

AN ORANGE COUNTY BUSINESS JOURNAL SPECIAL REPORT

Meetings & Conventions



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Cities Tap Into Their Fun Sides to Promote Themselves

Market Existing Points Of Interest to Potential Visitors

By PAUL HUGHES

They won't change the name—Surf City it is, and Surf City it ever shall be—but Huntington Beach marketers told the Business Journal they're preparing to market the locale to travelers based on fun of all types.

Yes, surfing's fun. So are the beach, the pier, the air show, the food, etc.

But promoting it to visitors on the basis of the all-in-good-fun hijinks that can ensue there—that's new.

"We've been brainstorming a broader context" highlighting some of what the city is already known for, said Kelly Miller, chief executive of the Visit Huntington Beach destination marketer.

Miller started with the city's heritage—102 years of surfing dating to the days of businessman Henry Huntington and founding father of surf George Freeth—sprinkled in its International Surf Museum and Surfing Walk of Fame; got as far as the Guinness World Record the city set in 2015 for "most people riding on a surfboard"—66—and ended up realizing there are dozens of annual surf competitions and surfers out every day "from before sunrise through sunset," visitors watching them from the pier.

Miller: Huntington Beach's 'cultural heritage is huge'

"It's like being in the pits in NASCAR," Miller said. "We get 5,000 people on a Friday, 10,000 on a Sunday."

Now they're developing an app to tell travelers what they should be looking for in Surf City. It will tell thematic and visual stories tied to things such as Huntington Beach's surf history and legends, places and events, music and fashion, and art, pop culture and lifestyle.

Self-guided walking tours and street signs that link to information on the app will also be part of the mix, along with a potential software platform to enable prospective visitors to access the material online. The final version should appear next year.

"The historical has been really helpful," Miller said. "Our cultural heritage is huge."

Camping Out

Other cities are to some extent joining the battle for the hearts of locals and travelers alike.

The city of Costa Mesa has for years had developer Shaheen Sadeghi's retail and restaurant layouts The Lab and The Camp, long before the concept took on an expanded form at the Packing House food hall and the Center Street Promenade in Anaheim.

Travel Costa Mesa has promoted the area in part by talking up Sadeghi's older projects, and he and his wife, Linda, recently sat for an interview with travel talk show host Samantha Brown.

"The retail centers do a good job of making a fun, laid-back environment for visitors," said Jenny Wedge, the destination marketer's public relations manager.

The Lab's "outdoor living room with swings and couches" is where Brown met with the Sadeghis on her tour through OC a few months back to film segments for her

broadcast work.

Parking spaces and stairways at The Camp, meanwhile, are marked with motivational ideas, such as "Unplug."

"I'd call it inspirational," Wedge said.

Emotional Intelligence

In fact, the emotional element of cities is apparently now a thing.

A May 30 Wall Street Journal story highlighted efforts by urban locales to liven themselves up. Efforts include:

- The Hello Lamp Post project in Bristol.

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Publicity: Shaheen Sadeghi and his wife, Linda, talk with travel talk show host Samantha Brown about his development work in Costa Mesa



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Cities

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U.K., which invites people to text codes slapped on bus stops, mailboxes and lamp posts to get a conversation with a chat bot—think interactive Siri-like software—that tells about the place where they're standing.

■ Piano key-like stairs in Stockholm play notes when stepped on—a la Robert Loggia and Tom Hanks in the movie "Big"—and encourage subway patrons to walk instead of taking the escalator.

■ Street intersections in Germany offer versions of the classic video game "Pong" to



Kageyama: fun promotions should be 'organic, surprising, nonprogrammatic'

play while waiting for the light to change, or ask pedestrians to dance for a camera that digitally translates movements to stand in for stick figures on the Walk-Don't Walk sign. If those sound too wacky and foreign, know that that the paper paired the piece with one on the more quantifiable Smart Cities concept, in which towns use data and technology to change the way we experience urban areas. It also reported last month that cities and developers in several U.S. states want zoning and ordinance changes allowing patrons of outdoor retail and entertainment centers to drink alcohol in public areas.

Young Love

The efforts are guided by younger destination marketers, meeting planners and consultants unabashed in their use of words like "love" and "emotion" when talking up towns. CalTravel, a state trade association for des-



Stairway to retail: inspiration path at The Camp in Costa Mesa example of 'emotional' reach out to visitors

ination marketing organizations, includes a 30 and Under award in the lineup of honors at its annual California Travel Summit. Two winners at this year's event in June at Newport Beach Marriott Resort & Spa work for Visit Anaheim—Senior Manager of Strategic Alliances and Events Lindsay Walker and Manager of Tourism Development Ryan Alsop.

Destination marketers in other areas are getting into the act, including VisitPittsburgh, which put four of its youngest staffers in charge of a 10-year planning process in July.

Peter Kageyama, who spoke at the Newport Beach travel confab on how cities can tap quirky concepts for attention from meeting planners and travelers, has given a

TEDx talk and written two books on related topics.

Workable Creativity

Kageyama said fun stuff has to be "organic, surprising, and nonprogrammatic"—which can be tough, because it can be like saying, "How do you mandate fun?" Kageyama said, "Well, you can't."

San Luis Obispo has become known for bubblegum alley in its downtown district—a 70-foot-long walkway framed by 15-foot-high walls covered in used gum wads—but the work definitely developed organically, literally and figuratively.

The fifth annual "dam dinner" in Goleta in Santa Barbara County was planned for Aug. 19 atop its Lake Los Carneros Dam, an otherwise prosaic landmark. Last year's event drew 300 diners.

Grand Rapids, Mich., was named one of America's "Dying Cities" in 2011, in part due to a declining population. The city responded with a 10-minute "lip dub" video combining lip-synched singing with audio dubbing to the tune of Don McLean's "American Pie."

Roger Ebert called it the "greatest music video ever," and at last count the video had drawn 5.7 million views on YouTube.

"People want to emotionally connect" with places they visit, Kageyama said. "You can create conditions where that connection can happen."

In Huntington Beach, the winning design of a public art project that drew 120 entries from high school students now adorns utility boxes at the municipal pier. Similarly, 30 trash dumpsters publicly visible in the downtown business district are getting a new paint job in a "Dumpsters on Parade" project.

Iconic Memories

Kageyama lives in Florida but travels regularly, and for the CalTravel conference flew into John Wayne Airport.

"I see a lot of airports, and you hope they're functional," he said. What he remembers about John Wayne is the Duke statue.

Huntington Beach wants to promote its take-away icons, so it began with what's there—the surf culture, the pier, the T-shaped promenade formed by Main Street, and the asphalt boardwalk that runs along its beach—and amped them up.

"The crux of what destinations are doing is figuring out how to talk about what's already there," Miller said. "Unscripted experiences still need some sort of structure. The fuzziness (of fun) needs function and form. It's organic but then (gets) organized" as cities push the new concepts in front of meeting planners and travelers.

"You can have bubblegum alley, but you still have to tell people about it," he said.

Huntington Beach has been "unconventional for years," Miller said. Now it's a matter of marketing.

"First you appreciate what you have," Kageyama said. "Then you, (for instance), shine that social media light on it."

Risk Management

Cities can plan stuff—"build that bridge, plant those trees"—Kageyama said, but originality that resonates with visitors may not always succeed, though it's not impossible.

Since cities build bridges and plant trees for reasons, he said, they can figure out reasons to make their cities more inviting to visitors.

"You have to have risk tolerance for it," he said. "But businesspeople understand the importance of taking risks."

Cities can also get on board.

"No is an easy answer and a lazy answer, and people don't get into trouble for saying no," he said. "People would do it more, but they run into bureaucracy. Cities could make it a little less of a pain in the ass to do it." ■



Rendering: Hyatt House Irvine to open in October with 1,000 square feet of events space

Hotel Construction Mostly Small World for Meetings

Properties Coming Soon For Smaller, Local Clients

■ By PAUL HUGHES

Local data show at least eight Orange County hotel projects are under way, several that are scheduled to open in the next six months, and most notable for something they'll have in smaller amounts than just about any property in OC: meeting space.

Most construction (see box below) is limited or "select service" hotels, smaller offerings by design, with fewer bellhops and whistles—complimentary breakfast and a couple of thousand square feet for events.

Industrywide, "the vast majority of new hotels being built are in the smaller, limited service sector," said **Alan X. Reay**, president of Irvine-based consultant and broker **Atlas Hotels**. Atlas produces a report reflecting current hotel construction.

"The average size of these properties is 100 to 150 rooms, and you're not going to build lots of meeting space," he said. "You don't have the capacity."

Reay said such hotels are easier for developers to finance and more profitable for owners to operate, producing profit margins of 35% to 50%, compared with 15% to 20% at full-service hotels with several hundred rooms and the full suite of amenities, commonly including multiple restaurants (see box, page 30). But that should change, as several of the latter type are planned.

To Market

Most current construction projects are coming online with square footage that wouldn't crack the Business Journal list of hotel meeting space—this year's tally had a minimum threshold of 5,000 square feet—so what's their meetings sweet spot?

That would be overflow from meetings held at the larger hotels; smaller and often local groups; and individual travelers or users who need only a room or two, views optional.

Hyatt House Irvine Director of Sales **Adam Drescher** said his property, which opens in October, will target extended-stay guests—"(short-term) project work, people relocating to the area, medical tourism"—and that 117 of the 149 rooms are suites with kitchen amenities.

The property—off the San Diego (I-405) Freeway between Jamboree Road and Von Karman Avenue—plans to tap nearby **John Wayne Airport** when it comes to marketing to travelers.

"The airport is the anchor," Drescher said.

Early interest in its 1,000 square feet of events space is coming from companies holding small all-day meetings; the college and youth sports market of teams traveling for events and local sports banquets; year-end sales meetings, church retreats and holiday parties.

Catering is in-house. "There's a bar and restaurant, outdoor patio, and a fireplace and fire pit," Drescher said. Maximum room capacity is 100. Pricing is all-inclusive.

"People are meeting a couple times a year, and holding an event isn't their job," he said. "We expedite it."

Location, Location

A hotel under construction in Buena Park is going in another direction, considering its tourist-centric location.

The **Hampton Inn & Suites** that opens there in November looks to be a bigger business fish in its huge tourism pond. It's three miles from **Knott's Berry Farm** and will try to stand out by offering meeting space in a market that caters largely to families visiting the park.

The hotel will have 102 rooms and 1,200 square feet of meeting space.

Hotel operator **Twenty Four Seven Hotels** in Newport Beach plans to market meeting space to some of the same travelers—Hampton guests might also be headed to Knott's—but even that much space helps groups that need it. A sports team here for a tournament might use it for "breakfast overflow," said Corporate Director of Sales **Mae Serrano** via email. "These bookings often account for more than two guests per room," which would tax capacity at its dining area, she said.

Meeting areas can be set up for large groups' breakfasts, which can then be packaged into the overall booking's price and gives individual guests a quieter space for their own meals in the dining room.

Twenty Four Seven has followed a similar path for such groups at a hotel it operates in Ontario, Calif., using small amounts of meeting space as a big definer in the market.

Properties also attract "local groups and associations, church communities and board meetings" Serrano said. Clients are looking for rooms with "more of a dialogue [format and] less classroom- or theater-set-up" than usual.

Coastal Spectrum

Two projects being developed by **R.D. Olson Development** in Newport Beach and built by sister company **R.D. Olson Construction** in Irvine aren't select service and

► Space 30

New-Hotels Itinerary

OC has eight hotel projects under construction that together will provide 55,900 square feet of meeting space, 83% of that from two:

- Marriott Irvine Spectrum, Irvine, 271 rooms, 14,500 square feet, opens in January
- Hampton Inn & Suites, Irvine, 164 rooms, 2,000 square feet, opens by December
- Waterfront Beach Resort (second tower), Huntington Beach, 152 rooms, 32,000 square feet, opens in October
- Hyatt House Irvine, Irvine, 149 rooms, 1,000 square feet, opens in October
- Lido House Hotel, Newport Beach, 130 rooms, 3,000 square feet, opens in February
- SpringHill Suites, Huntington Beach, 126 rooms, 1,300 square feet, opens in October
- Hampton Inn & Suites, Buena Park, 102 rooms, 1,200 square feet, opens in November
- Hampton Inn & Suites, Mission Viejo, 101 rooms, 900 square feet, opens in October

Source: Atlas Hospitality Group, Irvine



Future ballroom: Lido House Hotel, scheduled to open in February in Newport Beach, will have 3,000 square feet of dividable ballroom space

Space

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will check in at a higher register for meeting space.

Marriott Irvine Spectrum will have 271 rooms and just under 15,000 square feet of meeting space—about half for one meeting room and a ballroom, both of which can be divided; prefunction area, and an outdoor lawn, said **Michael Chavez**, a project executive who's overseeing the build.

Chavez said the setup—an artificial-grass lawn connected to meeting areas—is similar to **Paséa Hotel & Spa** in Huntington Beach, which R.D. Olson Construction also built and which opened last year.

"The doors open up large enough to get cars in there," he said. "You could hold a mini-concert if you wanted to," something Paséa has done in its spaces.



Serrano: clients looking for dialogue-friendly space

A development company spokesperson, **Jonathon Vopinek**, said via email that the property will offer private pool cabanas for breakout sessions, and that the **Courtyard Irvine Spectrum**, which Olson also developed and built a short walk away, has several thousand more square feet of space that could also come into play.

The Marriott had been scheduled to open in October, but January looks more likely, Chavez said.

Lido House Hotel in Newport Beach follows in February, said project manager **Evan Taylor**. It will have 130 rooms and 3,000 square feet of meeting space—all dividable ballroom area, Taylor

said. The property is on Balboa Peninsula near Lido Isle and part of Marriott boutique brand Autograph Collection.

"It has a Cape Cod, beach-type feel," Taylor said. ■

Bigger Guys

A few OC projects with bigger meeting areas are under construction or in planning.

■ The second tower of **Waterfront Beach Resort**, a **Hilton Hotel** in Huntington Beach is scheduled to open in October with about 32,000 square feet of meeting space.

■ **Anaheim Convention Center** isn't a hotel, but 200,000 square feet isn't a coat closet. The ribbon cutting is Sept. 26, and destination marketer **Visit Anaheim** said recently that 75 groups have booked time for the new ACC North digs.

Further down the line—and also keyed to the convention center complex or **Disneyland Resort**—are at least five projects promising high-end service and more than a couple thousand square feet for meetings and events:

■ **Greenlaw Partners** in Irvine filed plans in May with Anaheim to build a 14-story, 300-room hotel and parking structure about a mile from Disneyland. Construction could start next year.

■ **Walt Disney Co.**'s parks and resorts division said last year that it will build a 700-room luxury hotel on Disneyland Drive. Construction could start next year

■ **Wincome Group** affiliates plan two luxury hotels in Anaheim—one next to the convention center, the other across the street from Disneyland—with 1,200 total rooms and an estimated \$433 million investment. A construction schedule hasn't been set.

■ **Prospera Hotels** and **O'Connell Hotels & Hospitality** could start this year on their 12-story, \$150 million JW Marriott near the GardenWalk entertainment center on Katella Avenue.

All five should get AAA, four-diamond level ratings.

About half of Anaheim's 150 hotels are in its 1,100-acre resort area, but only two—Disneyland Hotel and Disney's Grand Californian Hotel & Spa—meet AAA's standards for the luxury category. ■