

We BUILT IT and They Are COMING.

When the new GICC welcomed its first visitors in March 2003, the reviews were rave. Meeting professionals and casual observers alike pronounced the facility an artistic and architectural marvel and applauded it for being as functionally impressive as it was visually compelling. But reviews don't book meetings or put people in the exhibit hall. Now that it was built ... would they come?

TWO YEARS LATER, the facility continues to please its owners, the City of College Park, as well as those who have booked and are now re-booking the GICC for trade shows, meetings and social events. Complemented by a staff that matches the elegance of the building with a strong service commitment, the GICC exceeded projections for bookings in fiscal 2004 with more than half a million attendees and nearly 500 events and is on pace to increase those numbers by about 20 percent in 2005 — at a time when the facility business is characterized as in decline, with too many buildings competing for too few events.

GICC Executive Director Hugh Austin credits a “scatter-shot” marketing plan for much of the early success.

“With the largest, most elegant ballroom in Georgia, the GICC lends itself as well to a wedding reception as it does to an 800-booth trade show. We have hosted consumer shows and religious and fraternal groups. We’ve served national corporate meetings and a diverse group of local Atlanta clubs. They all benefit from excellent quality in venue, service, food and beverage.”

“We’ve enjoyed the new facility,” noted Susan Hudson, director of event management for Delta Air Lines, which has held a variety of local and system-wide meetings and events at the GICC. “With areas for general sessions, meeting rooms and dining, it has everything we need — and all on one level. We’re very impressed with the staff and food.”

“We appreciate its proximity to the airport,” pointed out Tina Brown, the director of education and meetings for the Wholesale Florist & Florist Supplier Association, which held its Floral EXPO at the GICC in October 2004. “The free shuttles to and from the airport and to and from the hotels made transportation very easy and cost-effective for our attendees.”

FROM FUNCTIONALITY TO FANTASTIC FOOD

Despite the lack of hotels on GICC property, trade and public shows attracting large numbers of out-of-town exhibitors and attendees find the local hotel situation not just acceptable but inviting. Recently more than 7,000 attendees from 44 countries and 50 U.S. states settled into the GICC for the International Window Coverings EXPO. Attendees roundly applauded the show’s producer, Grace McNamara Inc., for selecting the GICC — “a superb facility for this show,” wrote one exhibitor.

Trade shows like the Window Coverings EXPO comment on the functionality of the building. “They like the way loading docks are positioned at the rear entrance of each section of the floor, the unobstructed aisles, the dedicated show manager’s offices on the trade show floor, the location of the cafes,” Austin said. “And they like having so many hotels to choose from — all the top brands, all within less than a five-minute shuttle ride of the facility.”

“Whether you’re staging a trade show, corporate meeting or social event, whether you’re in Atlanta or bringing people here from around the world, we’ve designed the GICC to be your best choice now and long into the future.”

— Hugh Austin,
GICC Executive Director



The GICC hosts many diverse events, from trade shows and events to meetings, dinners — even weddings.

A unique approach to foodservice enhances the appeal of the building and the quality of service. Long before the GICC opened, management determined that the surroundings demanded more than the typical institutional provider, so the GICC contracted with Atlanta’s leading caterer, Proof of the Pudding, for all food and beverage service — from elegant special event dinners to the trade show floor cafes.

SUCCESS THROUGH SERVICE

Still, Austin emphasizes service over the building and its amenities. And, more than anything, organizers and attendees compliment the GICC’s supportive, eager staff.

“It starts with every manager being involved in taking care of the customer,” he explained. “We meet the people and help them get the most out of our building.”

With such a notable start, the GICC looks forward to enhancing its offerings soon. Construction plans for a people-mover directly from the airport are already in the works. In 2006, construction begins on the first of four major hotels on GICC property. Once the hotels are operating, the GICC will consider an extension of the building on its west side.

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RACE MCNAMARA, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF GRACE MCNAMARA INC., understands that, even in the dynamic window covering industry, producers of trade shows must work to keep events fresh and relevant for attendees. Accordingly, her company brought the annual International Window Coverings EXPO to Atlanta in 2005 for the first time in eight years.

Grace McNamara Inc. produces the EXPO, the largest educational event for the window covering industry. And though first held in Chicago, The EXPO has since become a fixture in eastern cities. After holding the show for three successful years in Baltimore — the 2004 show posted the highest attendance numbers in five years — Grace McNamara Inc. opted for a change.

“Baltimore was a great location,” said McNamara, “drawing from so many cities in close geographic proximity, but after three years in the same city we wanted to freshen up the show — attract some new exhibitors and attendees — and Atlanta is a very popular draw.” In fact, in addition to hosting the EXPO this

year, the city — strong in the housing and building markets — secured one of Grace McNamara Inc.’s regional educational shows held throughout the year.

Once show organizers decided to move the show to Atlanta, they scouted facilities. “The City of College Park asked us to look at the GICC,” said McNamara, “and we saw immediate advantages: The facility was large enough for our purposes but still provided a more intimate setting, on one floor, with all of the latest technology. And it’s beautiful. We never forget that the EXPO is a design show, so the appearance of the facility is very important.”

How did exhibitors and attendees initially respond to the choice? “Frankly, not everyone immediately saw the convenience of the airport location, mainly because they hadn’t been to the area in a while and hadn’t seen the changes,” said McNamara. “The feedback, however, has been overwhelmingly positive — our best ever.” In fact, 50 percent of this year’s exhibitors have already committed to next year’s show.

INTERNATIONAL WINDOW COVERINGS EXPO

2005

SECRETS TO SUCCESS

Apart from the Atlanta location, industry trends have contributed to the increasing success of the EXPO. The housing and building markets have enjoyed robust growth even when the overall U.S. economy has struggled in recent years. “We keep hearing projections that the housing and building markets will flatten out — and it could happen — but we have yet to notice it,” said McNamara. Consumer trends, such as more and larger windows in homes, also benefit the windows market. Technology has fueled the industry as well, with advancements in green design, sustainability, building and architecture. In short, choices in window coverings are booming to meet increased demand.

But perhaps educational opportunities provided at the EXPO contribute most to the success — and the relevance — of the show. As in past years, educational programming at this year’s EXPO remained popular, with many sessions selling out well in advance. Attendees receive credit toward certification as part of the *Window Fashions* Certification Program™ (WFCP), which awards five levels of certification for industry professionals, including designers, manufacturers, workroom and installers. Grace McNamara Inc. is an authorized provider of Continuing Education Units (CEUs), so all seminars the company produces are CEU accredited — some even apply to state licensing. Through the program, professionals keep up with industry developments, round out their knowledge and skills, and demonstrate a level of education and expertise to consumers and others within the industry.



TOP: Grace McNamara, President & CEO, Grace McNamara Inc.

BOTTOM: Suzanne Worthley, Director of Education and Special Events, Grace McNamara Inc.



Window on the

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— Grace McNamara,
President & CEO, Grace McNamara Inc.
Producer, International Window Coverings EXPO

“We began in publishing, but education is our cornerstone,” said Suzanne Worthley, Director of Education and Special Events for Grace McNamara Inc.

“In person, in our magazines and online, we’re one of the largest producers of education programs in the interior design industry.” The company recently launched a new website, wfcppro.com, where professionals in the window covering industry can find educational opportunities and track their CEU and WFCP™ credits.

Grace McNamara founded Grace McNamara Inc. in 1986 with the purchase of *Window Fashions* magazine. The company now publishes *Wall Fashions*, *Fine Furnishings International*, *American Cake Decorating* and *loopreports*, in addition to *Window Fashions*, and produces the Window Fashions Regional Tour as well as the Window Coverings EXPO.

ABOVE: Attendees and exhibitors exchange ideas, observe trends and take advantage of educational opportunities.



Lower right photo: © XXXXXXXXXX Above remaining photos: © Warren Bond Photography

face to face



John Baragona
PUBLISHER, EVENT SOLUTIONS

The Main Event

Interviews with exhibition and meeting industry experts

A+ recently talked about event industry developments and trends with John Baragona, publisher of Event Solutions, the leading information franchise for the special event industry. The Idea Factory, Event Solutions' annual event, takes place August 22-25 at the GICC.

A+. More and more frequently, we hear references to the event industry. What exactly does the event industry encompass?

BARAGONA. The event industry is enormous, but it's usually considered in terms of the smaller industries that comprise it: catering, hospitality, entertainment, etc. I estimate more than half a million people actually work in the event industry — 40,000 in catering alone. Event Solutions attempts to communicate with and provide information to the entire event industry.

A+. Trade shows seem to have rebounded since the events of 2001. How do you characterize the growth of the event industry during the past 12 months?

BARAGONA. Based on our annual survey of event and meeting professionals, which we've been conducting for the last five years, 2004 was a very good year for the event industry. Client budgets were up, supplier revenues were up, profits were up, the number of events was up, supplier inventories increased. Salaries for event and meeting professionals were a little flat, but we expect them to catch up to the growth we witnessed this year.

We all know how devastated the industry was by 9/11 and the two-year recession. But we'd witnessed a downtrend in the industry even before then, with decreasing numbers of trade shows. Things started turning around in 2003, and the industry really gained momentum in 2004. We're seeing similar trends for 2005, which has started strong. If the economy stays on track, I expect another good year.

A+. What specific areas of the event business have shown the most growth?

BARAGONA. Corporations drove industry growth in 2004 as their profit levels recovered. Event spending for corporate America goes hand in hand with the economy, but corporations continue to increase their appreciation of events as a tool in their overall company strategy, particularly in marketing, sales and employee appreciation.

On the supplier side, event rental companies had a banner year. Average gross revenues increased more than 30 percent and profits almost doubled over 2003. Event sites also had a great year. They hosted more events than in any of the past five years, and gross revenues rose considerably. Their profit margins were a little off in 2004, but that was probably due to incentive offers and increased staff levels. We expect profit levels to increase in 2005 as they reduce incentives and maintain staff levels.

Technical support — lighting, audio visual, staging — also experienced strong revenue growth, showing a 25 percent increase in sales revenue. But like event sites, their profit margins were off slightly. That's typical for rapidly growing companies as they learn to manage the new volume.

A+. Are more corporations looking at the whole events arena in deciding where to spend their marketing dollars?

BARAGONA. Without question. Every year since we began tracking corporate spending on events, we've seen their respect for events increase. Sixty-five percent of all corporations responding to our survey said events are either very important or critical to their company's overall marketing strategy, up from 49 percent just two years ago. Fifty-seven percent of corporate planners also said that company management "completely appreciates" the value of special events in accomplishing the company goals, compared to just 44 percent two years ago.

(continued on page 4)

World

A View of the Window Covering Industry





culinary arts

First Impressions

THE IMPORTANCE OF DÉCOR for an event can't be overstated. As the saying goes, you never get a second chance to make a first impression. Yet décor is rarely the first thing event planners consider. In fact, it may be among the last accounted for. When allocating a budget, we often emphasize the venue, the theme, the food. And once we've covered these areas, we may have little if anything left over for flowers, centerpieces, special linens, large focal pieces, etc. But in placing less importance on décor, do we risk compromising that first impression?

"Ideally, the facility and the food become part of the décor," said Lejla Islamovic, Catering Sales Manager for Proof of the Pudding at the GICC. "Oftentimes, this isn't as expensive as you might think. We've worked with budgets of \$50,000 and \$500. The key is to be creative and open-minded."

Clients with larger budgets sometimes bring in their own designers or ask GICC staff to recommend a designer among the many with whom they've worked in the past. Sometimes GICC staff and clients work together to design an event themselves.

Furnishings and large décor items make a big impact, but they can also be expensive. Meanwhile, drapes, centerpieces, linens and lighting can create as great an effect — sometimes a greater one — and often for

Drapes, centerpieces, linens and lighting can create as great an effect as expensive furnishings and large décor items, often for less money.



less money, especially when the GICC provides some of these items. "Effective use of color alone accomplishes so much," said Islamovic.

Some other recommendations from Proof of the Pudding:

Start with linens: Linens on tables and the buffet carry the greatest visual weight.

Don't forget centerpieces: Centerpieces can cost as little as \$10 per table and provide an important finishing touch to the table as well as an opportunity to reinforce an event theme. Likewise, a dramatic piece on the buffet or an ice sculpture — generally available for between \$250 and \$500 — draws attention to attractive food presentation, making it part of the décor.

Look at lighting: The right lighting literally transforms a space, adding color, drama and a sense of movement. And inexpensive gels and gobos create a number of colors and patterns — and can be used alone to create a unique environment. "For a wedding-related event, we turned an exhibit hall into a cathedral just by projecting Gothic windows onto a wall," said Islamovic. "We've also projected floor patterns and other designs in keeping with a theme."

Keep track of trends: Styles change. Stay current or risk looking dated. Proof of the Pudding and GICC staff attend many events and industry functions to stay ahead of the curve.

And Islamovic added one more recommendation: Never neglect the food. "I may be biased given my job," she laughed, "but if décor creates a first impression, food often creates the lasting one."

Atlanta's best caterer serves GICC guests

Face to Face (continued from page 3)

A+. What are some other trends in the event industry?

BARAGONA. Events are going mainstream as they become more of a science and as marketing and advertising firms enter the mix. And, as with everything else, technology plays a big role as it becomes more affordable and more accessible for events of all sizes. The size of shows is also being debated right now. Large shows are great for economies of scale and for those who want everything in one place, but you lose the personal touch and maybe some of the impact.

A+. Knowing the event industry as you do, why did you choose to hold this year's Idea Factory in Atlanta?

BARAGONA. We chose Atlanta as a very good "event city." The event community here is very strong, and they really lobbied to bring us back to Atlanta. We held our Expo here in 2000 and had a very good experience, so we always knew we'd come back. Plus Atlanta's central location is within reasonable driving distance of a lot of people. There are many event and meeting professionals in Atlanta alone, and we hope they'll all come out and enjoy what will be a tremendous conference.

We opted to hold the Idea Factory at the GICC after visiting the new facility. The GICC is large enough to support us, but our audience of 2,000 event professionals won't get lost like they might in Las Vegas. Perhaps most importantly, the GICC staff understands our audience and convinced us that they know how to take care of them.

Event Solutions, the leading information franchise for the special events industry, serves the information, educational and marketing needs of organizations and professionals in the event and meeting industries. Event Solutions consists of three separate components: Event Solutions monthly magazine, the Idea Factory annual expo and Event Solutions Institute (ESI), the educational division soon available online.

focus



By Hugh Austin
GICC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

From the GICC's executive director

EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS: A Commitment to Service

IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY, the name Steve Wynn brings many images to mind: gambling, luxury — even extravagance. But one quality this great icon of our industry possesses is ultimate hospitality. Steve has and always will set the standard of excellent customer service. He's the complete package when it comes to taking care of his guests. He leaves nothing to chance and never fails to amaze and wow them.

How does he accomplish this and what lessons can we learn from him? It starts with presentation and the old adage that nothing is more important than a first impression — that first contact that sets up the experience. Wynn takes every opportunity and probably devotes every waking moment to thinking of how to take care of his guests and promoting his service to the customer. Once he gets them in the door, he bowls them over with excellent customer service and the 'wow factor' that all of his ventures project so well.

How simple is that? At the GICC, we take every opportunity to promote our service in everything we do. We begin every conversation with everyone we talk to by asking, "Have you been to the new convention center by Atlanta's airport?" We get them in the door by convincing them our facility is the best in the market and then wow them with the beautiful and unique Georgia International Convention Center.

Then the serious work begins: delivering excellent service and providing an enjoyable, efficient and memorable experience for our guests. We remind ourselves every day that we are hospitality professionals, responsible for providing an enjoyable time, efficiently and on time, in an outstanding space that is in excellent condition. Doing this consistently, we accomplish our goal of delivering excellent service.

The Marriott Hotels have found the answer for how to provide excellent service with their current service campaign of 'WIT': 'Whatever It Takes' to achieve our goal of having every guest leave satisfied. Our partners over at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport sum up the goal of delivering excellent service in their well-thought-out mission statement; "To be the world's best airport by exceeding customer expectations."

If we ultimately impress our clients, guests and patrons with our service, exceeding what they expect in a convention center, then we can expect to see them again and again.

WE REMIND OURSELVES EVERY DAY THAT WE ARE HOSPITALITY PROFESSIONALS, RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING AN ENJOYABLE TIME, EFFICIENTLY AND ON TIME, IN AN OUTSTANDING SPACE THAT IS IN EXCELLENT CONDITION.



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