

# The Guest

---

## R E P O R T

---

## Service excellence

---

### Convention Management Association stresses service

BY ROBERTA NEDRY

The Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) represents more than 3,000 domestic and international meeting professionals and supplier partners. Headquartered in Chicago, its members are key decision makers in selecting destinations, hotels and all the suppliers associated with meetings and conventions worldwide. The economic impact of its decisions can be of great significance. They held their 45th annual meeting in Miami in January, with record attendance. Patricia McDonald, VP of administration and meeting services, has planned PCMA meetings for the past four years and has been a meeting planner for almost 25 years. She is retiring from PCMA with the conclusion of this meeting and moving to other meeting planning adventures in the Birmingham, Alabama area.

**The Guest Report (TGR):** Why and how did PCMA choose Miami for this meeting?

**McDonald:** Our meetings are planned several years in advance and are based on the proposals approved by the PCMA board of directors. For this meeting, South Florida became a contender based on the recommendations of a previous CEO of our association. Our focus is on education and we don't have any exhibits.

Since our meetings are in January and we have a lot of East Coast members, we usually choose a sunny climate, a fun place with high energy and a location which offers multiple things to do. We have also been to San Francisco, Chicago and Dallas.

PCMA's last visit here was in the late 80s.

**TGR:** Is there anything different or unusual about your meeting profile?

**McDonald:** Since our members are all responsible for planning meetings themselves and are very knowledgeable about all the details that make a meeting a success, expectations were very high. Extensive planning and well-coordinated efforts were critical to ensure we not only met their expectations, but surpassed them. A large percentage of our members are women, 60 percent, and the overall group is very seasoned in the 30-50 year age range, so we were appealing to a wide variety of interests.

**TGR:** What were your previous impressions of Miami before attending and facilitating this meeting?

**McDonald:** My last visit to Miami was in the early 70s until my site visit for this meeting four years ago. I couldn't believe how much it had changed in such a wonderful way. The Lowes Hotel was just being built and we only had four model rooms in a trailer to look at for headquarter hotel selections. I was amazed by how different Miami had become and how much energy and excitement the area now had. There were more young people than I remember and they were out every day and night.

**TGR:** What types of events did you conduct and how were they handled?

**McDonald:** We had three official association evening events, sponsored by sup-

plier members, as well as several informal dining and entertainment outings individually selected by members.

The first one took place at Bayfront Park, the second evening was at the Lowes Hotel and the closing was at the Fontainebleau Hilton and Towers. Each of these hotels served as our co-headquarter properties and we featured all our education meetings, registration and all other daytime activities at the Miami Beach Convention Center. Every aspect of how our meetings and events were handled was amazing.

I can't say enough about the Miami Convention and Visitor's Bureau and how they rallied the whole community in support of our meeting. Even when I left early in the morning to go to Miami International Airport, I was amazed to see a lighted sign that said "Thank you PCMA" as I crossed one of the bridges over Biscayne Bay. They thought of everything and really went above and beyond to ensure everything was a huge success for what could have been a tough crowd.

**TGR:** Where did you observe outstanding service?

**McDonald:** The "Oh my gosh" for me at this meeting, which was so wonderful and so unbelievable, was our evening event at the Lowes Hotel. They actually built an ice-skating rink on their ballroom floor and featured Olympic skaters for the entertainment. It was unexpected, breathtaking and the crowd loved it. Everywhere I went in the hotel, I was welcomed and greeted by name, as were the association members. They treated everyone with personalized attention, which really made everyone feel extra special.

**TGR:** Any final thoughts on the service you experienced and do you think you or your members will come back?

**McDonald:** All of the attendees seemed to be very impressed, enthusiastic and invigorated by this meeting experience in Miami. One meeting attendee even booked one of her own meetings to come to Miami on the spot. In my opinion, service excellence means quick response, cheerful attitudes, going the extra mile without expecting anything, the desire to make guests feel comfortable through both quiet service as well as "knock your socks" off impressions. Consistency is probably the most important of all. Service is very important to PCMA because of all the business we represent and Miami really came through for us in a consistently outstanding way.

**ROBERTA NEDRY** is president of Hospitality Excellence, consultants in guest experience management and service excellence. She can be reached at (954) 739-5299 or [roberta@hospitalityexcellence.com](mailto:roberta@hospitalityexcellence.com).

