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When Hurricane Irma blew his event out of its original site, Kevin O'Keefe, show director for the International Contemporary Furniture Fair, found refuge in a mid-market city

CASE STUDIES IN SUCCESS

BY MARK CHESNUT

There's a saying in business: It's not what you know, it's who you know. And while knowledge and research are obviously crucial for meeting planners, that old refrain could still apply to the importance of teaming up with a local insider — someone who can help planners make decisions and assure success once the gathering is underway.

That inside connection may come with a variety of names. But whether it's a convention and visitors bureau (CVB), a destination marketing organization (DMO) or a tourism office, the goal is the same: To make things easier for meeting and event professionals.

In the following case studies, planners and tourism officials share their stories of how a good partnership can make all the difference.

THE 2017 NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES (NACO) ANNUAL CONFERENCE

This annual event brought some 2,500 attendees to Ohio's capital for four days of education and networking.

PLANNING PARTNERSHIP:

DEVER: "Experience Columbus proved to be an invaluable asset in the initial planning stages, with bid proposals, securing contracts and developing funding measures and structures. Experience Columbus had a team of experts to help navigate promotion of the conference. We relied on the CVB staff to assist in developing videos, design a display for attendance-building exhibits and provide local favorite treats, like buckeyes and ice cream, to entice NACo members to come to Columbus."

LEVINE: "The main support we provided during the planning process was for marketing purposes and venue selection. On the marketing front, we provided photos and verbiage for the conference website, e-newsletters and other materials. Additionally, we did two on-site attendance builders."

HELP ON SITE:

▶ DEVER: "Experience Columbus not only had staff greeting NACo's guests at John Glenn International Airport, but also were on site at the information booth at the Greater Columbus Convention Center. Following the conference, we were able to share the economic impact facts and figures with our community sponsors within

▶ EVENT: The 2017 National Association of Counties (NACo) Annual Conference

▶ LOCATION: Columbus, Ohio

▶ THE PLAYERS:

Robin Dever, public information officer for the Franklin County Board of Commissioners and local chair of the conference.

Sharon Levine, convention services manager at Experience Columbus



Opening celebration at NACo's annual conference

days, thanks to the efficient marketing professionals at Experience Columbus.”

► **LEVINE:** “While the event was taking place, we coordinated airport welcomes, including signage and live greeters; staffed information tables at five of the hotels being used by delegates, as well as at the convention center; posted welcome banners and signage across the city; facilitated an exhibitor welcome; and had someone available at all times to answer any questions or assist any way the planner needed.”

END RESULT:

► **DEVER:** “The NACo annual conference, hosted by Franklin County, was a successful event from every aspect, socially and educationally. It was thanks to Experience Columbus that we had the proper direction and support when necessary.”

► **LEVINE:** “This event was incredibly successful. The conference drew 3,000 attendees to Columbus, filling nearly 8,000 hotel rooms and generating \$3.8 million in direct visitor spending. The key factors that made this so successful include communication and open-mindedness. The better we understand what a group is trying to do, the better recommendations we can make.”

.....

ASIS INTERNATIONAL ANNUAL SEMINAR AND EXHIBITS

A total of 22,000 people converged on Dallas for this event, for four days of networking and education that made use of the entire convention center, dozens of hotels, and many off-site restaurants and venues.

PLANNING PARTNERSHIP:

► **O’NEIL:** “The VisitDallas team helped us with planning from the earliest stages. This included planning trips/site visits with our exhibitor partners and host city planning committee; venue selection for our large networking events; planning for and recruitment of keynote speakers; outreach to local celebrities for their involvement in our event; [and] local community attendee outreach.”

► **WALKER:** “We hosted an exhibitor FAM for their top exhibitors and staff, showing them several venues and restaurants, as well as giving them a tour of our city. We also provided unlimited site visits for the planner before their event.”

HELP ON SITE:

► **O’NEIL:** “The VisitDallas team was there with us every step of the way, each and every



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ASIS opening luncheon with celebrity speaker, Mark Cuban

► **EVENT:** ASIS International Annual Seminar and Exhibits
 ► **LOCATION:** Dallas, Texas
 ► **THE PLAYERS:**
Peter O’Neil, CEO
Ron Rosenbaum, chief global marketing and business development officer, ASIS International
Heather Walker, director of client experience, VisitDallas

supplemental insurance, put together this conference for 700 people from its offices across the United States.

PLANNING PARTNERSHIP:

► **MOORE:** “Cindy’s enthusiasm and passion about Monaco won me over. I had expressed my concerns about taking a large group to Europe, and she helped me overcome those fears by getting me the information needed. Shortly after that, I pitched the idea to the [company] president and that was that. Cindy kept in contact with me throughout the entire process.”

► **HODDESON:** “We were able to help recommend appropriate properties based on the size of the group and that they had

day of the event [and were] prepared to jump in whenever we needed them.”

► **WALKER:** “We were basically part of their staff once the event was here. We helped them set up and place items in their chairs for 3,500 people before their luncheon, after the morning general session, because it was a tight turnaround.”

success. I give VisitDallas a lot of credit for that outcome.”

► **WALKER:** “This event was a home run for our city. We, as a CVB, held daily conference calls with the planner to tie up any loose ends. This, I believe, helped make it a success.”

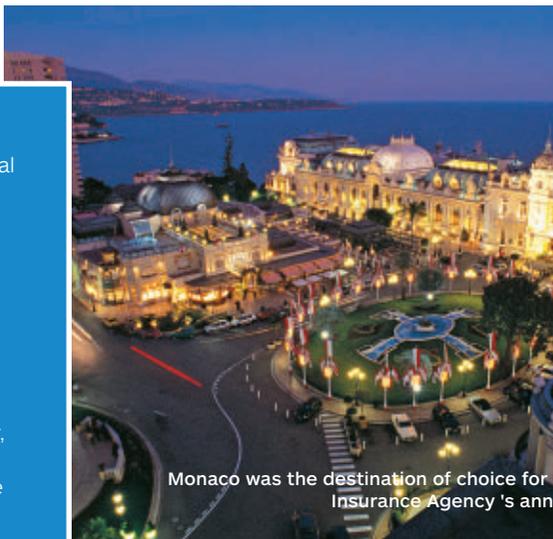
END RESULT:

► **O’NEIL:** “We were very concerned about a range of issues potentially impacting our event related to the recent hurricanes. However, they were a true partner to our organization as we got closer to our arrival and ultimately, our event was a huge

HEALTHMARKETS INSURANCE AGENCY ANNUAL CONFERENCE

HealthMarkets, a distribution company that specializes in health, Medicare, life and

► **EVENT:** HealthMarkets Insurance Agency Annual Conference
 ► **LOCATION:** Monaco
 ► **THE PLAYERS:**
Kelly Moore, director of contests and recognition, HealthMarkets Insurance Agency
Cindy Hoddeson, director, North America, Monaco Government Tourist Office



Monaco was the destination of choice for Healthmarkets Insurance Agency 's annual conference



HealthMarkets' top performers get behind the wheel of a Ferrari on Monaco drive tour



Joy P

May 15 at 9:07pm

Time to raise a glass and toast an amazing year. Gotta admit, luxe surroundings and VIP service is even better when you know you earned it. Cheers! [#BestMeetingEver](#) [#OrlandoMeeting](#)



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not previously been overseas. We sent her an extensive list of activities people could participate in during their free time. Kelly later listened to a destination webinar we presented. The Monaco Government Tourist Office also committed to offsetting the cost of a reception held in Monaco based on the number of room nights.”

HELP ON SITE:

► **MOORE:** “I relied on the tourism department for many things. Cindy provided tons of collateral on the destination that I could share with my attendees; I used this for my event mobile app and printed materials to help my attendees prepare for the event and during the event.”

END RESULT:

► **MOORE:** “The success rate of this event was our highest ever. We had 70 percent of our attendees extend their stay and travel all around Europe. This is the highest ever. I believe it was largely due to the detailed information provided to them far in advance that helped them plan their travel and put their minds at ease about the destination. Cindy made this easy for me. She provided me with a wealth of information and resources. She saved me time and money. I couldn’t have done it without her.”

► **HODDESON:** “Our open communication contributed to the success [of the conference]. We helped bridge the gap concerning cultural differences.”

NATIONAL AUTOMOBILE DEALERS ASSOCIATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE

This U.S.-based association chose Banff for its 2016 meeting of 325 people, which took place at the Fairmont Banff Springs. Attendees gathered to discuss industry topics and participate in a variety of outside activities.

PLANNING PARTNERSHIP:

► **GOLDFINE:** “Travel Alberta gave me a great introduction to options in our

surrounding area so I could pass along that information to attendees. Travel Alberta was my initial point of contact to help scout out venues for offsite group programming.”

► **KNUDSON:** “One of the key benefits Travel Alberta offers is air support, so a planner may see firsthand the options in our province under consideration for their meetings or incentive. We also help in navigating Canada’s International Events and Convention Services Program (IECSP), freight movement best practices, the tax rebate program, spousal programs and pre- and post-meeting itineraries.”

HELP ON SITE:

► **GOLDFINE:** “Travel Alberta provided me with online marketing materials, including videos, to encourage registration and help attendees navigate the area.”

► **KNUDSON:** “We work in partnership with our provincial DMOs, such as Edmonton Tourism, Banff and Lake Louise Tourism and Meetings and Conventions

Calgary, so planners are connected with myriad resources when working with Travel Alberta to make their jobs easier and their meetings more successful. If by chance the DMO cannot assist with a certain request a meeting planner has, chances are they know someone in their location that can!”

END RESULT:

► **GOLDFINE:** “Our conference was wildly successful in Banff. Travel Alberta was extremely professional, with very punctual and thorough responses throughout the entire process.”

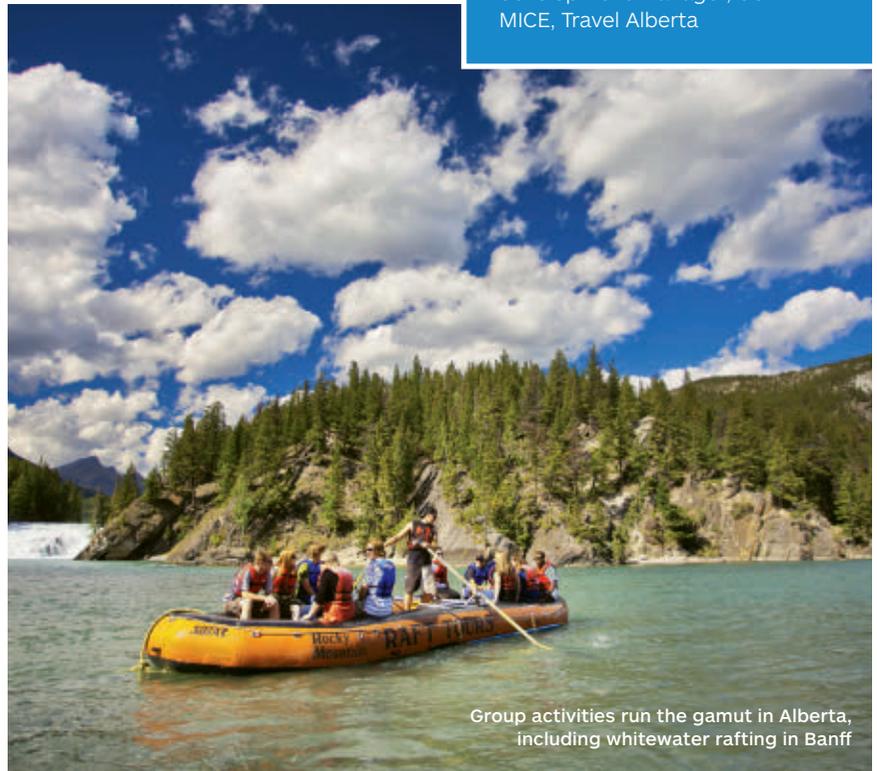
► **EVENT:** National Automobile Dealers Association Annual Conference

► **LOCATION:** Banff, Alberta

► **THE PLAYERS:**

Jill Goldfine, ATAE manager, member services and events, National Automobile Dealers Association, Tysons, Virginia

Kyla Knudson, business development manager, USA MICE, Travel Alberta



Group activities run the gamut in Alberta, including whitewater rafting in Banff

ROCK 'N' ROLL SAN JOSE HALF MARATHON

A 20,000-person athletic competition and health and wellness event, the Rock 'n' Roll San Jose Half Marathon included a fitness expo component at the San Jose McEnery Convention Center.

PLANNING PARTNERSHIP:

► SANDS: "We see Team San Jose as a local partner and an integral part of our team. In the early years of our partnership, we leaned on Team San Jose mostly for logistics. As we enter our 13th year of working with Team San Jose, we lean on them more for marketing ideas and specific destination assets to share and help us bring more people to the great city of San Jose."

► SCHATZEL: "Team San Jose assisted



San Jose's local flavor enhances the attendee experience

with public relations and marketing services, by providing web placements, banner ads, hosting press events and distributing media releases."

- EVENT: Rock 'n' Roll San Jose Half Marathon
- LOCATION: San Jose, California
- THE PLAYERS:

Bekah Sands, senior event manager, Rock 'n' Roll San Jose Half Marathon

Kyle Schatzel, communications manager, Team San Jose

Collaboration that Makes Events Sing



William Lewis dances to the beat of his own banjo. In his role as the executive director of PineCone in Raleigh, N.C., he preserves and protects blues, bluegrass and other forms of traditional music. And that's not all. He helps nonprofits like the International Bluegrass Music Association make the most out of meetings and events.

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HELP ON SITE:

► **SANDS:** “Team San Jose is always eager and willing to help when little hurdles come up [during] event week. Over the four days we spend setting up for the race and hosting our health and fitness expo, we have a designated event manager on site during all hours to assist with any of our issues and needs.”

► **SCHATZEL:** “Our event services team assisted with all aspects of the planning process that were taking place in the convention center, and also assisted on citywide opportunities. Team San Jose assisted with space planning, logistics, F&B and security ... [and] also staffed an information booth on the tradeshow floor. We assign each convention with an event services manager, and after the conference, the event services manager met to discuss what was a success and what could be improved on for future years.”

END RESULT:

► **SANDS:** “One of the greatest developments in our partnership with Team San Jose has been working with their marketing and public relations teams to help us with our local, regional, and marketing strategies. Their knowledge and commitment to our shared goals have helped us focus our marketing budget where it would be most impactful.”

► **SCHATZEL:** “Some of the key factors in the success of the event had to do with [our] creating an ongoing dialogue with the client, listening to their goals and accomplishing their vision.”

**ANNUAL MEETING OF THE
CRANE CERTIFICATION
ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA**

This annual meeting brought 60 upper- and middle-level association leaders to the Sheraton Puerto Rico Hotel & Casino.

PLANNING PARTNERSHIP:

► **BERGER:** “We had a good idea about which hotels we wanted to send the RFP



Private event in Puerto Rico

[request for proposal] to before we engaged Aileen. But it was fortunate we spoke with her, because she added some that we’d missed. When it was time for our client to take a look at the properties, she offered assistance to put together the meet and greet, and the transfers from the airport to see the hotels that were on the short list. They also offered additional services to help promote the event.”

► **LARACUENTE:** “We sourced the RFP and followed up with the hotels on his list to make sure they completed the hotel bid sheet the client provided by his deadline. We also offered a promotion we had at the time, called ‘Escape the Meeting Blah!’, providing the group with \$15 per room night credit to be used toward a Meet Puerto Rico member service like transportation or F&B.”

HELP ON SITE:

► **BERGER:** “They offered a plethora of creative resources. They provided materials for our client to have at the registration desk. They offered to be really helpful ambassadors for the client. And they introduced the client to supplier members that were not hotels — printing companies, decorators — who might bring additional value to the event.”

► **EVENT:** Annual meeting of the Crane Certification Association of America

► **LOCATION:** San Juan, Puerto Rico

► THE PLAYERS:

Jeff Berger, president and CEO, Conference Planning Resources, Naperville, Illinois

Aileen Laracunte, national sales director, Puerto Rico Convention Bureau (Meet Puerto Rico)

END RESULT:

► **BERGER:** “The overall feedback was very positive. The destination as a whole was a strong draw for attendance.” In the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, Berger said that working with a strong DMO is even more important. “We’re booking three, four years out now, and we’re asking if [clients] would like to add San Juan to the mix and help the community, and the response has been overwhelmingly positive.”

► **LARACUENTE:** “Meet Puerto Rico has always prided ourselves on our honesty and transparency — as such, we are a trusted partner in the industry. We are here to provide clients with up-to-date information from government officials and our members on the progress and status of their entity [in situations such as Hurricane Maria], like updates on hotels, airport and attractions.” ♦