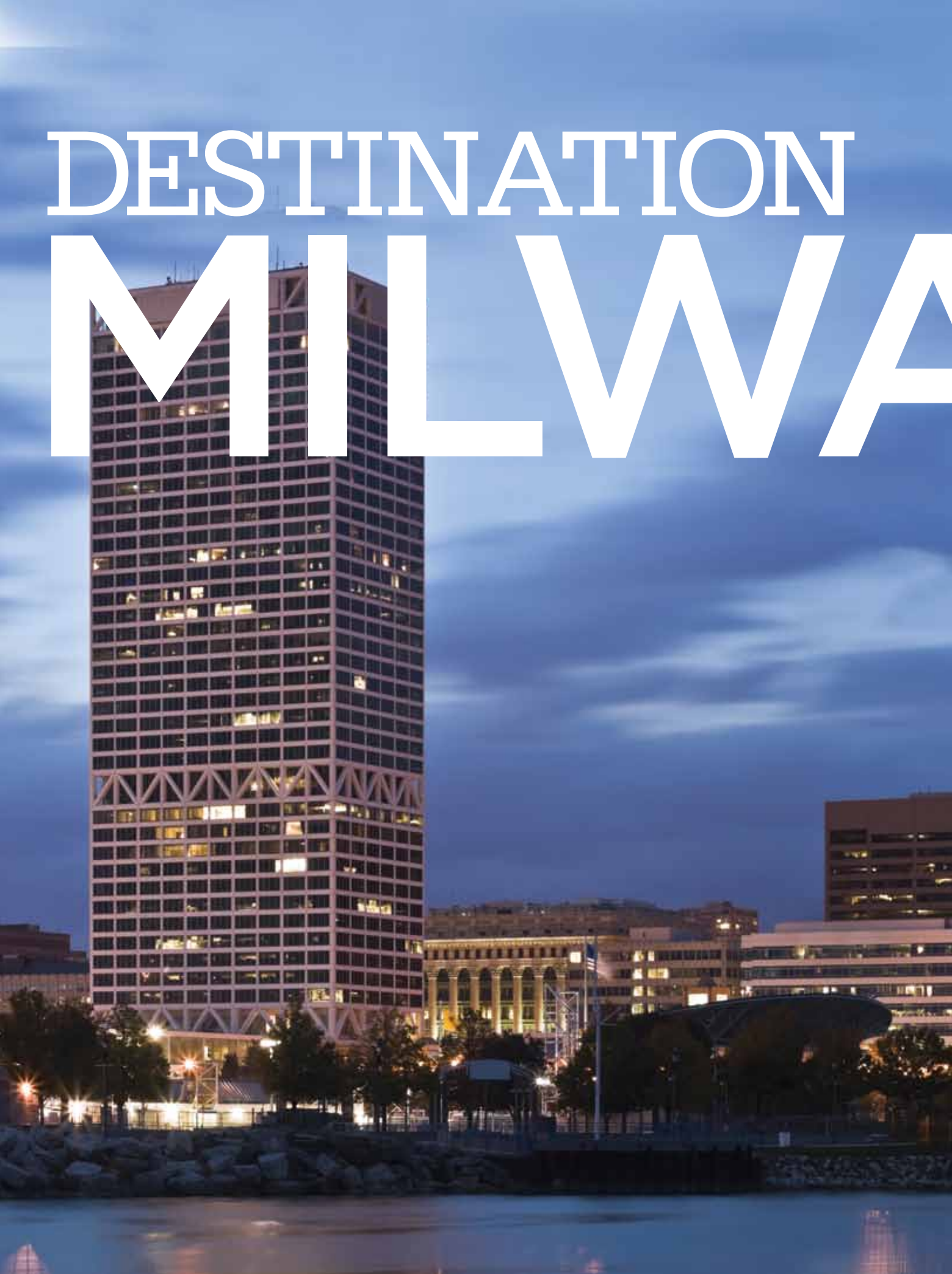


DESTINATION MILWAUKEE

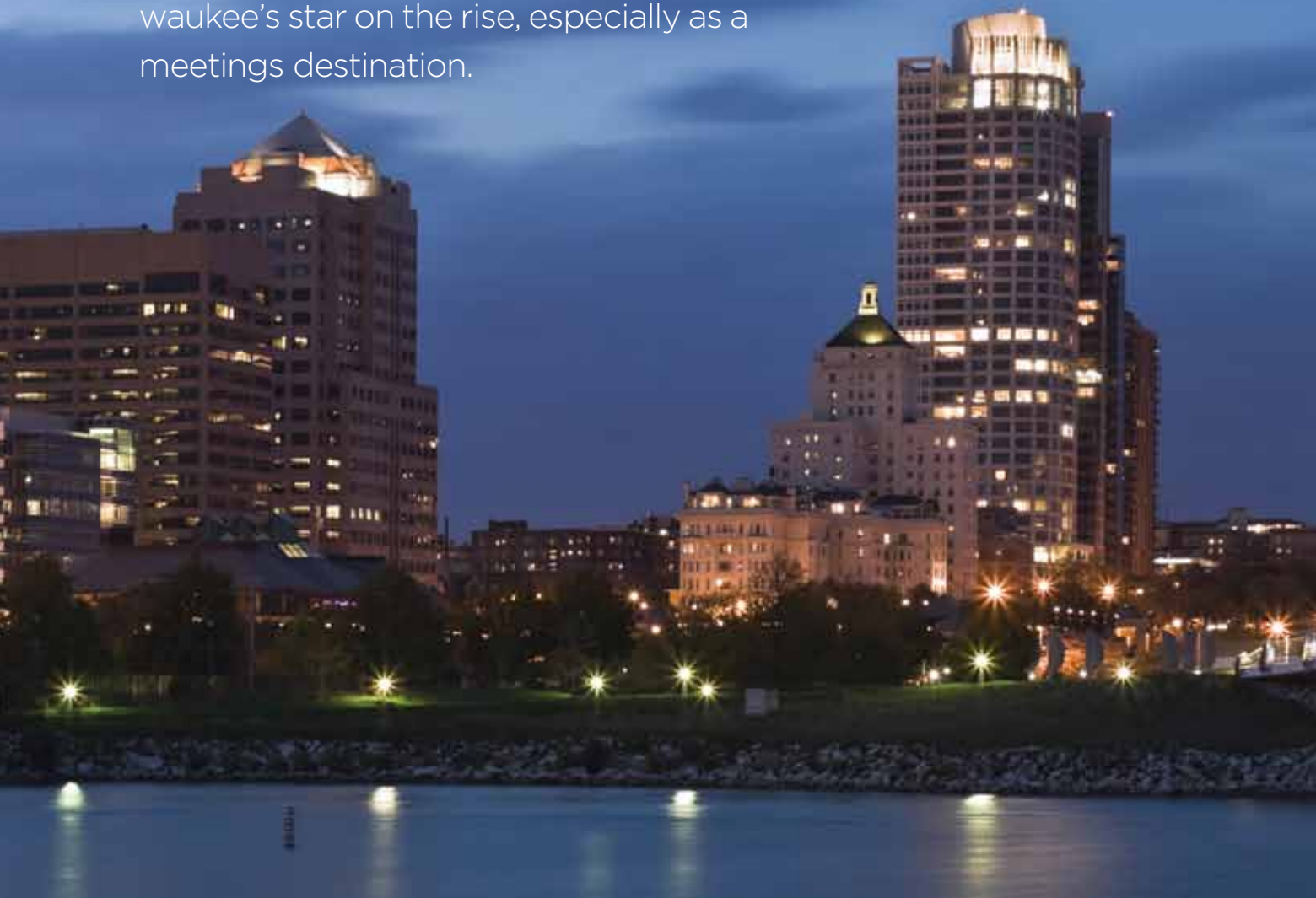


A STAR ON THE RISE

MILWAUKEE

Not long ago, Milwaukee was plagued by a poor reputation, considered a city past its prime. But investments in the city and revitalization projects have Milwaukee's star on the rise, especially as a meetings destination.

BY AMANDA N. WEGNER





Iron Horse Hotel

“It always gets a smile when I say Milwaukee is a fly-into city, not a flyover city,” says Joe Kurth, General Manager of the historic Pfister Hotel, located blocks from Lake Michigan in Milwaukee’s East Town neighborhood.

Danica Potier, Director of Sales at The Iron Horse Hotel, adds “Milwaukee has been put on the map, even in the last five years. It is the place to be, whereas not long ago, it was just a blip on the radar.”

Affordable, accessible and chockfull of amenities, Milwaukee, as evidenced by a handful of upcoming major conferences and expos with an estimated economic impact of \$8.5 million, is becoming the go-to destination for meeting planners near and far.

Big on value

For events large and small, Milwaukee is the place to be, “A big city, but without the big-city hassle,” says Paul Upchurch, VISIT Milwaukee’s new President and CEO. “The three keys to Milwaukee are value, accessibility and affordability. You really get a complete package here. We have the spaces, the places and the people. Within just a few blocks, you get amazing dining options, culture, history, entertainment and museums ... really everything your attendees might want to do. In fact, they’ll have difficulty not rounding out their visit here!”

Kaelyn Perlberg, Catering Operations Man-

ager at Potawatomi Bingo Casino, where dining, culture and entertainment come bundled in one torch-topped package, echoes that. “We are a hidden gem for meetings. Clearly, there are a lot of things to do in, say, Chicago, but you can do that all here as well, but at a third of the price. It’s easy for meeting planners to keep people entertained.”

Milwaukee, with its central Midwest location, is also a value for travel. “Access to and around the area is fantastic compared to other larger cities in the Midwest,” says Jason Hartlund, Vice President of Brewers Enterprises, which operates the meeting spaces at Miller Park. “That alone makes Milwaukee a pretty attractive destination.”

Kurth even goes so far to say that with the recent expansion at Mitchell Airport and ensuing airfare wars, Milwaukee has netted some of the lowest fares in the country. All these amenities come at a great value. And they have for a while, regardless of the economic downturn. During the downturn, “value” has been the selling proposition for cities of all sizes when courting meetings. But as business turns around, as it already is, Milwaukee will continue to be a value, jam-packed with extras.

“The new normal is something that Milwaukee has always offered,” says Kurth. “We thrive on quality offerings at a good price. Having your event in Milwaukee has al-

ways been, and will continue to be, a smart choice.”

Milwaukee is a value destination where visitors can convene productively. In fact, Runzheimer International, the national consulting firm specializing in transportation, travel and living costs, ranked Milwaukee the most affordable city for food and lodging when compared to cities it competes with for visitors.

Milwaukee ranked as the 60th least expensive major city out of 69 cities on the Runzheimer Meal and Lodging index report. Travel Web site Hotwire ranked Milwaukee in its top 10 “2008 Best Places for Value Vacations.”

“A lot of the allure of Milwaukee is that it has remained affordable. Planners also realize that there is a lot to do here. Attendees can go offsite, as a group or on their own, and find something around nearly every corner,” says Iron Horse’s Potier.

Even in the winter. “So what if it snows in January? We’re people who know what to do in the offseason with phenomenal culture and outstanding facilities, and we’re much more affordable than those sunny, major league locales,” says Kurth. “Here, you’ll always get a major league city with minor league pricing.”

Choices abound

From the Wisconsin Center District, featuring the recently renamed Frontier Airlines Center that can accommodate over 12,000 in the Exhibit Hall — its largest space — to setting your attendees free to mingle in Windhover Hall at the Milwaukee Art Museum, there are plenty of meetings options in Milwaukee. Here are a few that are new or have recently been updated.

Miller Park: Since renovations brought the space up-to-date two seasons ago, the five meeting rooms in the Brewers Conference Center at Miller Park have been bustling.

“It’s a great space for meeting planners,” says Tai Chamness Pauls, Special Events Manager for Brewers Enterprises. The five rooms in the center, all named for Brewers celebrities, can accommodate 25 to 100 people for meetings, breakout sessions and seminars. Conference center space can be used in conjunction with other spaces within the park, such as

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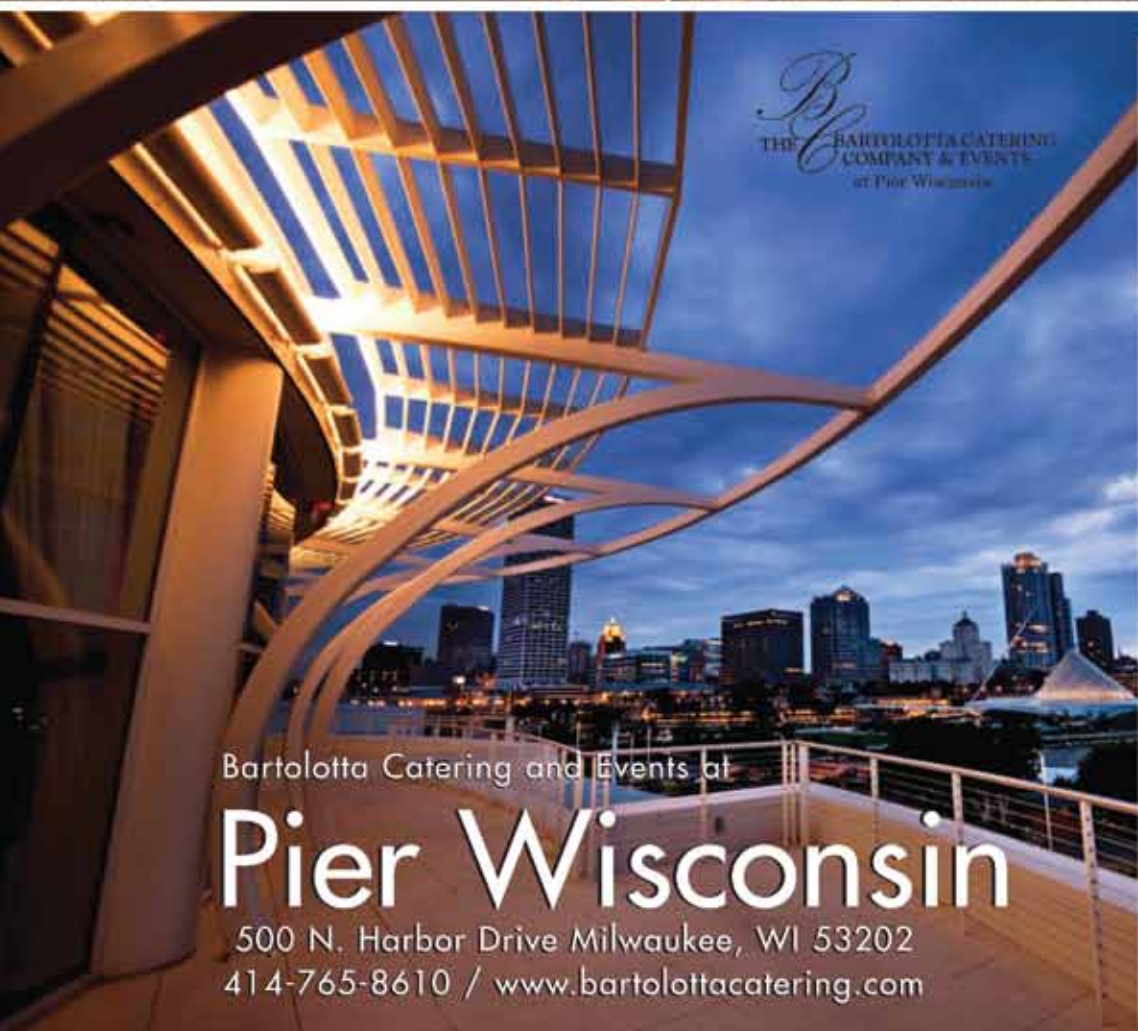


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the Stadium Club and Gehl Club, which both offer views of the field.

"People are surprised that we have these spaces," says Pauls. "It's just a unique backdrop for a corporate function. Plus, we can really get creative with the spaces." A number of enhancements are also available, from placing your company name on the scoreboard to a visit from Bernie Brewer. The most popular add-on is a ballpark tour. "It's a really nice thing to offer to get a behind-the-scenes look of what can't be seen from a fan's standpoint."

There are some availability restrictions; some spaces are not available on game days (or only available until game time) and some spaces are not available during the winter months.

Potawatomi Bingo Casino: When your space grows, business grows. And that is exactly the case at Potawatomi Bingo Casino, which completed renovations in 2008 that nearly tripled Potawatomi's space. "With the expansion, we have sort of become the new kid on the block for meetings," says Perlberg. The Woodland Dreams Ballroom, which

can accommodate 550 banquet-style in its 9,000 square feet of space, was created in that expansion. In addition to other unique spaces like the Tribal Room, perfect for a corporate function with its view of downtown Milwaukee through floor-to-ceiling windows, there's a 30,000-square-foot expo center that's hosting the city's 165th birthday party in January.

"We have versatile spaces that are great for meeting planners," boasts Perlberg. In fact, versatility reigns at Potawatomi. "First and foremost, we're an entertainment facility. Nowhere else do you get private dining, shows at the Northern Lights Theater and gaming downstairs. And we partner with local hotels, so groups don't feel like they're stuck here and have plenty of options."

Perlberg also notes personalization isn't just a perk at Potawatomi, it's their business. Take, for instance, the fact that the facility hosted the Fresh Coast Classic, a basketball tournament, in the expo center last November, bringing in a court from UW-Milwaukee! "We're very personalized here. We're not sticklers to how things have to be."

The Iron Horse Hotel: A rarity in downtown Milwaukee, The Iron Horse Hotel, which celebrates its two-year anniversary in September, is a luxury boutique hotel that's already scored AAA Four Diamond status (only the city's second hotel to earn this designation; the other is The Pfister). Making innovative use of the historic Berger Bedding factory on West Florida Street, The Iron Horse, says Potier, "is one of a kind."

"The Iron Horse was designed for everybody. From biker enthusiasts to the corporate and leisure and crowd, the hotel is comfortable and well-designed to accompany all tastes and needs."

On the lower level, The Gallery is an isolated space (meaning there's nothing else on this level, so the entire space is yours) with an urban feel that can handle up to 130 people, reception-style. For inspiration, try The Library, which draws on the owner's youth: he went to a small school where the library doubled as the lunchroom. A functioning library, the space features vintage tables and lighting, and antique Bank of London library chairs; it's the perfect setting for cocktail

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The Pfister Hotel

receptions and corporate luncheons. (The Harley-Davidson Museum is just across the river from the hotel.)

For brainstorming and power sessions, the fifth floor Executive Suite, which includes the War Room and Sandbox, is it. The War Room is a classic boardroom, and the Sandbox is an interactive space, a place to toss ideas around and play. "People get things done here without feeling like they're in a big-box corporate center," says Potier.

The Pfister Hotel: With the addition of the Mason Street Grill, Well Spa and full renovation of its meeting space and guestrooms, completed in 2008, "it's fun to say The Pfister is the newest, most historic property in the state," says Kurth. "Planners really get the best of everything here. You have the grandiose, historic lobby, then you go onto the meeting floor and get the most high-tech audio/visual available."

From the rooftop Twenty Three, a private oasis that doubles as the perfect space for a board meeting (with a Great Lake view to boot) to conference and event space taking

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Pulmonary Rehabilitation's annual meeting in October, the American Medical Writers Association's annual conference in November and the Wisconsin Association of School Board's 90th state education convention in January, to name a few.

All told, these six meetings are bringing almost 10,000 attendees to Milwaukee for 16,000 room nights. "There is no doubt that a strong meetings business is good business. These events have a large economic impact on the Milwaukee area," says Upchurch.

In the Milwaukee area, traveler expenditures came to an estimated \$2.34 billion for 2009. The industry continued to be a major supporter of the local economy by supporting 57,813 full-time equivalent jobs, \$1.339 billion in wages and contributing \$374 million in local and state taxes; those numbers include the fourth quarter and January, which are generally slower months for convention business. Meetings and conventions make up nearly a quarter of those numbers.

A meeting held here in a fiscally responsible manner — which is what you get in Milwaukee — is a victory for the area and its businesses and residents, and for Wisconsin's meetings industry as a whole. Meetings do mean business in Wisconsin.

At The Pfister, Milwaukee's upward trajectory in the industry is scratched out on paper, meeting after meeting. In fact, nearly half the meetings business that Milwaukee's three Marcus hotels (The Pfister, Hilton Milwaukee City Center and Intercontinental Milwaukee) receive is repeat business.

"You won't believe the number of people who, as they're leaving, say 'Send me a contract for next year,'" says Kurth. "Until you've had a meeting here, you have no idea what you're missing."

And often, that wow factor comes in even before the first rooms are booked. "We'll often do site tours, talk about what's available, and it really opens their eyes a bit," says Perlberg. "In Milwaukee, you get something different, and planners like that. Milwaukee is definitely on the rise." [www](#)

Amanda Wagner is a freelance writer based in Madison.

up the entire seventh floor, The Pfister offers spaces for all types and sizes of meetings. Plus, with a collection of suites, including three Presidential and three Heritage, meeting attendees and executives stay in style.

With its extensive Victorian art collection, The Pfister's recent addition, an artist-in-residence, makes perfect sense. Artist Katie Musolf is the hotel's second artist-in-residence, and her tenure runs through March 2011. "A hotel can be a box and or you can incorporate the hotel into the experience," says Kurth. Musolf is available for creative breaks and will speak with attendees and share what she's currently working on.

And there's no shortage of add-ons either: Offer attendees a show at The Rep or shuttle them out to the Boerner Botanical Gardens; take a tour of Sprecher Brewery Company or cruise the Milwaukee River.

"Here, planners have the ability to create an event that when people leave, they say 'I had no idea.' I hear it again and again and again," says Kurth. "There is no shortage of things to do."

Harley-Davidson Museum: Next to beer, there's nothing more quintessential to Milwaukee than Harley-Davidson. And with the opening of the museum in 2008, meeting planners can now share this fascinating history with their attendees. The Harley-David-

son Museum can handle groups of 10 to 1,000 people indoors; that number swells to 15,000 for its outdoor space. The facility includes theater-style seating for up to 750 and indoor, sit-down receptions for up to 500. There are several board-room style spaces, as well as an on-site restaurant. Not to mention more than a century of Harley-Davidson history and artifacts to engage and inspire attendees. According to Denice Waldhuetter, Vice President, Professional Events and Consulting, "The Harley-Davidson Museum is the perfect venue that's not ordinary but extraordinary! The ambience and atmosphere are built-in and you don't have to spend serious dollars to create a theme." Other advantages include the museum's proximity to downtown hotels and its free parking.

Talk of the town

Meeting planners see value in Milwaukee and are talking the talk for this city. "It is the cool place to be," says Potier. "Planners have gone rampant, talking to one another and how planning here in Milwaukee really made the event. In Milwaukee, we can make you look like a hero."

"People are really wowed by Milwaukee," says VISIT Milwaukee's Upchurch. "I think it's safe to say that our star is rising, and that it has been." And Upchurch should know, between September and January, Milwaukee is hosting six large events, including the American Association of Cardiovascular and