



METRO MAGNETS

RELATED OXFORD

By Jeff Heilman

New York City, Long Island and Westchester County inspire groups with innovation and distinctive venues

Flexibility, versatility and creativity drove the agenda in April as the International Association of Conference Centers, now simply IACC, brought its reimaged annual IACC-Americas meeting, renamed IACC-Americas Connect, to New York City.

The program newly utilized multiple venues for the sessions and social functions, including the two Midtown locations of IACC-member Convene. With five Manhattan locations, this trend-setting network of 120-plus meeting, conference and event spaces in New York, Philadelphia and D.C. transposes on-demand hospitality services typically found in hotels into commercial office buildings. Interactive F&B seminars were hosted by a nearby Midtown restaurant; the closing awards show was held at Chelsea Piers on the Hudson River; and delegates

could choose their lodging and dining around the city.

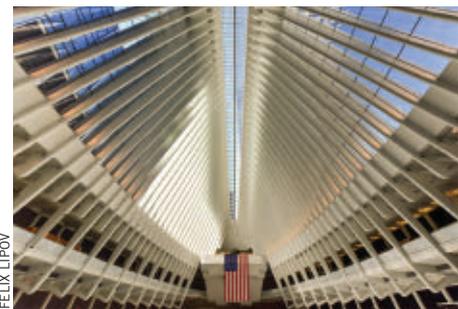
The freedom was inspiring. “How about a tour of Grand Central Terminal?” I proposed to IACC CEO Mark Cooper for our scheduled interview. In those 15 minutes, amid the Midtown bustle, we talked English football, Manhattan’s meetings energy, challenges around getting traditionalists to think creatively, and more.

It was instantly memorable—demonstrating the possibilities, even on the spur of the moment, for creative engagement beyond the conference room. In metropolitan New York, those possibilities are infinite.

Gotham Galore

In 2015, a record 6.1 million meetings and conventions delegates visited New York City’s five boroughs, or 10.5 percent of the 58.3 million visitors last year. With tourism soaring, Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced many billions of dollars in future-forward infrastructure and transportation upgrades, including JFK and LaGuardia airports, Penn Station, and a new Hudson River rail tunnel. Plus, \$1 billion to expand the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center to 3.3 million square feet.

Amid other mega-projects including the



FELIX LIPOV

WORLD TRADE CENTER'S OCULUS TRANSPORTATION HUB

World Trade Center’s completed \$4 billion Oculus transportation hub and the \$20 billion Hudson Yards development, the scope of options is a planner’s feast. Constantly abuzz with group activity, the city’s venue spectrum, from arenas to zoos, only keeps improving and expanding.

Nearly 6,000 new rooms were added to NYC’s hotel inventory last year, for close to 107,000 total rooms. With abundant growth in the outer boroughs, budget-conscious groups have ready bases just a subway ride away from Manhattan. In the city itself, standouts include the historic 1,015-room Roosevelt Hotel. Opened in 1924, “the Grande Dame of Madison Avenue” offers 30,000 square feet of flexible space, a chic

ON the SCENE

DORAL ARROWWOOD, RYE BROOK, N.Y.

DISCOVERING THE ART OF CREATIVE CONFERENCE

By Jeff Heilman

It was, as IACC noted at the time, a “unique arrangement.”

In 2000, a major pharmaceutical company opened a 110,000-square-foot sales training facility in Rye Brook, N.Y., 30 miles north of Manhattan. Distinguishing the \$40 million project was its attachment to the Doral Arrowwood (www.doralarrowwood.com) hotel and conference center.

Innovative conferencing is in Doral's lifeblood. Developed by Citibank in 1983, the property, an original IACC member, is for memorable meetings—and especially in the summer and fall, weddings, social events and families.

Set on 114 wooded acres, it stands as metropolitan New York's only resort, and as I recently experienced, an enclave apart for groups.

Following an ice-breaker from True North

Team Building, which coordinates experiential programs on-site, our group enjoyed a Chef's Table Dinner in the resort's kitchen, with a nightcap in the pub.

Property tours included Doral's 33 dedicated function rooms and 6,500-square-foot ballroom. The Doral Executive Center, the training facility scenically overlooking Doral's nine-hole golf course, offers 10 meeting rooms, 11 breakout rooms, an executive conference room, 174-seat amphitheater, two 50-seat amphitheaters, 13 office spaces and upscale executive boardroom.

We also toured the Sports Center, which includes tennis, a fitness center and indoor/outdoor swimming pool, and dined in the sunny Atrium restaurant.

After joining Benchmark Resorts & Hotels last September, the property announced \$4 mil-



JEFF HEILMAN

CHEF'S TABLE DINNER ENTREE

lion in renovations this February, including expanded Wi-Fi, enhanced operational software, new A/V equipment, and conference room refurbishment. Upgrades to 200 of the property's 363 guest rooms are slated for completion this spring, with the balance by year's end.

“Along with the requisite technology, customization and flexibility for today's meetings, our focus is on experience creation,” said Director of Sales and Marketing Jack Meehan, who is involved with the IACC Meeting Room of the Future initiative. “With innovations including chef-led dinners and F&B-inspired breakouts, we create memories and stories to tell.”

In that regard alone, Doral Arrowwood hits the bullseye—including service excellence, which made the visit a flowing pleasure from start to finish. **M**

rooftop lounge and other draws. Looking for something different? Manhattan has it all.

At the island's southern tip, Pier A Harbor House is a 28,000-square-foot dining and event venue housed in the landmark former headquarters for the New York Harbor Police and Department of Docks, built in 1886. There's casual indoor and outdoor dining on the first floor, fine-dining on the second floor and special events on the third level.

On the energetic, revitalized Bowery, Duane Park is a rave-reviewed live music and

burlesque venue hosting groups of up to 120 for private dinners and events. On the edge of Central Park, the mighty Metropolitan Museum of Art hosts an array of gatherings. Groups can also tour the Met Cloisters, the branch of the museum devoted to medieval European art and architecture overlooking the Hudson in northern Manhattan. What can compare to Madison Square Garden, with its dramatic new 430-seat Sky Bridge level, or Radio City Music Hall, or Lincoln Center? All offer truly world-class entertainment and event spaces—and memories and excitement like nowhere else.

In Brooklyn, the pioneering Brooklyn Marriott is nearing completion of a three-phase, \$43 million makeover, including the new M Club lounge, 50,991 square feet of upgraded space, and all 667 guest rooms. Just minutes from LaGuardia and JFK airports in White-stone, Queens, The Center for Automotive Education & Training, IACC's latest New York member, offers 45,000 square feet of sleek, modern space for corporate conferences, dinners and more.

Running 24 hours a day between Lower Manhattan and St. George, the free Staten Island Ferry is a scenic option for reaching attractions like Richmond County Bank Ballpark, home of the Staten Island Yankees, and the Staten Island Museum. The museum also offers a brand-new LEED-certified building at the group-capable Snug Harbor Cultural Center & Botanical Garden.

Great Neighbors

Within convenient reach of the city, Long Island and Westchester County extend the flexibility in myriad ways.

Globally renowned for its wine region and beaches, Long Island presents a broad canvas for groups.

Taking the view that “untraditional venues stimulate creativity and produce better opportunities for attendee engagement and comradery,” Joan LaRosa, director of sales for the Long Island CVB and Sports Commission, described Long Island as “filled with fun and exciting venues beyond the four walls of a regular meeting room.”

History comes alive in Long Island's collection of group-capable Gilded Age mansions such as the Oheka Castle and institutions like the Cradle of Aviation Museum in Garden City. At the Long Island Aquarium in Riverhead, delegates can meet in the Shark Tunnel room—or cage-dive with live sharks in the 120,000-gallon



JORG HACKEMANN

THE MET CLOISTERS, MANHATTAN



OHEKA

LONG ISLAND'S OHEKA CASTLE, HUNTINGTON

TREVOR TONDRO



BARON'S COVE INN, SAG HARBOR

Lost City of Atlantis Shark Exhibit.

The surging culinary scene includes siblings Restaurant Mirabelle and Mirabelle Tavern in Stony Brook from pioneering French chef-restaurateur Guy Reuge. The IACC-certified Glen Cove Mansion Hotel and Conference Center is just 30 minutes from Manhattan, while in Sag Harbor, Baron's Cove Inn, first popularized by John Steinbeck, has been reborn as a 67-room resort with superior dining and private event space. Farther out, the 146-room Gurney's Montauk Resort & Seawater Spa features 7,000 square feet of space and private sand beach.

"Bring the meeting to the beach, or out to sea on a catamaran," said LaRosa. "Groups

simply enjoy the variety of options available on Long Island."

From elite gatherings at Tarrytown's historic hilltop Castle Hotel & Spa to IACC-certified sanctuaries Doral Arrowwood (see On the Scene, page 42), Tarrytown House Estate & Conference Center and Edith Macy Conference Center, Westchester County, just north of Manhattan, brims with opportunity.

"Westchester County continues to be the hub for the next generation of meeting planners looking for creative activities, unique venues and interesting collaboration options," said Natasha Caputo, director of Westchester County Tourism & Film. "Home to acclaimed accommodations, world-class

entertainment, a sophisticated cultural scene and irresistible dining experiences, Westchester provides planners with alternatives to traditional settings to add value to their meetings and events."

Historic Hudson Valley promotes preeminent landmarks like the Rockefeller's Kykuit estate and Van Cortland Manor through tours and programs like magical Lightscapes in the spring and the Great Jack O'Lantern Blaze around Halloween. Other options include concerts and tours at the Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts in Katonah, and private events at the Capitol Theatre, the "original rock palace" in Port Chester. **m**

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