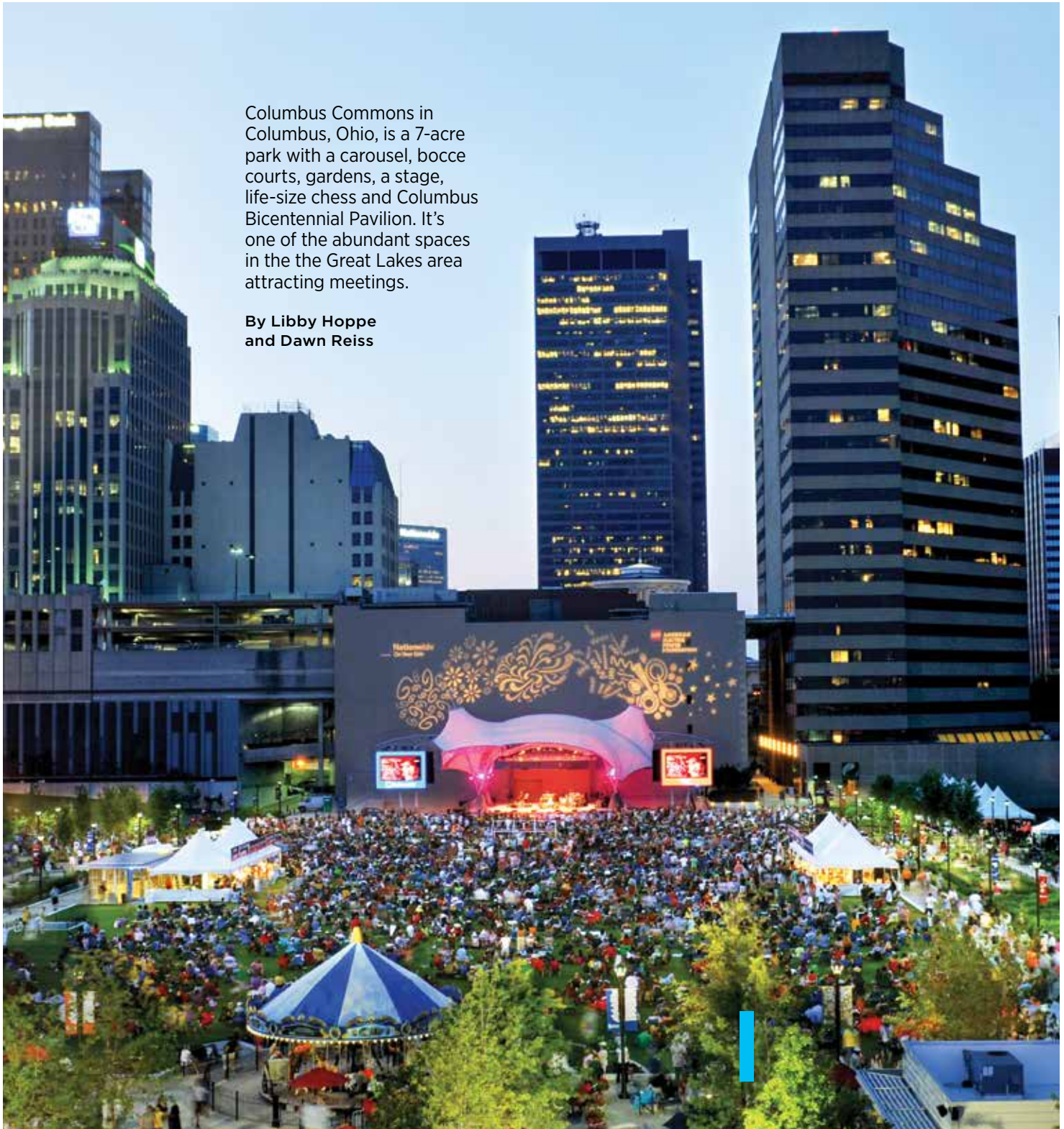

GREAT LAKES

Columbus Commons in Columbus, Ohio, is a 7-acre park with a carousel, bocce courts, gardens, a stage, life-size chess and Columbus Bicentennial Pavilion. It's one of the abundant spaces in the the Great Lakes area attracting meetings.

By Libby Hoppe
and Dawn Reiss



Matters of Taste

The Windy City is a world-class dining destination.

4,700
restaurants

32
AAA Four- and
Five-Diamond hotels

29
Fortune 500
companies

There's a reason the 2015 James Beard Awards are being hosted in Chicago. It's a first for the prestigious awards, which previously were only hosted in New York. With more than 40 James Beard Award winners, Chicago has become a top culinary destination for every type of cuisine. If you have foodies in your group, booking a conference here is sure to spike attendance.

Award winners include Jimmy Bannos Jr. of The Purple Pig, a destination spot on Michigan Avenue known for its small plates, house-cured meats and extensive wine list. For divine pastries, check out Mindy Segal's restaurant and dessert bar, Mindy's Hot Chocolate, which has seasonal and sustainable-based fare, and, of course, hot chocolate with house-made marshmallows. In the West Loop, visitors flock to Stephanie Izard's Girl & The Goat, where a goat leg can be preordered in advance for a group.

More favorites include restaurants by Paul Kahan, who has earned multiple awards, including the James Beard Outstanding Chef in 2013, for his work at Blackbird, Avec, The Publican, Big Star, Publican Quality Meats and Nico Osteria.

For top-notch Mexican, try hosting a reception at one of Rick Bayless' three restaurants: Frontera Grill, Topolobampo and Xoco. Bayless won Bravo's "Top Chef Masters," authored eight cookbooks and received the James Beard Foundation's highest award, Outstanding Restaurant in 2007, for Frontera Grill.

Other popular spots include The Aviary, a swanky cocktail lounge, and Next Restaurant, which requires advance tickets for seasonally themed dinners. The Terrace at Trump is a sophisticated spot with views of downtown and al fresco dining. Italian lovers should try Spiaggia, a favorite of President Obama, with a spectacular private dining room that has floor-to-ceiling views of Lake Michigan and the Magnificent Mile.

QUICK FACTS

Area guest rooms: 110,000

Nearest airports: Chicago O'Hare International and Chicago Midway International

Convention center: McCormick Place, largest convention center in the U.S.

Meeting space: 2.6 million square feet of exhibit space

Meeting rooms: 173

COMING IN 2015

The world's first Virgin Hotel—Virgin Hotel Chicago by Sir Richard Branson—to open in January with 250 rooms, two restaurants, a rooftop bar, lounge and clubhouse

22-story Hyatt The Loop Chicago to open in February

Loews Hotels & Resorts to open a hotel in River North with 25,000 square feet of meeting space in March



The Terrace at Trump; Spiaggia desserts



[CASE STUDY]

For its 100th annual convention, the National Communication Association spent 10 years planning a grand event in Chicago. The group hosted the November 2014 event, which drew more than 5,600 higher education attendees, at Hilton Chicago, with overflow programming at the Palmer House, the original site of its first conference. After hosting a reception at the Hilton, off-site programs were included at Adler Planetarium, Art Institute of Chicago, famous blues bar Buddy Guy's Legends, and The Plant, an old factory that has been transformed into an innovative, sustainable food production facility.

Michelle Randall, NCA's director of convention and meetings, says the Windy City's many dining and meeting options made it ideal for the conference. "Chicago is a great destination because of what the city offers in variety of venues and restaurants," says Randall. "It's a central location, and it's easy to get in and out of the city." There are some issues planners should be aware of when taking an event to Chicago, though, notes Randall. "There are additional costs endemic to Chicago with the union structure you have to work with, so being aware of those costs is crucial."

Creative Columbus

The artistic scene in Ohio's capital breaks out.

Besides being home to the Ohio State Buckeyes and its rabid fans, Columbus is an art powerhouse thanks to local collectors and the renowned Columbus College of Art & Design.

Columbus Idea Foundry, a 65,000-sq.-ft. community workshop, learning center and creative space, opened in the Franklinton neighborhood in April 2014. Nearby is 400 West Rich Street, home to more than 100 Columbus-based artists, designers and performers, and an event space with brick walls and skylights.

Currently undergoing a \$37.6 million expansion (scheduled to be completed in fall 2015), Columbus Museum of Art showcases a range of contemporary art, folk art and photography, including a renowned piece by glass artist Dale Chihuly. There's also Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State, which includes a theater, performance space, a film and video studio, and approximately 13,000 square feet of galleries.

Hilton Columbus Downtown, adjacent to Greater Columbus Convention Center, is also part of the art trend, showcasing more than 150 works by Ohio artists, including large canvases hanging on guest room ceilings.

A few blocks away, the Short North Arts District has a range of boutiques and restaurants, and a gallery hop spotlighting new exhibitions and street performers takes place the first Saturday of every month. Local real estate developer Ron Pizzuti, named one of the world's top 200 art collectors by "ArtNews," has a contemporary museum in Columbus, which he will allow guests of the soon-to-open Le Meridien Columbus, The Joseph to access for free with their hotel key cards.

[CASE STUDY]

Multiple factors are responsible for AmericanHort's ability to draw more than 10,000 attendees to Columbus for Cultivate, the largest all-industry horticulture exposition and convention in North America, in July 2014. The first is basic, says Margaret McGuire-Schoeff, CMP, the show's event designer and manager. "Columbus is very affordable," she says. McGuire-Schoeff was drawn to the city because of the convention center's design and location, which allows for easy access to area restaurants and to Port Columbus International Airport. Convention center staff demonstrated needed flexibility by allowing the show's planners to build creative landscapes and lower temperatures to keep their plants alive, notes McGuire-Schoeff.

AmericanHort partnered with eight hotels, including Hilton Columbus Down, as well as the Columbus Convention and Visitors Bureau, which helped coordinate food trucks during the weeklong event. The event also took advantage of Columbus' arts scene by hosting a catered cocktail-and-painting party at Brandt-Roberts Galleries. Other highlights included visiting Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams, Elevator Brewery and Draught Haus, and The Pearl, which serves craft cocktails and oysters.

QUICK FACTS

Area guest rooms: 26,000

Nearest airport:
Port Columbus International

Convention center:
Greater Columbus Convention Center

Meeting space:
1.7 million square feet

Meeting rooms: 65

COMING IN 2015

\$125 million upgrade and expansion to Greater Columbus Convention Center over the next two years

Host of the 2015 NHL All-Star Game

\$37.6 million expansion at Columbus Museum of Art, including a 17,700-sq.-ft. Sculpture Garden



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- SAM KENNEDY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, TECHWEEK

BE PART OF THE D'S COMEBACK AT ASAE 2015

Location was integral to Techweek 2014, a leading technology convention that showcases, celebrates and enables startup and stalwart innovation ecosystems. Detroit's pioneering culture and technology-driven growth spurt made The D a natural fit as host and Techweek has scheduled a conference encore in 2015. ASAE attendees will get to experience Detroit themselves next August, including the newly renovated Cobo Center, plenty of downtown hotel options and Detroit's unique international riverfront, all just a short walk away.

Be part of America's great comeback city. View Sam's whole story at meetdetroit.com/sam.

Techweek Detroit photo ©Leonard Beck



[CASE STUDY]

Welcome to Titledown

You can't escape the Packers when you visit Green Bay, so why try? Embrace the team's influence and appeal.

If you think every person in Green Bay, Wisconsin, is a Packers fan, basic facts suggest you're right. The town that sits on the southern lip of the Lake Michigan waterway and shares its name has a population of only 104,000, and on a handful of Sundays every fall, 78,000 of them pack into Lambeau Field to watch their beloved team. The waitlist for season tickets is rumored to be 30 years.

Luckily, you don't have to own season tickets to step inside the storied stadium. Planners can arrange private tours that take groups inside the locker rooms, through players' tunnels and out on the field. The tour covers more than the history of the four-time Super Bowl champs; it tells the story of how a small town in Wisconsin cultivated one of the most loyal fan bases in the game. The on-site Lambeau Field Atrium is open most days of the year, houses a pro shop, pub and hall of fame, and can be rented out for special events with private catering.

Packer pride isn't contained inside the stadium alone. Visitors can eat at Brett Favre's Steakhouse or try a local microbrew at Titledown Brewing Company, which is housed in a former train depot built in 1898 and converted almost 100 years later.

When Senior Meeting Manager Ed Robie and his team plan events for the Technical Association of the Pulp and Paper Industry, they look for something specific. "Green Bay is located in an area where the industry is key," he says. A number of mills exist along the Fox River near Green Bay that manufacture tissue and paper products. "TAPPI locates most of its conferences in areas of the country where the industry is prevalent, making it easy for local members and others in the industry to attend," Robie adds. TAPPI held back-to-back conferences at the KI Convention Center in Green Bay in September 2013, hosting more than 650 people. Attendees stayed at Hyatt on Main (booked when it was Hotel Sierra), and many attended an optional reception at Lambeau Field that included tours. But the best surprise of the trip might have been a spouse excursion to neighboring Door County, known for its parks system, quaint bed and breakfasts, and cherry wine. "September was a great time of year to visit, and they enjoyed it a lot. I think other attendees either arrived early to Green Bay or stayed around after the conference to tour Door County on their own."



Green Bay Packers locker room; Lambeau Field at night



QUICK FACTS

Area guest rooms: 4,300

Nearest airport: Austin Straubel International

Convention center: KI Convention Center

Meeting space: 45,000 square feet

Meeting rooms: 19

COMING IN 2015

\$23 million expansion of KI Convention Center, nearly doubling its size

160-room Hotel Northland

\$5.3 million Hampton Inn conversion connected to KI Convention Center



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[CASE STUDY]



Milwaukee Public Market

"I found Milwaukee to be a vibrant city that was a relaxed and more intimate version of Chicago," says Jennifer Root, director of events and education for Association of Marketing Service Providers. About 230 participants traveled to Milwaukee in June 2014 for AMSP's annual conference. "We have a significant membership base within driving distance of Chicago, which tends to be a favored destination. However, our group is economical-minded, so Chicago in June was more expensive than our group would bear." She decided on Milwaukee instead, and the city surprised her and surpassed expectations. The 307-room Pfister Hotel—a Milwaukee icon since it was built in 1893—served as the host hotel and event venue, and the 23rd-floor Blu bar and lounge at the top of the Pfister became a favorite for evening sunsets. Root says Milwaukee's friendly city streets and varied entertainment options (notably outdoor summer festivals with live music) make it a must-consider destination, even for groups like hers that prefer the big city. "A vendor treated me to see Elvis Costello on a whim," she says.

QUICK FACTS

Area guest rooms: 16,000

Nearest airport:
General Mitchell International

Convention center:
Wisconsin Center

Meeting space:
265,900 square feet

Meeting rooms: 28

COMING IN 2015

158-room Kimpton to open in Historic Third Ward district

Expansion of BublR Bikes bike-sharing program

New daily nonstop flights between Seattle and Milwaukee through Alaska Airlines

Next Stop: Brew City

Planning a successful meeting in Milwaukee might be as simple as knowing if your guests prefer ale, stout or lager.

Milwaukee's beer history is as rich and layered as some of the pints that pour from the city's taps. The prevailing story about what made Milwaukee famous goes something like this: When the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 wiped out businesses, breweries and the city's drinking water supply, Joseph Schlitz upped shipments of his namesake beer to the big city 90 miles south. Sales took off, and Joseph Schlitz Brewing Company soon became the largest beer producer in the United States.

Today, meeting planners have a variety of ways to tell Milwaukee's story and integrate its brewing past into events. The Miller Brewery hosts tours and special events (think: a seated dinner for 50 in the 150-year-old underground brewing caves). A number of operators offer tours of local breweries, including Brenner, Lakefront and Sprecher, in addition to the famous Pabst and MillerCoors breweries. The notable Pabst mansion, built in 1890 to house "beer baron" Frederick Pabst's family, is now a museum and special events destination, and the former Pabst Brewery was recently converted into the 90-room Brewhouse Inn & Suites, which houses a group of original copper brewing kettles in the second-floor lobby.



Growth Mode

Rochester, Minnesota, builds on the notoriety of Mayo Clinic to attract more meetings.

It always lands somewhere near the top, but the Mayo Clinic once again holds the No. 1 spot on U.S. News & World Report's list of best hospitals for 2014-2015. It's one of the world's premier medical facilities and has helped put Rochester, Minnesota, on the map. The presence of such a highly regarded facility means access to some of the country's leading medical professionals as guest speakers and presenters, and the city knows it needs more event space to accommodate large groups. The answer is an intensive overhaul and expansion of the city's main meetings facility, the Mayo Civic Center.

"The new space is specifically designed to meet the needs of today's meetings and conventions, and to bring larger events to Rochester," says Brad Jones, executive director of the Rochester Convention & Visitors Bureau. "We have carefully considered the needs of meeting planners, event attendees and the Rochester community in developing the new space." The renovation, which will double the size of the center to 200,000 square feet, begins in early 2015 and will cost \$79 million. The expansion has been designed with green features in mind.

Another big addition to Rochester is the Historic Third Street development, about four blocks from the civic center. New dining establishments include The Tap House, Downtown Kitchen and The Half Barrel Bar & Kitchen. Rochester's chefs have impressive resumes to tout. Kevin Madden, Downtown Kitchen's chef/owner, started his career in a sandwich shop in Northfield, Minnesota, then went on to receive a master's degree in

gastronomy at Boston University. "Julia Child and Jacques Pepin designed the program," he says. When asked to categorize the food at his restaurant, he says he can't narrow it down, but his favorite dishes are classics like steak au poivre, coq au vin and French onion soup. "I make everything by scratch except the bread," he says. And if you want to know where Madden eats in Rochester, he goes to La Poblana. "It's the best."

QUICK FACTS

Area guest rooms:
5,185

Nearest airport:
Greater Rochester International

Convention center:
Mayo Civic Center

Meeting space:
100,000 square feet

Meeting rooms: 17

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