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# MeetingNews

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## Destination Insider: *New England*

more people walking around at lunchtime, for example. It also gives us a more corporate feel; it gives Providence a certain cachet to have these big firms here. It puts us on the same playing field as Pittsburgh and Charlotte and other places that have always had a corporate presence.

**Q** The Rhode Island Convention Center, which opened in 1993, has been derided by some local critics as a white elephant. How do you view the facility's future?

**A** I don't think you can point to a single convention center in the country that's profitable. The role of the convention center is to create economic activity and by that standard we are successful and becoming more successful. Groups like the Society of Molecular Imaging and the Academy of Molecular Imaging bring thousands of delegates into the city.

I think the fact that hoteliers continue to invest in Providence shows that the industry has faith in the destination. What we're seeing now is that groups

are putting us on their consideration list, groups such as the ones we're hosting now would not be here without those new hotel rooms. [Surge-protection device maker APC], a Rhode Island company, recently had its annual sales meeting in Providence. The convention center has been here 12 years, and the company had never done that before.

**Q** How do you stay relevant and competitive with Boston for meetings and conventions?

**A** We like to say that we have all of the amenities of a first-tier city, but we're so much more intimate and charming. The key for us is to impress upon our clients that when you hold a 1,000-person meeting in Boston, you might be one of 10 groups in the city that week. But in Providence, when you hold a meeting of that size, you're the big fish. We can offer a certain level of service you might not get elsewhere, like welcome banners on the streets and an on-site service desk. We really roll out the red carpet for any group but especially one with 1,000 or 1,500 attendees. □

## Hyatt Regency Newport Sets November Overhaul

The Hyatt Regency Newport, the largest hotel in the Rhode Island resort city, will begin a \$30-million renovation project in November. It will redo all 264 guest rooms and suites, 75,000 sq ft of indoor and outdoor meeting and event space, the Stillwater spa, its restaurant, lounge areas, and its lobby by March 2008.

## Newport Introduces Trio of Waterfront Venues

The historic Christie's Restaurant, a seaside dining hall, may have vanished from the Newport waterfront, but meeting planners will be glad to know that a new event venue is taking its place.

The new 41 Degrees North, on Thames Street, has more than 9,000 sq ft of event space. An outdoor pier, featuring a lounge, bar pavilion and patio, and landscaped garden, can host groups of up to 400 for cocktails or 150 seated, while a pair of nautical-themed

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indoor event facilities with private decks can accommodate 150 standing or 70 for dinner.

"On the pavilion near the dock or in the lounge, guests feel as if they are on the stern of a boat, surrounded on three sides by water," said Dave Schultz of DAS Architects, the Philadelphia firm-based that designed the property. Future plans include a boutique hotel, a high-end restaurant, and corporate meeting space.

The venue joins Belle Mer, a Longwood Events facility that opened last spring on Goat Island offering 14,000 sq ft of event space and six acres of outdoor terraces, and Regatta Place, a tented event site at the Goat Island Marina that can host seated events of up to 150 attendees and offers outings on the 75-passenger schooner *Aurora*.

Said Tim Walsh, VP of sales for the Newport County Convention & Visitors Bureau, "Whether it be the simple chic and understated glamour of Belle Mer, the nautical elegance of Regatta Place, or the extraordinary resort atmosphere of 41 Degrees North, it is clear meeting planners can create the perfect event in Newport." □

## Westin Stamford to be IACC-Certified Hilton

Big changes are in store for the 484-room Westin Stamford, which is converting its former IBM Learning Center to an International Association of Conference Centers (IACC)-certified facility. The Stamford, CT, property will be rebranded as the Stamford Hilton in February 2008.

The conference center will be a distinctive 7,200-sq-ft part of the hotel's 45,000 sq ft of meeting facilities, which include a 10,200-sq-ft ballroom (the largest non-casino one in Connecticut). Meeting IACC standards meant a complete refurbishment, including incorporating AV equipment into each meeting room, said Gary Mitchell, director of sales and marketing. "We're targeting the same groups and offering them this facility, all at one price per person, including all equipment and food and beverage," he said.

The facility is part of the hotel's \$30-million renovation that also will revamp all meeting facilities and public spaces—right down to the parking garage, Mitchell noted. □ —Section written by Bob Curley

## Newport Gives Groups Warm Winter Welcome

The Newport County Convention & Visitors Bureau is offering a winter value-added meetings promotion that includes a welcome reception and upgraded guest rooms and amenities for groups with minimum 20 rooms at participating meetings hotels between Nov. 12, 2007 and April 30, 2008.

The reception includes hors d'oeuvres and an open bar. Planners receive a free spa treatment, and attendees get coupon books worth \$500. Participating properties include the Hyatt Regency, Newport Marriott, Hotel Viking, Newport Harbor Hotel & Marina, Castle Hill Inn & Resort, and OceanCliff resort.

For details, visit [www.gonewport.com](http://www.gonewport.com).