

A group of 30, for example, could meet or dine beside an Apollo Lunar Landing Module, designed by Long Island's one-time aviation giant Grumman Aerospace (formerly Grumman Aircraft, now Northrop Grumman Corp.).

The landing module's foil shields glow orange and yellow in a small dim room that replicates Tranquility Base, where Neil Armstrong took "one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind" onto the moon. Another Grumman landing module became a "leibol in space" for Jim Lovell and other Apollo 13 astronauts after an oxygen tank exploded in their command module in 1970. "It was a classic case

of crisis management," Lovell said recently. "Under intense pressure, teamwork by Grumman engineers and Houston mission control to solve problems we'd never even dreamed of got us home safely."

The museum can arrange dinners for 800 and receptions and events for up to 2,000. It has a boardroom and several small meeting rooms, as well as an IMAX theater.

Some of the museum's exhibits are interactive. Imagine what it was like to take off in a small plane on a dark morning in May — alone. Or to land on the moon.

(516) 372-4111

www.cradleofaviation.org



Country Cradle of Aviation Museum Dinners can be held in the museum's atrium, beneath a Grumman F-11.



Beet building on a deserted island is among the team-building options at Atlantic Marine World.

highest point.

In a setting that is leafy and resortlike, the hotel has 358 rooms, 17,000 square feet of meeting space, a golf course, a driving range and a baseball diamond.

The Hyatt's chef does outdoor clam-bakes and picnics, as well as fine dining. The fitness center has global positioning system units preprogrammed with running/walking routes of varying distances. And a 3,000-square-foot tent has heat, air conditioning and a crystal chandelier. The Hyatt is also well connected.