

{ We present the top professionals
in the meetings and events industry. }

The BEST of the Industry

BY BARBARA AXELSON

ONCE AGAIN, *ILLINOIS MEETINGS & EVENTS* IS PLEASED TO PRESENT TO YOU the front-runners in the meetings industry—professionals chosen by you, our readers, as the best of the best. Statewide, the votes poured in to support the finest of a notable group of companies that make it possible for meeting and event planners to shine. ✨ To the winners, we say, “Well done!” This is a sort of People’s Choice Award, not the ideas of independent observers or editors but the opinion of people who are intimately involved—in the trenches of meeting planning—so it’s a true indication of the heights you have achieved. And to our readers, hold on to this article because you have here the recommendations of many peers as well as an open door to even more meeting successes. >>



Convention/Exhibit Center

>> Located on Lake Michigan, **MCCORMICK PLACE** is North America's largest convention facility. Minutes from downtown Chicago, this venue attracts almost three million visitors each year for tradeshow, conventions, corporate meetings or special functions. Three state-of-the-art facilities provide a total of 2.2 million square feet of exhibit space, with 1.6 million square feet on one level. Experienced staff partners with planners for all types of meetings. Many dining choices and full-service catering are available as well as full business services, coat checks, first aid areas, equipment for visitors with disabilities, gift shops and visitor information centers. The center is served by public transportation and cabs and offers shuttle bus options to tradeshow. (McCormick Place, Chicago, 312.791.7000, www.mccormickplace.com)



Most Unique Venue

>> Back again for an encore award is **ROCKIT BAR & GRILL**, hot spot in River North and the creation of long-time partners Billy Dec and Brad Young, whose previous successes include Chicago establishments such as Solo, Circus, Skylight and Le Passage. Sales director Amy Christiansen applauds their "huge space that can accommodate from 20 to more than 500 people. We offer an amazing upscale menu and, at the same time, you can be very comfortable and have burgers and chicken sandwiches. You can dress casually or not and use the four pool tables and seven plasma screen TVs for corporate presentations. The entire venue can be bought out for events. And, we have a really great staff!" The stylish atmosphere blends modern and natural elements—exposed beams, brick and a 75-foot skylight, reminiscent of a warehouse. How about antler chandeliers, flowing metal sculptures from local artists and cocktail tables made of tree stumps? (Rockit Bar & Grill, Chicago, 312.645.6000, www.rockitbarandgrill.com)

Team-Building Facility/Organizer

>> Another perennial favorite resurfaces. **WINDY CITY FIELDHOUSE** was founded to meet the city's need for a multi-purpose sports facility to provide space for basketball, volleyball, soccer and court-based sports, leagues, programs and celebrations. "We're the Midwest's largest team-building facility," says owner Bob Beaubien. "We understand our clients' needs and find out how to customize for them. Our sales reps get on the phone with customers and inevitably we take them in a direction they may not have thought about at first. We say, 'what do you want to get out of this?' and we may suggest anything from deep skills team building to just plain old fun—team building can be fun!" WCF has served more than 2,000 corporate clients with events that take place at different private locations throughout the area or at its 55,000-square-foot venue minutes from the Loop. (Windy City Fieldhouse, Chicago, 773.486.7403, www.windycityfieldhouse.com)



Conference Center + Meeting Venue

>> **UNIVERSITY CENTER CONFERENCE CHICAGO** is located downtown at Congress Parkway and State Street. According to sales manager Mark Calderone, "With state-of-the-art conference facilities, on-premise catering, high-tech audio-visual equipment, unmatched services and overnight summer accommodations, University Center Conference Chicago is the perfect combination of downtown location, abundant amenities and excellent affordability." The facility accommodates board meetings, seminars, workshops, training sessions and retreats. Meeting rooms, all on one level, range from 415 to 2,375 square feet and accommodate various configurations. Amenities also include computer data projection and videoconferencing. Business services encompass high-speed Internet, whiteboards, flipcharts and copy and fax service. (University Center Conference Chicago, Chicago, 312.924.8000, www.universitycenter.com)