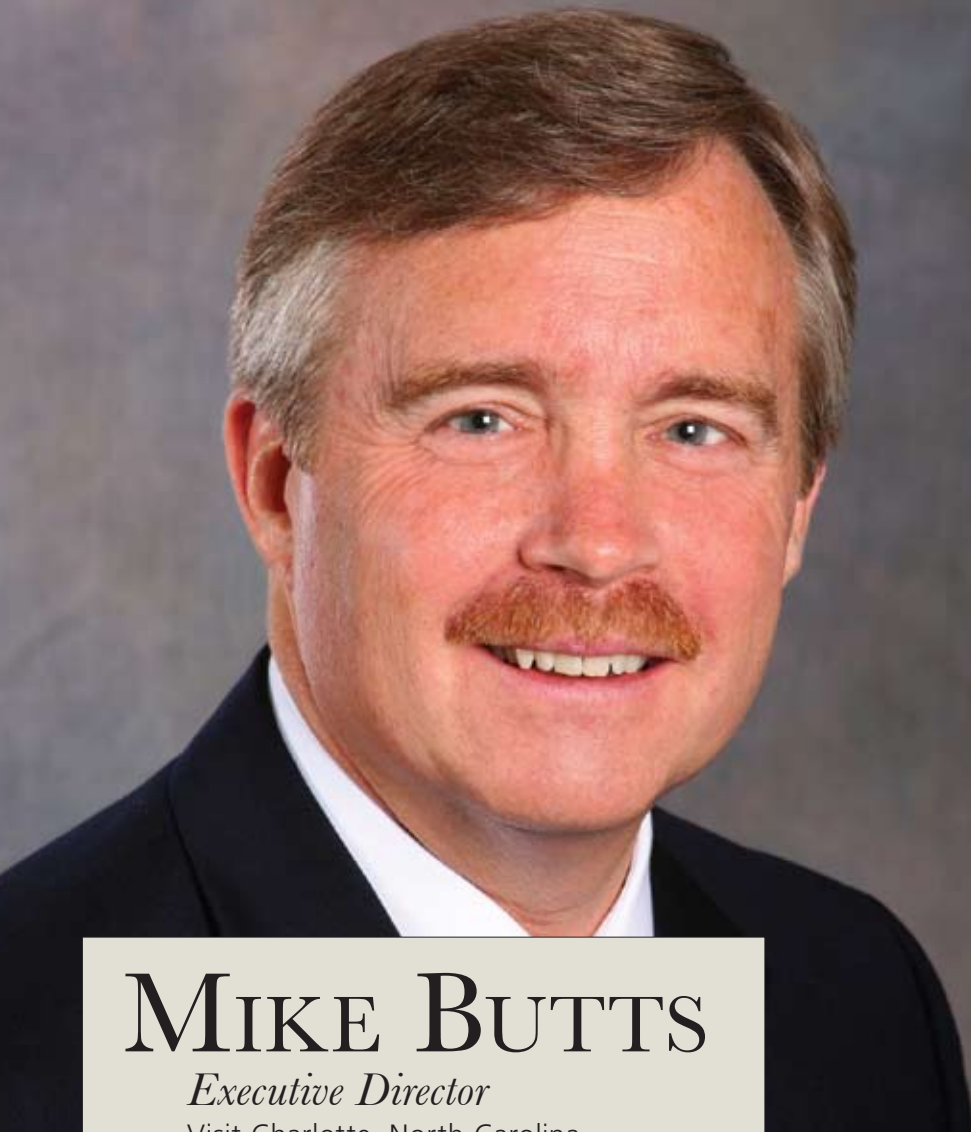


A  
INDUSTRY  
LEADERS  
2009



"I'm proud to promote a city like Charlotte where smart development and foresight have made the region an unbeatable value for meeting planners and an engaging destination for attendees."

# MIKE BUTTS

*Executive Director*

Visit Charlotte, North Carolina

"Mike Butts is a true advocate for travel and tourism. He is an active board member of DMAI and has been instrumental in moving industry initiatives forward and creating new educational opportunities for meeting professionals."

—*Michael D. Gehrisch,*  
*President and CEO, DMAI*

**Background:**

A leader in the tourism and hospitality industry, Mike Butts oversees operations for a team comprised of more than 40 professionals dedicated to promoting the region as a destination for tourists, a host city for meetings and conventions, and a site for sporting events. A former vice president of marketing for Signature Hospitality Resources, Butts has served a number of industry-related

organizations throughout his career. He notably served as a board member for Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI), president of the Destination Marketing Association of North Carolina and a board member for the NC Travel and Tourism Coalition.

**Advice to planners:**

"Use your DMO to the fullest extent," says Butts. "That means sitting down with them and sharing what the goals of your meeting are and including them as a partner in your meeting's success. Destination Marketing Organization's have relationships and access to resources that don't show up in collateral and general sales presentations. Let them be a part of your team from the beginning and you'll really get added value you can't get anywhere else."



“For more than a century, the name Biltmore has been synonymous with a world-class reputation for hospitality, guest service and attention to detail. Travel and tourism are affected by so many factors, yet our guests and our community continue to support our efforts to preserve the estate for the enjoyment of future generations.”

## BILL CECIL

*President & CEO*

The Biltmore Company, North Carolina

“Bill Cecil Jr. is one of the most dynamic leaders I know. The Biltmore Company has navigated these challenging economic times [under his leadership] ... with vision and courage, bringing to life fresh guest experiences with the stories that make them personal, endearing and unforgettable. From an epic new outdoor venue to the opening of new rooms that illuminate our precious history, Bill’s innovation and inspired progress at Biltmore invigorates our community and paints a vibrant picture for the future.”

— *Kelly Miller, Executive Vice President and Executive Director, Asheville CVB*

### **Background:**

Bill Cecil serves as president and CEO of The Biltmore Company in Asheville, N.C., which owns and operates Biltmore Estate. He is a recent past chair of the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce and has been a board member since 1997. In addition, he has served on the Southeast Tourism Society Board of Directors since 2005. A graduate of the University of Colorado at Boulder, Cecil earned a degree in environmental conservation.

“Our mission to preserve Biltmore as a privately owned, profitable working estate remains the standard for guiding our efforts to enchant guests and to maintain the business of preservation,” Cecil says. “In keeping with our mission and our values, we are extremely proud of receiving Sustainable North Carolina’s Triple Bottom Line Award. This achievement honors Biltmore’s legacy of providing economic opportunities in the region while also improving the environment and quality of life.”

### **Advice to planners:**

“We are delighted to be considered a planning and meeting resource in the Asheville area,” Cecil says. “With facilities such as Inn on Biltmore Estate, Lioncrest, Diana at Biltmore, and our new Antler Hill Village (Spring 2010), we can offer a variety of options to suit even the most specialized and detailed needs of planners and their clients. Biltmore welcomes each opportunity to provide the perfect setting and service customized for your specific needs.”



## ALEX KAPTZAN

*Director of Convention Sales*  
Tampa Bay & Company, Florida

“Alex Kaptzan strengthened Tampa’s position in the primary markets, honing both his team’s focus and the entire Tampa hospitality community toward growing the critical SMERF segment. Kaptzan’s foresight in continued development and expanded reach into the SMERF market has kept Tampa ahead of the curve.”

**Background:**

Alex Kaptzan joined Tampa Bay & Company in March 2006 as director of convention sales. During his time with Tampa Bay & Company, he has served as a board member for the Sales and Marketing Executives International, as well as held memberships in PCMA, MPI, ASAE and SGMP. Before joining Tampa Bay & Company, Kaptzan was director of sales at the Tampa Marriott Waterside Hotel & Marina for more than five years. Alex has 20 years of experience in the hospitality industry, holding several sales positions with corporate managed properties with Hyatt and Hilton since

“Although having set and exceeded many goals in my career, I still feel my greatest accomplishments lie ahead of me,” says Kaptzan. “To say one’s proudest moments are in the past, to me marks the end of an era, and in my opinion there is still so much to be done. I will say I am extremely proud of my relationships with our stakeholders.”

graduating from the hospitality program at Florida International University in 1989.

“Successfully impacting Tampa’s off season is especially satisfying to me,” says Kaptzan. “Through ongoing efforts in changing the paradigm of our partners, we have truly gotten everyone ‘on the same page’ when considering opportunities. From our Tampa Convention Center to our hotel members, from our attractions to meeting service providers, we work in unison when promoting our destination.”

**Advice to planners:**

“The deals are out there, and those that are able to move forward now and secure their dates are the ones that will be in the best position in the future,” Kaptzan says. “Organizations that hesitate, which seemingly the majority are doing now, will potentially miss out on locking in an amazing destination at value rates.”

“One of our biggest accomplishments has been the development of our ‘SpringfieldFIRST’ brand, which reflects the idea that meeting planners should think of Springfield and the Pioneer Valley first when considering an ideally located and highly affordable venue. This brand also demonstrates the fact that Springfield has historically been a city of firsts such as the birthplace of basketball, Dr. Seuss, the first armory and first commercially sold vehicle. We believe it all adds up to a great first choice for any kind of convention, meeting or special event.”



## MARY KAY WYDRA

*President*

Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau, Massachusetts

“Mary Kay Wydra is the Pioneer Valley’s No. 1 cheerleader — a local with a passion for promoting the region so that visitors can experience all of the ‘attractions and distractions’ the area has to offer.”

### **Background:**

As president of the Greater Springfield CVB, Mary Kay Wydra oversees a membership-based, nonprofit destination marketing organization that is dedicated to promoting Massachusetts’ Pioneer Valley as an attractive site for meetings and conventions, group tours and leisure travel. In addition to her duties with the bureau, she is actively involved in a number of statewide committees and organizations, including the Governor’s Advisory Council on Travel & Tourism, the Governor’s Creative Economy Council and the NCAA Division II Men’s Basketball Championship Local Executive Committee. Wydra also chairs the 13 Regional Tourist Councils within the commonwealth.

### **Advice to planners:**

“If you’d like to be treated like a ‘big fish in a small pond,’ come to Springfield, Mass., and the beautiful MassMutual Center, our state-of-the-art convention and exhibition facility. We offer hospitality like no other venue, along with outstanding hotels, restaurants, and unique cultural and entertainment attractions. The Pioneer Valley offers everything you’ll need to host a memorable and highly successful event.”



# MICHAEL J. CARRIER

*President*

Oklahoma City Convention  
& Visitors Bureau

“Oklahoma City has changed tremendously over the past 15 years. Our team continues to be focused on identifying how we can meet the unique needs of each and every group and how those groups can make the most of their visit. I’m proud to have a team of true professionals working with me to represent Oklahoma City and serve our customers.”

**Background:**

Michael J. Carrier has more than 20 years experience in the hospitality industry, working in hotel sales and marketing, convention and visitor bureaus and convention center management. Before joining the Oklahoma City CVB, Carrier was the general manager of the Shreveport Convention Center. Carrier also served as president & CEO of the Knoxville CVB, where he was closely involved in the construction, opening and marketing of the Knoxville Convention Center. He also served on the board of IACVB, now DMAI, and was president of the Carolinas Chapter of MPI.

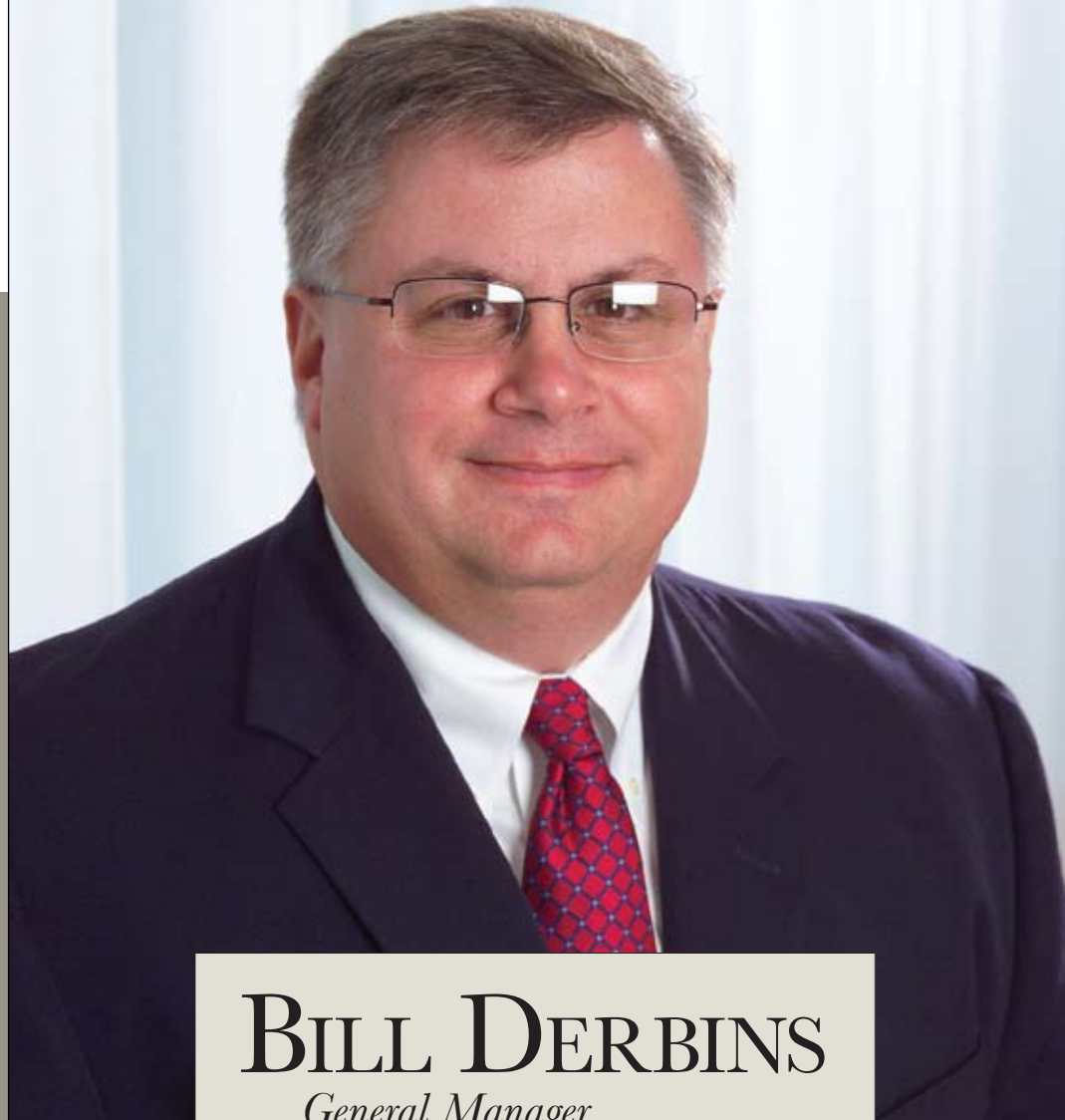
“In 1993, our mayor recommended damming up a river basin, the one we had to mow three times a year,” says Carrier. “The result of that vision is that Oklahoma City is now a U.S. Olympic training center for rowing canoe

and flatwater kayak. This is just one example of the Oklahoma City spirit that continues to produce major, positive results every day.”

**Advice to planners:**

“No matter what your perception is, until you experience a city you don’t really know the reality of that place,” Carrier says. “Here in Oklahoma City, we regularly hear that we have so much more to offer than what people expected. Because Oklahoma City has changed so much in the past decade, we have worked hard to exceed the expectations from previous visits. Like so many cities, we work hard to take care of our clients and customers, but we depend on our customers to give us all the information we need to help them achieve the results they want. By working cooperatively, we regularly exceed their expectations.”

“Planners who visit Branson for the first time are amazed at the variety and the quality of meeting facilities, as well as the variety and quality of shows and attractions that we have to offer. The Hilton Hotels, the Branson Convention Center and Branson Landing are seen as great new amenities to this already dynamic market. From a success standpoint, the Branson Convention Center is exceeding event day expectations with well over 230 event days two years in a row. The center has also experienced a rebooking percentage of well over 25 percent.”



## BILL DERBINS

*General Manager*

Branson Convention Center, Missouri

“Bill Derbins took the reins as general manager of the Branson Convention Center before the facility celebrated its first anniversary. Through his leadership, the convention center has developed a reputation as a first-class, meetings-friendly venue.”

### **Background:**

Arthur William “Bill” Derbins III was named general manager of the Hiltons of Branson in May 2008. Derbins manages the operations of the Branson Convention Center and Hilton’s two hotels, the Hilton Promenade at Branson Landing and the Hilton Branson Convention Center. A 30-year Hilton veteran, Derbins came to Branson from Fort Lauderdale, where he managed a Doubletree hotel, Gallery One Fort Lauderdale, for three years. Other previous Hilton management stops include West Palm Beach, Fla., Orlando, Fla., and Kona, Hawaii.

“Branson has been known as a great tourist destination with family-friendly attractions and shows, but wasn’t really known as a convention/meetings destination. In fact, the CVB had to be trained on its new and expanded role. They needed to develop a new department that would handle the sourcing of large leads as well as the services that would be expected once conventions booked in the market.”

# URSULA L. GRANT

*Association Sales Manager - Myrtle Beach Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, South Carolina*

“In her lengthy tenure with the Myrtle Beach Area CVB, Ursula Grant has developed as a respected industry leader just as the area has developed as an attractive destination — I guess you could say they’ve grown together.”

— *Danna Lilly, Director of Sales, Myrtle Beach Area CVB*

**Background:**

Ursula Grant is responsible for the promotion of the Myrtle Beach area as a convention destination to the association market through direct sales and marketing efforts, including exhibiting at 12 to 14 national and regional trade shows. Grant works closely with meeting planners to coordinate numerous meetings, citywide

conventions and trade shows held in the area throughout the year.

**Advice to planners:**

“We encourage planners to consider the Myrtle Beach Area for future meetings. Myrtle Beach is filled with value, affordability and diverse convention hotels. When all costs are considered, resort destinations can many times be more economical than meeting in a downtown or metro area. There’s no hiding the fact that Myrtle Beach is a resort destination, nor do we want to. There is the perception that the Myrtle Beach area is a vacation or golf destination only. When planners visit and experience Myrtle Beach first hand, then they are able to see all that we have to offer the meeting market.”



“With the state of the economy and difficulties facing the meetings market, the Myrtle Beach CVB strives to stand out,” Grant says. “At the recent Connect Marketplace, the keynote speaker used our money clip giveaway as an example of how to brand and position the Myrtle Beach area in the minds of meeting planners. We could not have asked for a better endorsement and pat on the back.”



“It is important for me to keep the right perspective in my career and personal life. If I don’t set the pace and keep a very positive outlook on the day-to-day tasks as well as the long-term goals, then I cannot expect anyone else to do that. I strive to bring a higher standard to everything I work on and to each and every person I encounter. If we can all work together better, then we will all benefit in a much more constructive way.”

# AVA M. POPE

*Director of Sales - Greensboro Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, North Carolina*

“Ava Pope has led the Greensboro CVB team on a mission to make the most of the one-on-one relationship development with meeting planners. Her expertise and dynamic personality are a winning combination that is paying off for Greensboro.”

— *John Saunders, executive director, National Forum for Black Public Administrators*

**Background:**

A long-time veteran of the hospitality industry, Ava Pope has worked as director of sales with the Greensboro CVB for more than 18 years. She is involved in many professional associations including the National Forum for Black Public Administrators, Society of Governmental Meeting Planners, American Society of Association Executives, Meeting Planners International and Professional Convention

Management Association. She has served on the local organizing committees for numerous conventions and conferences that have met in Greensboro.

**Advice to planners:**

“Don’t overlook Greensboro because you are not familiar with us,” Pope says. “Come and visit, take a tour and let us customize our services to meet your needs. Not everyone knows that Greensboro has a tier-one meeting facility in the Sheraton Greensboro Hotel and Koury Convention Center. Most planners who come to Greensboro are amazed at the great facilities that we have — they are not expecting that in a city the size of Greensboro. Hosting planners onsite certainly makes a huge difference in whether or not they choose Greensboro.”



## DORIS SIMS

*Sales Manager - Greater Lansing Convention & Visitors Bureau, Michigan*

“Doris has been especially helpful with the two events my office is planning. I want to thank her for the efficient, willing manner when helping us research places to utilize in the Lansing area. I told my supervisor your agency was excellent and the meeting with Doris proved that.”

— *Trudy Leitz, USDA, NASS,  
Michigan Field Office*

### Background:

A member of the Greater Lansing Convention & Visitors Bureau (GLCVB) staff since 2007, Doris Sims has more than 20 years of experience in state government. She also served as director of the Greater Lansing African American Health Institute; director of governmental affairs, National Association of Social Workers (NASW-MI); director of legislative affairs, Arthritis Foundation; and Public Sector

Consultants, executive assistant to CEO & Cassopolis Public Schools. Sims’ market segments with the GLCVB are corporate, government, military, fraternal/Greek, multicultural, education and reunions.

A noteworthy success for the GLCVB was its formal accreditation by the Destination Marketing Association International. The GLCVB is the first CVB in Michigan to receive such a designation.

### Advice to planners:

“Never underestimate the value of working with a CVB,” Sims says. “When you meet in Greater Lansing, our dedicated team will operate as an extension of your own staff, committed to helping you have a truly productive and successful event. Also, many of the great services we offer are free of charge.

“What I am most proud of in my role with the GLCVB is the gratification that is felt when our client has received service above and beyond their expectation, and they leave our city feeling like they matter and can honestly say, ‘This was one of the best events we’ve had.’”

## INDUSTRY LEADER

## DENNIS J. ROCHE

*President - Positively Cleveland CVB, Ohio*

“Dennis’ past work outside of hospitality and tourism informs his decisions for championing the industry. His unique perspective makes this DMAI-accredited marketing organization that much more effective at what they do. Dennis always sees the bigger picture and the community and the customers are better for it.”

— *Maura Gast, Immediate Past Chair,  
Destination Marketing Association International*

### Background:

Dennis Roche has been at the helm of Positively Cleveland since 2003. On the boards of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, Cleveland National Air Show and the Greater Cleveland Film and Sports commissions, Roche also served on Medical Mutual of Ohio’s Board of Directors and is a member of the Visiting Committees for the College of Education & Human Services, and

the Levin College of Urban Affairs at Cleveland State University. Prior coming to Positively Cleveland, Roche was CEO of the Greater Cleveland Growth Association. Roche has implemented some big changes — launching a Cleveland Plus regional brand, opening a downtown visitors center, adopting the memorable moniker of Positively Cleveland, and becoming one of the first DMOs accredited by Destination Marketing Association International. Positively Cleveland is now working to maximize the impact of a new medical mart, convention center and a casino.

### Advice to planners:

“Come to a second-tier destination like Cleveland because not only do we have all the big city amenities at affordable prices, but we’ll roll out the red carpet for your group. There’s something to be said for being a bigger fish in a smaller pond.”



“We are an accredited, award-winning bureau, but it’s not about the plaques and certificates. It’s that everyone on our team, from our entirely CMP-certified convention services staff to our hard-working sales team operates at the highest industry standards and continually strives to exceed customer expectations.”

# GINA MINTZER

*Director of Sales* - Albany County Convention & Visitors Bureau, New York

“Gina Mintzer is a dynamic sales representative who truly focuses on her clients. She is willing to share her knowledge, time and creativity to make events unique. She is reliable and so well connected: You can always count on Gina!”

**Background:**

Gina Mintzer, CMP, joined the Albany County Convention & Visitors Bureau in 1998 as the director of sales. In this role, she is the information resource for meeting and event planners and other community partners regarding the hospitality and tourism industry within Albany County, N.Y., the capital region and beyond. Mintzer is considered a very good networker within the industry and the capital region community, with a positive reputation as a motivated, enthusiastic and resourceful professional.

She directs a sales and services staff of five working with Albany County hotels and the entire hospitality community to bring meeting and convention business to Albany. She is involved in a variety of organizations within the industry including the Empire State Society of Association Executives and Meeting Professionals International Northeastern New York chapter, Association of Convention Marketing Executives, New York Society of Association Executives and American Society of Association Executives as well as many local and regional organizations.

**Advice to planners:**

“Ask your CVB for assistance to guide your meeting to success in any city you are planning to visit. Convention and visitors bureaus will enhance your meeting and attendee experience.”



“I am most proud of the times I’ve helped clients out to the point that they feel compelled to send a thank-you note to me and my boss. Oftentimes, those are the easiest clients to please yet it means the most to the success of their meetings, conferences and events. This truly fulfills my purpose of strategically leading others to realize their potential of being economic engines in the communities they serve.”



# TANYA BRAND

*Meeting & Event Promoter* - Warren County Tourism Department, New York

“Tanya Brand, meeting & event promoter for the Lake George Area in New York’s Adirondacks, is a dedicated professional committed to showcasing the unique meeting and event opportunities within her community.”

**Background:**

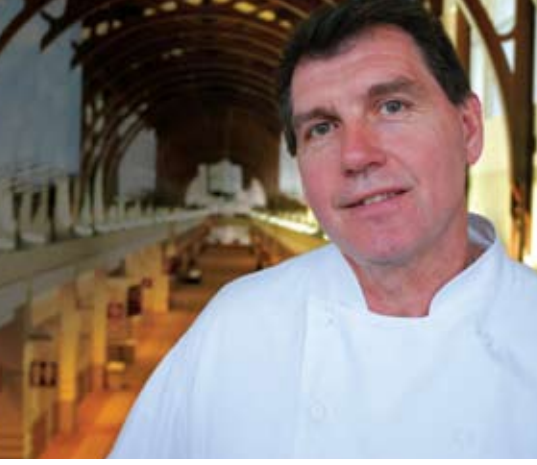
Tanya Brand has been with the Warren County Tourism Department since 2003 and can be called upon to offer assistance with sourcing hotel and function space availability, RFP/bid distribution, site inspections, publicity and promotional materials. She takes

the time to understand planners’ needs and suggest resources and services as well as assist in supplying the finishing touches to make each meeting or event the highlight of the year.

**Advice to planners:**

“The Warren County Tourism Department encourages planners to learn more about a special incentive for new events. Warren County’s Occupancy Tax Funding offers new groups up to \$50,000 when choosing to host their events in the Lake George Area.”

“As a destination marketing organization representing all meeting and convention facilities within our county, my job is to promote the wide range of wonderful meeting possibilities our area has to offer. Our diversity is what makes us so special. I look forward to helping [planners] navigate through all the details of holding a meeting or event here.”



## KEITH QUATRANO

*Executive Chef* - Chattanooga Convention Center, Tennessee

“The Chattanooga Convention Center is pleased to announce that Keith Quatrano has joined their culinary team as the new executive chef. Quatrano joins the convention center as a hospitality veteran, with over 25 years in the industry. We’re very excited to welcome Keith to Chattanooga and to the convention center team. Keith is a tremendous addition to the convention center and we’re very proud to have him join us. He brings significant talent and a culinary expertise that adds value to the conventioners’ experience.”

— *Bob Doak, president & CEO, Chattanooga Area Convention & Visitors Bureau*

### Background:

Before coming to Chattanooga, Quatrano was the F&B director of the Intercontinental Hotel at the Plaza in Kansas City, Mo., for the past three years. Prior to that, he was the executive chef at the Rosen Plaza Hotel in Orlando,

Fla.; executive chef at the BWI Airport Marriott, Baltimore, Md.; executive sous chef at the 5-star, 5-diamond Boca Raton Resort & Club, Boca Raton, Fla., and the executive chef at Interstate Hotels Corporation, Pittsburgh, Pa. Quatrano’s accomplishments include leading teams to exceed guest experiences; linking F&B functions to the strategic initiatives of hotels; developing numerous F&B concepts; facilitating and assisting in opening and acquiring seven hotels and resorts; and developing, renovating and implementing numerous successful F&B outlets. He is a member of the Interstate Hotels and Corporate Chefs Council.

One of his primary goals is to stimulate the local economy by working closely with local agricultural partners to incorporate more local products. He already has set up meetings with several local purveyors to work on future projects.

“I am thrilled to be at the convention center and in Chattanooga. It’s exciting to be part of a team that has a genuine interest in meeting and exceeding the quality standards and experiences for our guests. I’m really looking forward to taking this job to the next level and adding my own personal touch in the preparation and presentation of the dishes. I have the opportunity to be very creative so I want to embrace the local ingredients and Southern cuisine and incorporate them into the current and new menu items.”

## INDUSTRY LEADER

## JAMIE MITCHELL

*Sales Manager* - Chesapeake Conventions & Tourism, Virginia

“By adding Jamie to our sales team, we are taking the next step in fulfilling Chesapeake’s desire to attract the dedicated group and meeting travel market.”

— *Kim Murden, Chesapeake Conventions & Tourism Director*

### Background:

A member of the Chesapeake Conventions & Tourism team since August 2008, Jamie Mitchell is a valued asset to the sales team that promotes Chesapeake to meeting planners both regionally and nationally. Before joining CCT, Mitchell was a group sales manager for the Hampton, Va., CVB.

With more than 10 years of industry experience, Mitchell has had her fair

share of success stories. Meeting planners have praised her for her dedication and attention to detail. She is affiliated with numerous professional organizations, including Destination Marketing Association International, Society of Government Meeting Professionals and Meeting Professionals International, and is an active committee member of local chapter affiliates.

### Advice to planners:

“Contact the CVB when planning a meeting in a city. Many CVBs offer complimentary services to save the organization money and time. Chesapeake offers an abundance of recreational activities for team building and free time excursions.”



“I love representing the city of Chesapeake as a destination for meetings and events. Chesapeake has so much to offer, and it is my goal to spread the word about our wide variety of meeting and convention options. I have been active within the Hampton Roads area for many years, and I am continually striving to attract visitors to our vibrant community.”

# TRACY ALDRIDGE

Senior Vice President of Sales - Cabarrus County Convention and Visitors Bureau, North Carolina

“We are pleased to have an executive of Tracy’s caliber, knowledge and experience join our team. During his career, Tracy has always been at the forefront of the travel and tourism industry and now his talent and skill-set will be an asset for the Cabarrus County CVB and its partners.”

— Donna Carpenter, CEO & President, Cabarrus County Convention and Visitor’s Bureau

**Background:**

Tracy Aldridge is responsible for leading and directing the sales team and overseeing all sales functions, which include meetings, conventions, tradeshow, group leisure travel and military programs as well as the amateur sports market. He has more than 10 years of experience in the hospitality industry and

most recently served as the tourism sales manager for Visit Charlotte, the sales and marketing division of the Charlotte Regional Visitor’s Authority. Prior to joining the CRV, Aldridge was the director of sales and marketing for one of the largest group tour operators in the Southeast.

**Advice to planners:**

“Use your local convention and visitors bureau to the fullest extent possible,” says Aldridge. “We are really there to serve you and be the liaison between planners and potential properties, offsite venues, local attractions and restaurants. We want to make their job easier. That’s what we are here for.”



“I am extremely excited about the opportunity to represent such a dynamic and growing area. Cabarrus County has so much to offer and has an appeal for all age groups. From meeting planners and tour operators, to young families and emerging travel groups, there is truly something here for everyone.”



# DEAN CONWELL

Executive Director - Beaumont Convention & Visitors Bureau, Texas

“The Beaumont Convention and Visitors Bureau is proud to announce the Texas Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus (TACVB) proclaimed Beaumont CVB executive director, Dean Conwell, as the incoming chair for 2010 at the TACVB Annual Conference in Waco, Texas, Aug. 13, 2009.”

**Background:**

Under Dean Conwell’s leadership, the Beaumont CVB has overseen tremendous growth and expansion in the region’s tourism industry. Conwell and his CVB team host an impressive number of annual meetings and conventions, as well as

sporting events and reunions. The Ford Park Event Center, Beaumont Civic Center and Athletic Complex are venues that are making headlines and attracting planners to the Southeast Texas region. “Three or four years ago, we were off the map, and now we’re on as a viable destination for meetings,” says Conwell, who attributes Beaumont’s growth to downtown revitalization and the multi-million dollars invested in recent hotel renovations and new facilities as well as an extremely hardworking, dedicated CVB staff. Conwell will be the official spokesperson for the TACVB and serve on other industry-related organizations.

“After 12 years as a TACVB member, I’m pleased to have this opportunity to not only represent TACVB, but also Beaumont. With tough times facing our industry and the economy as a whole, this is the perfect time for Beaumont to step up and prove that travel and tourism means business.”



## HOLLY YOUNG BEAUMIER

*Director of the Florence Convention & Visitors Bureau, South Carolina*

“Special thanks to Holly Young, who organized and oversaw the events of the week [Tourism Development International], and marshaled the group through a full schedule, starting early and finishing late each day. On Sunday evening the firm president told me he has worked with tourism professionals around the world for 30 years and that Holly is one of the best he has ever seen. We are lucky to have Holly in Florence County, and are indebted to her for her hard work on the project thus far.”

— Ben Zeigler, chair of the Florence County Economic Development Tourism Committee

### Background:

Holly Young Beaumier has been with the Florence Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) since 2006. She is a Certified Travel Industry Specialist and will soon earn

Tourism Marketing Professional status. Beaumier has worked jointly with Tourism Development International in tourism and product development planning. Previously, she was employed as a Mandarin Chinese interpreter/PR representative for an international manufacturing company.

“In recent years, Florence has become the place to meet in South Carolina. Hotels, restaurants and retail sites have added to the Civic Center area development, providing an excellent meeting location with a range of amenities.”

### Advice to planners:

“In this economic climate, it’s important to maximize cost effectiveness. Look to second- and third-tier locations that suit your meeting needs and are happy to provide red carpet service.”

“Focus on awareness of the value of meetings and conventions has brought a unified approach to welcoming large groups into our city. Restaurants adjust hours to accommodate attendees and nighttime entertainment targets the specific groups. This all makes for a memorable, unique experience in Florence.”

## INDUSTRY LEADER

## JOHN W. SNEED II

*Convention Sales Manager - Wilmington/Cape Fear Coast*

Convention and Visitors Bureau, North Carolina

“John’s sterling reputation and contacts in the travel industry, combined with his expertise in convention sales, should prove to be a great asset as we market the destination and the new convention center to meeting professionals”

—Kim Hufham, president/CEO, Wilmington/Cape Fear CVB

### Background:

John Sneed has been with the Wilmington/Cape Fear CVB since July 2009. Sneed served for eight years on the board of the Society of Government Meeting Professionals’ North Carolina chapter. He also serves on the board of the Association Executives of North Carolina. Sneed’s industry awards include the Society of Government Meeting Professionals’ President’s Award and Supplier of the Year. He

was also named to Boykin Management Company’s “Million Dollar Club” for three consecutive years.

“When it comes to meeting destinations, some just rise above the rest,” Sneed says. “Wilmington, N.C., is a prime example. Scheduled to open in the fall of 2010, the Wilmington Convention Center will be located on the shores of the Cape Fear River, just steps from a treasured historic district. The relaxed coastal environment, along with a dash of Southern hospitality, makes Wilmington easy to work with and a comfortable fit for meetings and events. It’s business made casual.”

### Advice to planners:

“Our professional, easy-going sales team has the experience, dedication and creativity to make your meeting a hit,” Sneed says.



“One of my goals is to bring people together, outside of the office environment, to inspire fresh thinking and motivate productivity.”

# TRACY HEITZIG

*Sales Manager - Edgewater Beach & Golf Resort, Florida*

“Tracy Heitzig has been an exceptional asset to the sales team at Edgewater Beach & Golf Resort. Her vast experience and skill have led her to become the top producing sales manager several years in a row. She makes guest satisfaction a priority and always strives for excellence.”

— *Steve Bailey, director of group sales, Edgewater Beach & Golf Resort*

**Background:**

Tracy Heitzig joined the Edgewater Beach & Golf Resort sales team more than five years ago with more than 15 years of hotel management experience. She relocated to Panama City Beach after living in the Turks & Caicos Islands for eight years. Her hotel experience includes public relations manager, marketing and sales manager, and director of operations for a Caribbean resort. Heitzig currently oversees social,

military, educational, religious and fraternal meetings and events at Edgewater Beach & Golf Resort.

“When I worked in the Turks & Caicos Islands, I found myself in the unique situation of holding the highest position of any woman on the island,” Heitzig says. “Thankfully, my experience of growing up in a military family that constantly traveled, prepared me to adapt to different cultures and work in unusual environments. That ability has served me well throughout my career.”

**Advice to planners:**

“The most important advice that I can offer planners is to be flexible, creative and open-minded,” Heitzig says. “If you can be quick on your feet to find a solution when problems arise, you will become an invaluable source of comfort and assurance for your guests.”



“My philosophy of living life to the fullest has led me in an exciting career path that has taken me all over the world including the beautiful shores of Panama City Beach. I find that if you live every part of your life with passion, you will meet success at every turn.”



# DEBBIE WILSON

*Executive Director - Florence/Lauderdale Tourism, Alabama*

“Debbie Wilson is the Picasso of tourism in The Shoals. She has painted our community in the vibrant colors necessary to draw visitors from all over the country. Through her leadership, our tourism has gone from being nearly nonexistent to a thriving industry that brings thousands of tourists each year for our museums, festivals, sporting events and concerts.”

**Background:**

Debbie Wilson has been in the hospitality and tourism industry since 1990. Her experience in broadcasting coupled with her marketing and public relations experience in Los Angeles with Westin Hotels, the Alabama Music Hall of Fame and as the CVB director in Florence since 1994 makes her an asset to any meeting planning team. She has served as president

of the Alabama Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus, executive board of the Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourism Association, Professional of the Year in North Alabama, and her team was named the Bureau of the Year by the Southeast Tourism Society.

Under Wilson’s leadership and marketing skills, the lodging revenues for Lauderdale County have doubled in six years and are still on the rise today. The North Alabama Tourist Association named Florence/Lauderdale Tourism “Tourism Organization of the Year” in 2001 and Wilson received the honor of the being named “Tourism Professional of Year” in 2002. Florence/Lauderdale Tourism was named Southeast Tourism Society’s CVB of the Year in 2007.

“My greatest satisfaction in my job is bringing people together to reach common goals. It is my desire to create unique experiences for visitors. In doing so I believe it makes our community better as well. I strive to meet each visitor’s expectations and engage the local community to help our CVB make positive memorable impressions.”



## BRENDA B. McCROSKEY

CEO - Sevierville Convention & Visitors Bureau

“Under Brenda McCroskey’s leadership, Sevierville has developed a more refined tourism product that continues to draw more and more leisure and convention visitors every year.”

### Background:

Brenda McCroskey has been the CEO of the Sevierville CVB since 2000. She is a member of Sevierville’s Public Building Authority and serves on the board of the Tennessee Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus and the Tennessee Tourism Roundtable. Prior to that she was the sales and marketing director for an entertainment complex featuring the Lee Greenwood Theater and worked in sales for Gatlinburg hotels and the Gatlinburg CVB since 1989. She received the Regional Key Award for Leadership in 2003.

“It has really been a challenge to help the Sevierville CVB become a premier destination

marketing organization with a fraction of the budget enjoyed by our sister cities of Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg,” McCroskey says.

“However, our city has grown by leaps and bounds in the last 10 years and now offers a leisure and convention product not found in the other cities. Sevierville has become increasingly popular with our visitors, as evidenced by the massive growth in our city’s lodging tax over last year. Currently, we are showing a 40.9 percent growth over 2008.”

### Advice to planners

“Don’t be afraid to ‘let go of the reins’ when it comes to your team,” she says. “A sense of unity derives from hard work by the entire team, not just you. When your successful event is over, give others the credit. You will earn your team’s loyalty and respect — and you’ll be a lot less tired.”

“I am most proud of bringing our organization to another level by giving my employees an opportunity to shine and grow in their own right. Seeing them reach accomplishments that bring pride to both themselves and the community is extremely rewarding.”

## INDUSTRY LEADER

## ROSS SUMMERS

President & CEO - Branson/Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce/CVB, Missouri

“The Branson CVB is proud to have Ross Summers overseeing all Branson Chamber of Commerce and CVB operations. Summers represents the CVB on legislative issues affecting the tourism industry.”

### Background:

As president & CEO of the Branson COC and CVB, Summers leads a 1,000-member organization in promoting business and tourism for the Branson/Lakes Area. Summers also serves as a member of the board of directors of the American Bus Association, president of the Missouri Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus, and general manager and initial investor in TravelNow.com. He began a career in the cable industry in Springfield, Mo., with the TeleCable Corporation and was promoted to general manager of TeleCable’s group of cable systems in

Auburn, Ala., in 1983. Summers was elected president of the Alabama Cable Television Association, 1989-1991. He is also a former sports and news reporter and anchor for KOLR-TV, the CBS affiliate in Springfield, Mo.

“The best thing about my job is working with all of the outstanding people in the Branson community and watching the cooperative nature in which our market thrives,” Summers says. “Even though there is significant competition between the many businesses — theatres, restaurants and attractions — they all work together to support everyone’s primary interest, and that is making sure the visitor has a great time and wants to come visit Branson again and again.”

“One of the primary challenges we face is convincing the people who have never been to Branson before that our



little town offers much more than they imagine,” Summers says. “We hear on a daily basis that people are surprised by what they find here — from the beautiful Ozark Mountains to the variety of live entertainment (we’re so much more than only Country music) to the world-class theme parks and attractions. We also offer something for every member of the family and our live music shows are enjoyed by people of all ages.”

# INDUSTRY LEADERS

## Resource Guide

### ALABAMA

#### Florence/Lauderdale Tourism

visitflorenceal.com  
888-356-8687  
Debbie Wilson, Director  
debbie@visitflorenceal.com

### FLORIDA

#### Edgewater Beach & Golf Resort

edgewaterbeachresort.com  
800-331-6338  
Tracy Heitzig, Sales Manager  
tracy.heitzig@resortspcbeach.com

#### Tampa Bay & Company

visittampabay.com  
813-223-1111  
Alex Kaptzan  
akaptzan@visittampabay.com

### MASSACHUSETTS

#### Greater Springfield CVB

valleyvisitor.com  
800-723-1548  
Mary Kay Wydra, President  
marykay@valleyvisitor.com

### MICHIGAN

#### Greater Lansing CVB

lansing.org  
517-487-0077  
Doris Sims, Sales Manager  
dsims@lansing.org

### MISSOURI

#### Branson Convention Center

bransonconvention.com  
417-336-5401  
Bill Derbins, General Manager  
william.tirone@hilton.com

#### Branson/Lakes Area COC/CVB

explorebranson.com  
800-296-0463  
Ross Summers, President & CEO  
rsummers@bransoncvb.com

### NEW YORK

#### Albany County CVB

albany.org  
800-258-3582  
Gina Mintzer, Director of Sales  
gmintzer@albany.org

#### Warren County Tourism Department

visitlakegeorge.com  
800-95-VISIT ext. 143  
Tanya Brand, Meetings & Events  
brandt@co.warren.ny.us

### NORTH CAROLINA

#### The Biltmore Company

biltmore.com  
800-411-3812  
Bill Cecil, President & CEO  
bcecil@biltmore.com

#### Cabarrus County CVB

visitcabarrus.com  
800-848-3740  
Tracy Aldridge, Sr. Vice President of Sales  
tracy@visitcabarrus.com

#### Visit Charlotte

charlottesgotalot.com  
800-722-1994  
Mike Butts, Executive Director  
mike.butts@visitcharlotte.com

#### Greensboro Area CVB

visitgreensboronc.com  
336-274-2282  
Ava M. Pope, Director of Sales  
apope@visitgreensboronc.com

#### Wilmington/Cape Fear Coast CVB

cape-fear.nc.us  
877-406-2356  
John W. Sneed II, Sales Manager  
jsneed@capefearcoast.com

### OHIO

#### Positively Cleveland

positivelycleveland.com  
800-321-1001  
Dennis Roche, President  
droche@positivelycleveland.com

### OKLAHOMA

#### Oklahoma City CVB

okccvb.org  
800-225-5652  
Michael J. Carrier, President  
mcarrier@okccvb.org

### SOUTH CAROLINA

#### Florence CVB

florencesccvb.com  
800-325-9005  
Holly Young, Director  
holly.young@peedeetourism.com

#### Myrtle Beach Area CVB

visitmyrtlebeach.com  
843-626-7444  
Ursula L. Grant, Association  
Sales Manager  
ursula.grant@visitmyrtlebeach.com

### TENNESSEE

#### Chattanooga Convention Center

chattconvention.org  
800-962-5213  
Keith Quatrano, Executive Chef  
kquatrano@chattconvention.org

### Sevierville CVB

visitsevierville.com  
888-738-4378  
Brenda B. McCroskey, CEO  
bmccroskey@scoc.org

### TEXAS

#### Beaumont CVB

beaumontcvb.com  
409-880-3749  
Dean Conwell, Executive Director  
dconwell@ci.beaumont.tx.us

### VIRGINIA

#### Chesapeake Conventions & Tourism

visitchesapeake.com  
888-889-5551  
Jamie Mitchell, Sales Manager  
jhmitchell@cityofchesapeake.net