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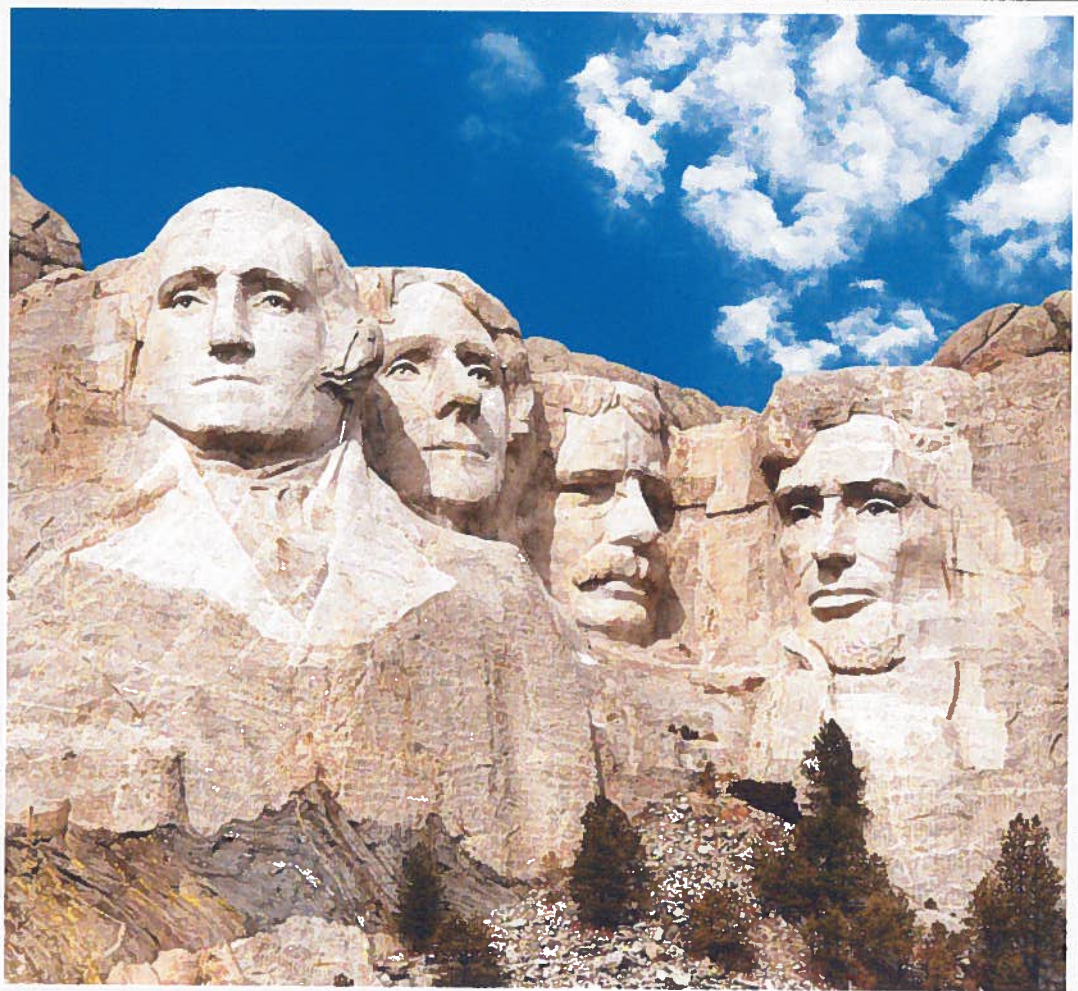
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# CULTURAL & ACADEMIC VENUES: CREATING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

By Ann Shepphird

There are times on an association agenda when it's time to get out of the ballroom and open attendees up to something unique. Cultural and academic venues such as museums and zoos offer insightful, educational and creative group options. Additionally, holding a special event at a museum or zoo is an ideal way to give back because the revenue these institutions earn from hosting events helps fund new or ongoing cultural and educational projects that, in turn, benefit the community.

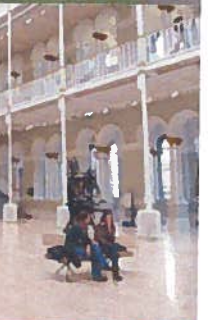
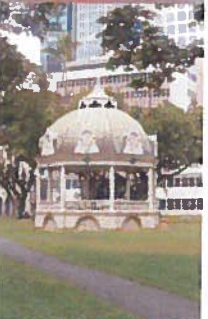
Before the Western Museums Association held its most recent annual meeting in September in Honolulu, leaders of the organization decided to make some changes. According to Kippen de Alba Chu, vice-president of the Hawaii Museums Association and executive director of the 'Iolani Palace in Honolulu, a drop in attendance at the previous year's meeting—in part a result of the economic crisis that had reduced the funding many museums receive—led them to rethink the annual meeting. One of the changes planners came up with was the idea of partnering with other arts organizations in order to lower costs and increase attendance. So when they learned that the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries & Museums was considering a meeting in Hawaii during similar dates, they suggested a partnership. The meeting was a natural fit and was developed with the theme of "Working Together to Move Forward."

"By partnering, we were able to branch out to the entire Pacific region and also highlight indigenous issues for the museum field," said de Alba Chu.

## A NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM

Although the bulk of the museum associations' sessions were held at the Hawaii Convention Center, the groups branched out in the evening to venues such as the **'Iolani Palace**, which started hosting special functions for as many as 8,000 guests on its property a few years ago. The resulting income has helped the palace with operational costs. This solution—a cultural attraction doubling as an event venue—has served many such institutions well in recent years as endowments and returns on investments have fallen. More importantly, bringing people in for events at a site aids an institution's mission of getting more people through the doors. "These are often groups of people we would not normally have gotten to come on a tour, and we've found that when they come for a special evening event, they will come back for a full tour and bring the family," said de Alba Chu.

The idea of using events to introduce people to the museum is also one embraced by the new **LeMay—America's Car Museum**, which is set to open to the public on June 2, 2012, in Tacoma, Washington, but is already hosting events. "Events generate revenue," said Scott Keller, chief marketing communications officer for the museum, "but equally important is they bring people to the





The Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens in southwest Florida is adding a new giraffe habitat as part of its Kiwa Ranch project, which is expected to open in 2016.

museum who might not have come here. It's a surprising facility, something people might not expect, so we use events as much as an outreach tool as we do to generate revenue."

Keller pointed out that holding events before the opening is possible because the four-story building and its

500 cars—spanning 100 years of the history of the American automobile industry—are already in place.

Another new museum of interest to association planners is the **Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art**, which opened on November 11 in Bentonville, Arkansas, and features more

than 400 works designed to highlight the full scope of American art and history. The 120-acre site, designed by architect Moshe Safdie, includes a glass-enclosed gathering hall and outdoor spaces for group events.

Still other museums have recently completed expansion projects that include space for association events. The **Natural History Museum of Utah** in Salt Lake City has opened the new Rio Tinto Center. Its signature event space is called the Canyon and can accommodate up to 700 people. Another unique event space is the Native Voices Sky Gallery & Terrace, which was designed in consultation with Utah's Indian community.

Groups looking for an indigenous cultural experience without having to travel off site may want to look at hotels where cultural exhibits are built into the property. Many hotels and resorts owned by Native American tribes offer this amenity. One such example is the **Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort & Spa** in Phoenix, which is owned by the Pima and Maricopa tribes. Their art and culture is incorporated into its programming and design, and it even has a cultural concierge on staff to assist planners. Also notable is the **Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa** in New Mexico; this property offers pueblo bread-baking demonstrations and tribal dance performances among its amenities.

#### TAKE ME TO THE ZOO

Zoos are also capable of providing fascinating backdrops for gatherings. The **Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens** in southwestern Florida had its beginnings in 1919 as a tropical garden maintained by botanist Dr. Henry Nehrling. Now a nonprofit organization, the zoo has achieved accreditation from the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and is continuing to expand its on-site wildlife experiences and off-site conservation efforts. According to Tim Tetzlaff, the zoo's

## SCOTLAND 2012: A FOCUS ON CULTURE

Each year, the Scottish government showcases one of the country's assets. For 2012, it is "Creative Scotland." New and renovated venues available for group events span the centuries, from the castle where Mary Queen of Scots was born to a new museum designed by contemporary architect Zaha Hadid.

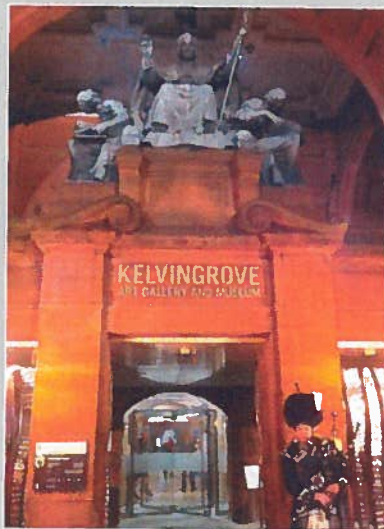
Mary Queen of Scots spent her childhood within the walls of Stirling Castle, located midway between the two biggest cities in Scotland—Edinburgh and Glasgow (which are only 52 miles apart). The castle recently completed a \$19 million refurbishment project and can host medieval-themed banquets for up to 300.

In the capital city of Edinburgh, the National Museum of Scotland reopened September 1 following a \$76 million refurbishment. The museum's grand gallery can accommodate groups of up to 850 for dinner or more intimate themed events can be arranged. According to Elaine Brodie, the museum's business development manager, "Guests can experience a dinner surrounded by Scottish inventions or get up close to Mary Queen of Scots' jewelry or Bonnie Prince Charlie's traveling cutlery set."

Set to reopen December 1 following a \$28 million renovation is the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, also



Glengoyne has been called the most beautiful distillery in Scotland—and is available for groups.



The newly refurbished Kelvingrove Art Gallery & Museum in Glasgow's West End offers a center hall ideal for gala dinners and receptions.

in Edinburgh, which can host groups of up to 250. And just two miles from the city center, in Leith, is the Royal Yacht Britannia, where groups of up to 380 can gather in spaces once enjoyed by the royal family.

The newest museum in Glasgow is the \$118 million Riverside Museum: Scotland's Museum of Transport & Travel, which opened in June and features a structure designed by Zaha Hadid that was inspired by Glasgow's maritime history. The new museum is available for groups of up to 800. Adjacent to the museum is the historic Glenlee Tall Ship, which welcomes events of up to 150. The Glasgow Science Centre, also on the River Clyde, can host receptions for up to 800.

And what visit to Scotland would be complete without a trip to a whiskey distillery? Glengoyne now offers meeting and event space that includes a whiskey sample room, club room and meeting room. There's also a boardroom for up to 18 people. ■

—Ann Shepphird

director of conservation and communications, for every guest at a group function, the zoo plants a tree in Africa, Asia or the Americas. "In addition, 5 percent of the zoo's event fee is dedicated to the Naples Zoo Conservation Fund, which supports field conservation programs," said Tetzlaff.

Another nonprofit zoo with AZA accreditation is the **Santa Barbara Zoo** in California. This 30-acre park, which overlooks the Pacific Ocean, was originally an estate but the land was passed to the Santa Barbara Foundation and opened as the Santa Barbara Zoological Gardens in 1963. Today, events held at the zoo can feature behind-the-scenes experiences like feeding animals and touring holding areas.

At the **Columbus Zoo & Aquarium** in Powell, Ohio, many of the animals travel with the zoo's director emeritus, Jack Hanna, and can be brought out to mingle with guests at events. According to Roger Dudley, group sales representative, these encounters are very popular. "They can bring out a baby cheetah or baby snow leopard they're raising, and people can take pictures with them," said Dudley. Recent additions to the Columbus Zoo include the Polar Frontier, which opened in 2010. Next up is an expansion of its African forest.

The **Cheyenne Mountain Zoo** in Colorado Springs, Colorado, is also expanding. The zoo has completed the first stage of its \$13 million Encounter Africa Exhibit, with final completion scheduled for the summer of 2013. For groups, the zoo opened the Lodge at Moose Lake, which has 5,200 square feet of meeting space, and the new 14,000-square-foot Grizzly Grill.

Meeting planners looking for that rare double feat of giving back to their meeting destination while also providing the elusive "wow" factor to their attendees may want to consider a museum or zoo. These venues can open meeting-goers up to something new and different, while the events in turn help fund their missions. ■