



SAN DIEGO STATE
UNIVERSITY

L. Robert Payne School of
Hospitality & Tourism Management



a message from the director

going places



CARL WINSTON
DIRECTOR

Wow! What a busy time for us at the L. Robert Payne School of Hospitality & Tourism Management. We're delighted that Bob and Patty Payne made a significant naming gift to the school this year. If you haven't come to campus to see the naming recognition wall, expect a great piece of visual storytelling. We are truly indebted to the Paynes for lending us their name as well as their resources to help protect our school in this time of economic uncertainty.

We were excited to host a number of events this past year, with guest speakers and visitors including Frits van Paasschen, President and CEO of Starwood Hotels; Mike Deitemeyer, President of Omni Hotels; Mickey Fearn, Deputy Director of the National Park Service; Joe McInerney, from the American Hotel & Lodging Association; Tarun Patel, Chair of the Asian American Hotel Owners Association, and so many more.

Dodging the budget pressures that impacted so many state-supported universities has also kept us busy – with private support programs, partnering with the amusement park industry, the lodging industry, and the meetings & events industry, and developing international programs in China (which you'll read more about in our next newsletter). These activities – combined with our very generous donors – allowed HTM to remain steady through a terrible economic downturn. Because of this stability, we continued to bring world-class education to our students and retained our fine faculty and staff.

You'll find some interesting folks featured in this issue. From outstanding alums like Sarah Major '05, who works at Cisco, to faculty member Rachel Peniche, Associate Director of the Institute for Meetings and Events, which recently held its first symposium for San Diego's nonprofits. You'll also read what our students have been up to between classes and networking, attending industry meetings, organizing 400-person events, or working at hotels in Southern California...and South America.

A hint about the future: Our school turns ten next fall (September 2011) and we could not be more proud. We'll be unveiling a whole year's worth of celebratory activities in the weeks and months ahead. Meanwhile, we know we wouldn't be here without your support, and we look forward to doing more great things with you in the future.

Read on!



SAN DIEGO STATE
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a message from Brian Blake

going places



**BRIAN P. BLAKE,
DIRECTOR OF
THE J. WILLARD AND
ALICE S. MARRIOTT
STUDENT CENTER
FOR PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT**

Great Gifts, Great Grads...

The last two years have been extremely difficult for the hospitality industry and yet...our students are thriving and our school is growing. Two major gifts—from The J. Willard and Alice S. Marriott Foundation and the L. Robert Payne and Patricia L. Payne Family Foundation—have transformed us. I have the great pleasure of overseeing The J. Willard and Alice S. Marriott Foundation Student Center for Professional Development, and early last year, our school was renamed the L. Robert Payne School of Hospitality and Tourism, in honor of Bob Payne’s generous long-term support.

During the spring semester, HTM students attended conferences locally and across the country. Last November, the American Hotel & Lodging Association’s fall conference was held in conjunction with the International Hotel, Motel & Restaurant Show in New York City. Thirty-six of our students attended, meeting with alumni, taking tours of several hotels, and enjoying a full roster of events, including the “Women in Lodging” luncheon. (Considering over half our grads are women, could another student chapter be far behind?) You’ll read about some of those conferences in this newsletter. Natalie Franzone-Cohen ’11 and Sammie Bass ’11 were at this year’s InnSpire Conference, and Brittanie Martinez ’12 organized the 13th Annual High School Hospitality Conference on the *U.S.S. Midway Museum*...with 400 attendees!

Which brings me to the best news of all: despite a down economy, our placement rate remains remarkably high. In February and March, nine companies – including Hyatt, Marriott, Starwood, and Omni – were on campus recruiting HTM students. Earlier this semester, I had paid internships I couldn’t find students for! I’m pleased to report that nearly all our 2010 HTM graduates are working. That’s a great testament to our industry and a statement about our students’ intent. (Read more about us in the *Union-Tribune* article, <http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/2011/mar/11/want-run-hotel-take-calculus/>.)

This summer looks strong for San Diego tourism. Several major employers have been busily recruiting students to help staff those summer seasonal positions with our students. Here’s to a great and busy summer season for all of us!



starting early on success: high school hospitality meets the midway

going places

The 13th Annual High School Hospitality Conference convened Friday, March 11, aboard the U.S.S. Midway Museum. Sponsored by HSMIAI, CH&LA, CRA, HFTP, and Johnson & Wales, this well-attended conference (400 participants!) was geared toward San Diego County high schools that maintain hospitality or culinary programs. Students who attended learned about the range of possibilities within our growing industry.

This year’s theme was “5 Steps to Success and Becoming a STAR: Search, Talents, Appearance, Ready, and Success.” Following a trade show hosted by industry professionals from various campuses, associations, restaurants, and hotels, the San Diego Workforce Partnership offered a presentation on job



“search” (step 1) and developing job-related “talents” (step 2) for resumes. Next, the students toured downtown hotels, restaurants, and the San Diego Convention Center.

After returning to the U.S.S. Midway, students from Mira Mesa High School’s event planning class presented a fashion show: What to wear and what not to wear on an interview (“appearance,” step 3). Finally, Hospitality Human

Resource Association (HHRA) members teamed with students to discuss steps 4 and 5 – how to be “ready” and prepared for the interview process and how to retain the job and be a “success.”



My role as coordinator included organizing the fashion show, meeting with teachers, and orchestrating the industry professionals’ attendance (what to bring, where to be, and how long to be there). I also managed and supervised 20 student volunteers. The conference taught me to keep an open, creative mind; to be flexible and communicate clearly; and to always have a back-up plan – in other words: be prepared!

— Brittanie Martinez '12, Conference Coordinator



inspired by InnSpire to aspire to innkeeping

going places

In late January, the CH&LA Education Foundation arranged for HTM students Natalie Franzone-Cohen '11 and Samantha Bass '11 to attend the Innkeeping as a Professional Program and the recent InnSpire Conference at the Mission Valley Marriott Hotel. Natalie and Sammie are members of the AH&LA/CH&LA Student Chapter. Their experience at the InnSpire conference confirmed what they needed to know to move forward.

Samantha Bass '11: At the Innkeeping as a Profession seminar (IAP), part of the InnSpire Conference, I was truly “inn-spired,” I went into the IAP conference with nothing more than a vague dream and no concrete direction. After two full days at the conference for aspiring innkeepers, I left more confident than ever that I could one day realize my dream of running my own successful B&B.

As a student at SDSU studying Hospitality and Tourism Management, I was offered the chance to spend two days at the IAP seminar, and I leaped at the opportunity. What better way to see if my far off dream could one day become a reality?

I found listening to real-life B&B owners share their personal experiences to be the most beneficial part of the seminar. Since I had yet to decide if innkeeping was right for me, hearing first-hand stories from innkeepers gave me the insight I needed. I was excited when Ann Callahan and Bruce Abney, two successful Southern California Bed & Breakfast owners, shared their stories about the world of innkeeping. Seeing their passion for the day-to-day life as an innkeeper made me realize that owning and operating my own B&B was a goal worth working towards. The path each of them took was unique and made an impression on me. I was able to relate to Ann and Bruce’s stories because they each started their careers in full-service hotels. My major is in Hotel Management and I have worked in hotels for four years. I love the people I work with and the dynamic environment a hotel provides, but I know I will soon look for a change. I think a B&B will be the perfect change for me. After speaking with various professionals at the seminar, I plan to work in a B&B for a few years before opening my own.

The IAP seminar was a behind-the-scenes look at the innkeeping profession and lifestyle. I learned quickly that owning and operating a B&B is hard work, and that the first three years are especially trying. The idea of hard work does not sway my decision to pursue this dream, it only reminds me of the importance of adequate planning. Planning for my future B&B is something that this seminar set in motion for me; I now am thinking twice about buying that new outfit, and more about investing my savings. Then one day, I will be able to have a financial base for my B&B endeavor.

After attending the IAP seminar, I know that my dream of owning and operating a Bed & Breakfast



going places

(Continued from page 1)

Inn is attainable and I will continue to work towards this goal. I am excited to be a future Bed & Breakfast owner, and thankful to have been the opportunity to attend such a beneficial seminar. <http://www.innspireconference.com/IAP-Student-Articles.php>

Natalie Franzone-Cohen '11: The conference along with a trade show had financial, marketing, and website information, as well as vendors to know what we needed to keep in mind when we were to open/think about opening a Bed and Breakfast of our own. Learning how they “fell” into this occupation, how long they have been doing this and what it really takes to run a B&B. Seeing each innkeeper pick up things from the other innkeepers was very interesting and knowing they are regular people trying to improve the quality of their business by providing the best experience, or finding more effective ways to do something from what worked for others. Learning where most B&B's are located and why, helps in deciding where would be a successful location to have. Some people say the three most important things in a hotel/restaurant are location, location, location. For B&B's the three most important things are website, marketing, location. Finding that marketing is one of the biggest things to focus on because getting a B&B noticed takes a lot more effort than a name brand hotel. Being involved in the local community, and being part of professional B&B organizations helps in getting noticed and involved in the community in which the bed and breakfast will be located in.

Why would someone choose to stay at a B&B in a city with multiple corporate hotels with loyalty programs? The answer is simple: personalized attention. There is a specific type of guest that stays at a bed and breakfast, one who likes to interact with people, meet new people (maybe even from around the world), and those who want to have a good time. The idea of what a bed and breakfast is and what used to be has changed dramatically from what others would call staying at their grandmother's house. Some are still like that today, which is wonderful, but the B&B industry is ever changing and people not need to stray away from the idea of staying in one, I know one thing, you will be disappointed you missed out on a wonderful experience.

Owning and running a B&B has been something I have wanted to do for a long time, but it was a far-fetched idea. I was thrilled to have met all the wonderful innkeepers from different backgrounds and locations. Doing something that made them happy and enjoy their time working was wonderful to see. It showed those of us who attended that it was hard work, but very rewarding. I am excited to shadow two women from the conference and learn how they operate on a daily basis and how much work it actually takes. By attending this seminar, I now know the first steps of what I need to do to have my dream become a reality. I plan to attend another conference in the future.

<http://www.innspireconference.com/IAP-Student-Articles.php>



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make your home first, your job second...

going places

words of wisdom from industry pros

In mid-February an unprecedented alliance between the San Diego student chapters of the American Hotel and Lodging Association (AH&LA) and the Hospitality Financial & Technology Professionals (HFTP) produced a joint conference held at the Sheraton Harbor Island. Among those in attendance were Ryann Hastings '11, the AH&LA Liaison of the HTMSA's student chapter.

The HFTP-AH&LA event started off on a very rainy evening. With bad weather and traffic, we expected a low turnout, but we were wrong... Almost 40 students attended from SDSU, nearly outnumbering the HFTP!

We began with a cocktail hour and plenty of productive networking. I was surprised to discover that most of the accountants worked at hotels! Dinner followed, where conversation moved from travel to careers. After dessert, the three panelists spoke, beginning with Randi Knott of CH&LA, a lobbyist from Sacramento. She joked that new laws and regulations may not always be interesting, but they do address major issues about today's hospitality world. Knott managed to be both funny and informative, especially for those of us with a hotel emphasis.

The second speaker was John Campbell of the La Jolla Beach & Tennis Club and this year's AH&LA chair, whom I've met many times and always enjoy. He told a story about how he moved to Hawaii because he thought it would be a great place to go after college, but he realized his heart was still in Southern California, so he came home. "After graduation, find a place that you want to live; don't move to a job. Because ultimately you will not like a place where you don't like the environment that surrounds you."

The last speaker was Atlas Hotels' Mike McDowell, who spoke eloquently about what it takes to succeed. After describing his past and his plans for the future, McDowell urged us to stay involved and start associating with different memberships to expand our knowledge.

This meant a lot to us students: the majority of us who attended this event are graduating in May, and we're all a little unsure about what move to make next. Campbell's perspective reassured us that not only does our happiness matter, but we can earn our way to success from the ground up.

—Ryann Hastings '11

HFTP & AH&LA STUDENT
CHAPTER MEETING

HTMSA PRESENTS



A night of networking featuring a panel of:

- John Campbell (AH&LA)
- Randi Knott (CH&LA)
- Mike McDowell (Atlas Hotels)

Wednesday, February 16, 2011
6:00 PM
Sheraton Harbor Island



\$20 includes dinner and the event. Please RSVP
by February 11, 2011.

For more information & to RSVP contact:
Aha.htmsa@gmail.com

HFTP will present a trio of speakers for this event from the AH&LA, CH&LA and SDLIA presenting a 2011 hospitality update from the national, state and local levels.



“not all fun & games, but worth it...”

new understanding in the old city

going places

Cinthia Cruz, class of 2010, traveled to Cartagena, Colombia, to work for Hilton Hotels in August 2010. Even after a short time, she knew how much her HTM studies informed what she did and how she did it...

I've only been here one week so far, but there's been much to learn! Friday I was working with the Revenue Manager who's been working with the Sales Director on the budget, which is due tomorrow and needs to be presented in Miami next week. I ended up staying with them until 10:30 p.m. to fix a problem. It was a very long day but very informative, and I got to see what goes into making the budget and making sure everything is good. Next week I'll be in sales and F&B. The hotel is a little old and plans for renovation are underway. It's a big hotel compared to what I was used to in San Diego, but it's becoming a great experience. The city outside of the hotel is not the greatest, but what they call the "Old City" is gorgeous – definitely a must see.



Thank you for having us do all those activities and projects in the Kaleidoscope classes because the way this program works is like that class. I have to come up with a "Business Driven" project, then an "Improvement Opportunity" for each department; that is my "specialization." I have to present it to the GM and the HRD, very similar to the activity for 498. I was reading the manual they gave us, and it reminded me of everything I did in school. You guys have really put together a program that prepares the students for the "real world." It asked for a lot of stuff I had done already, even the way the work sheets are formatted, asking what our objective is, what tasks we need to do at the start and finish of the day, the results/success. We get graded, then we get more constructive criticism.

Thank you again for everything your program offered me and prepared me for this.

Nine months later, a very different Cinthia shares an update:

I have one more month left here and it's been a great experience; I couldn't have asked for anything better. It hasn't been the easiest thing, but I have definitely learned a lot. I've gone through every department, spent time with the GM, and seen how a hotel is run outside of the U.S., which was some-

(Continued on page 2)



SAN DIEGO STATE
UNIVERSITY

L. Robert Payne School of
Hospitality & Tourism Management



going places

(Continued from page 1)

thing to get accustomed to (they tend to be a little bit more laid back). Best of all, my Spanish has improved immensely. At the moment I'm working on my project and trying to get it implemented before I leave, which has been keeping me busy.

From here, I will be going to a Hilton Garden Inn opening in Tuxtla, Mexico, for four months. After I'm done there, I will be headed to Hilton Los Cabos for five months. I'm very excited for my next placements, especially since one is an opening and the other is the best hotel that Hilton has in Latin America.

I went to the NSMH conference in Atlanta, Georgia, on February 10-12, to promote the Latin America & Caribbean "Elevator Training Program," which they will be recruiting for next year. It was nice to get invited and was a good networking experience. It was weird being on the other side this time after just one year.

I think the greatest thing that this program offered me has been the vast networking opportunities. We are always in contact with Orr or Mirta, the Regional HRD for the Caribbean, and they have treated us wonderfully, helping us in any way that they could. I feel as if they really do want us to grow and develop career wise, but they also expect the same determination and enthusiasm from us. I have also had the opportunity to meet GMs and VPs and have created great friendships with the other five elevator participants.

As I said, it's been a great experience that hasn't been all fun and games, but definitely worth it.

Saludos!

— *Cinthia Cruz '11, Elevator Graduate Trainee
Hilton Cartagena Hotel*





IME's first symposium sets the tone for success

going places

March 8 marked the launch of the L. Robert Payne School of HTM's Institute for Meetings and Events' (IME) first symposium for nonprofits. The seminar featured a panel of meeting industry leaders and community volunteers who addressed a long-standing issue among San Diego's 9000-plus nonprofits: "Events: Are They Worth It?" The morning of information and education was organized and orchestrated by IME Associate Director Rachel Peniche and Patti Roscoe, founder and chairman of the Board of Advisors of IME, who said, "We were very pleased with the response to this first symposium presented by IME and look forward to future programs on the many topics that challenge the meetings and events discipline."

More than 80 attendees benefited from a range of topics that addressed the nonprofit community's key concerns, including "Event Economics: Dispelling the Myths," by HTM Director Carl Winston, and an event case study, "From Dreary to Dynamic," from the Breining Group's founder, Terri Breining, who also serves on the IME Advisory Committee.

"Voices of Experience," a panel comprised of industry insiders, featured Anthony Bolotta (President, Bollotta Entertainment); Sandi Cottrell (Managing Director, ArtWalk); Sean McPartland (Executive Director, Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation); and Linda Katz (Founding President, San Diego Women's Foundation). A lively question and answer period followed, giving a clear signal that more conversation will follow.

"This was an opportunity to introduce IME to the nonprofit community while giving attendees a chance to learn from local experts and network with each other," Peniche said. As part of the program, students from HTM reflected on their own nonprofit work or internship experience.

In addition to her involvement in IME, Peniche teaches several courses in the HTM program: Weddings & Social Events, Introduction to Hospitality & Tourism Management, Specialty Event Management, and Site Selection & Negotiation. She also helps students interested in working in the meeting and events industry find internships and gain valuable hands on experience as part of their educational experience.

Senior Kimi Phillips '11 spoke about her nonprofit internship's "hands-on" experience and how it informed her future career. "It helped me see if I was 'cut out' for it or not, and to realize my true passion for nonprofits..... It's such a heartwarming experience working for a organization and a cause that you believe in."



KIMI PHILLIPS '11

(Continued on page 2)



(Continued from page 1)

Well-respected in San Diego's special event circles, Peniche founded her own company, Plan It San Diego, in 2000. Since then she's conceived, planned, and coordinated hundreds of weddings, bar/bat mitzvahs, and other corporate, political, and charity events. Peniche passes this experience onto her students, who appreciate her smarts, savvy, and sass. "Rachel's unique combination of skills contributes to her personal success and her popularity as an HTM instructor," effused director Carl Winston. "They save her when competing priorities of a pressure-based business threaten to derail the day. And that's a skill every student in this program needs to learn!"



RACHEL PENICHE

Attendee response to IME's first symposium was encouraging and enthusiastic ("...We are a new board of a small nonprofit. You brought many ideas to mind and we found plenty of inspiration!"), while the takeaways were tangible: each participant received a volunteer form linking them to students plus an incisive article on the future of volunteerism.

Contact Rachel Peniche at (858) 449-8060 or rpeniche@mail.sdsu.edu for more information about IME.

About Rachel

Rachel Peniche is a San Diego native and graduate of the University of San Diego High School. She attended Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. In 2000, she began working in the Special Event industry when she coordinated the celebrity and VIP arrangements for The Governor Gray Davis Committee at the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles. That same year, after training in event management and meeting management & special events planning, Peniche started Plan It San Diego, an event planning and coordination company specializing in weddings, bar/bat mitzvahs and other corporate, political and charity events. She is a member of the International Special Events Society (ISES), San Diego Chapter where she has also served on the board of directors.

Peniche teaches at SDSU and USD, and co-chaired the 2009 Wedding Lunch for The Special Event Conference hosted in San Diego in January 2009, and is also involved in many philanthropic organizations such as Rady Children's Hospital San Diego, The Thursday Club, and The Leukemia Lymphoma Society. Most recently, she served as the Event Coordinator for Vista Hill, a local nonprofit serving those with substance abuse, mental health issues, and developmental disabilities.



alumni updates

going places

Nothing succeeds like success. And a story never hurts. Two alums – Sarah Major '05 and Zachary Parker '08 – took divergent paths to their HTM futures, but both have achieved dreams they seeded in our program, even if it isn't quite the garden they thought they'd grow. So whether your future stays as local as your laptop computer or as far-reaching as a remote village in Papua New Guinea, our students are going places... (In another twist, another HTM alum, Matt Lemmo '10, was in Papua New Guinea as Zack's field worker!)

Sarah Major: I Am One+

(This story originally appeared in *One+* at MPIweb.org,

http://www.mpiweb.org/Portal/Business/20101112/Sarah_Major_I_Am_One)



SARAH MAJOR '05

In 2005, I graduated from the San Diego State University (SDSU) Hospitality and Tourism Management program at the top of my class. I had visions of linens, signage, lighting and F&B dancing through my head. In my first job out of college I managed regional job fairs for a local newspaper in Silicon Valley, which taught me the basics of trade shows and how to manage a desk. We also created a Virtual Job Fair (Internet-based). If only I had known that this was just a small glimpse into my future.

I soon left the paper to work for a large global high-tech company, supporting a 16k-attendee, live sales meeting in Las Vegas. We bought out huge hotel blocks and planned activities with all the glamour and glitz I dreamed about. I moved over to a smaller (3,500 attendees) annual CEO leadership meeting, where we produced a live event in San Francisco.

In the middle of our second planning cycle for a live event the economy took a turn for the worse and the AIG scandal rocked event planners around the world. To avoid layoffs, my company decided to make drastic cuts to budgets across the board, greatly reducing spend in a short amount of time. They started with extras—beverages in break rooms—and moved on to the harder stuff, like cutting employee travel and bonuses. As difficult a transition as this was, the overwhelming sentiment was that we were happy to modify our behaviors if it meant saving jobs.

And almost four months out, we learned that due to budget cuts our event would be transitioned to a completely virtual meeting.

Virtually??? I had a two-day agenda with 20 hours of content and 3,400 attendees spread out over 57 countries that touched just about every time zone. After the initial denial and then acceptance, we sat down to piece this together. This would be the company's first all-virtual event with this much com-



(Continued from page 1)

plexity, and all eyes were on us. The decisions we made would serve as a practice run for the larger sales meeting several months later.

Speaker Changes

With a greatly reduced budget and four months to plan, we began looking for anyone that would have insights. We soon found that this was a very new trend in the industry and consequently there was very limited expertise. This was a brand-new world and we would be pioneers in this space. We took what we knew from live events and started piecing together an outline. Right away, the 20 hours of content was drastically reshaped and repackaged. It was impossible to expect attendees to sit in front of their computers watching three days of content.

We looked to attention span studies and adopted a formula—do something to re-engage the attendee every 5 to 7 minutes. This would require drastic changes to the content delivery and our executives' standard delivery. We had to teach speakers about the new style/format of sessions, as the platform was no longer a big stage with fancy demos and special effects, remove fluff and get to the core of the content. It was about smart, streamlined information that dovetailed from speaker to speaker to reinforce the key messages.

In addition, our executives had to become great multi-taskers. The majority of the sessions in the first year were streamed WebEx sessions. The speakers, with the help of their communications managers, had to integrate polling questions and Q&A to keep attendee interest.

Change is hard, and going virtual was flipping most everything upside down. We provided the speaker with training and walked them through the virtual environment and technologies so they could see what the attendee would see. Rehearsals were more critical than ever before. It was stressful, but our executives were committed to success and prepared like never before. The results were great and have been improving year over year.

Attendee Experience

There was a huge behavioral shift for attendees as well. Where were they going to “go” for the event? We quickly partnered with a third party to create a virtual environment with the same look and feel as our Executive Briefing Center to help provide a familiar space. We aimed to keep it as real-world as possible—there was a trade show-style hall with virtual booths, virtual meeting rooms and a virtual auditorium for keynote sessions.

It was also clear that we needed to make it fun for the attendees. A networking lounge was created to

(Continued on page 3)



(Continued from page 2)

help drive interaction between attendees and to insert a little fun into the event. This is where really understanding your audience comes into play.

You have to understand what drives your audience and the root reason for their attendance. Is it for networking, reward, education, driving business, etc.? What about the makeup and demographics of your attendees? Are they primarily sales folks, business leaders, young/old, male/female, what culture? All of these elements helped shape the design of the program.

The first year we created a “points system.” The goal was mainly to help behavioral change and to encourage attendees to learn how to navigate the virtual environment—simple efforts such as “download your conference guide and win 10 points.” We had prizes along the way as attendees hit certain point levels, and a grand prize for the individual and the regional locations that had the most points.

Global and Cultural Considerations

Though there are some sacrifices to planning a virtual event, there are also strong benefits. We strived to offer times that were globally sensitive for all attendees to ensure no one had to attend a session in the middle of the night or the wee hours of the morning. We found the largest blocks of time that overlapped with as many of our attendees as possible, and learned about different countries and some of the challenges. (A great example: Many parts of the Middle East only have electricity for a few hours a day. We had to target that time so they could get access to the content.)

In other parts of the world, network connectivity did not support large bandwidth requirements. There were also cultural and religious considerations, such as not starting a session during prayer time or making sure we have content slides available early so the global audience can absorb the information first and be prepared to ask questions to gain clarity. We also needed to make sessions smaller and more intimate to allow for group dialog. There were many lessons learned in our first year.

Technology

Technology was a huge component that would continuously influence the planning. Discussions shifted from parties and F&B to technology infrastructure, network load and bandwidth. I had to learn an entirely new vocabulary in a short period of time—I never considered myself a “techie” and still don’t, but I got one intense crash course.

Our team quickly partnered with IT, and we conducted hours upon hours of testing—load testing, stress testing, troubleshooting, support handoffs, etc. I quickly realized that I was in uncharted territory, and we learned that there were still physical limitations in the virtual world. Requirements,

(Continued on page 4)



going places

(Continued from page 3)

timelines and drop-dead dates had to be honored, as well as capacity limits on sessions to ensure we didn't overload the network.

Planning a virtual event is not as fluid as a wiki or a Web page. It was not OK to make changes on the fly and push them live without proper testing and troubleshooting. One simple change could have a drastic domino effect on the backend, which end loaded our timeline drastically. As we all know with events, you have to be fluid and flexible to allow for changes that are bound to occur, and this was the polar opposite in the technology world. We had to have a 90 percent finished product a good four to eight weeks before going live just to allow for proper testing, adjustments and retesting.

Lessons Learned

At the end of the day, even with our fair share of learning, the events have been seen as a success. The post-event scores have trended to show greater alignment and understanding of the messaging and a spike in the consumption of the content. Although I feel we are still on a learning curve for virtual events, I have summarized my lessons learned as follows.

- **Don't be afraid to ask for help and/or admit that you don't have all of the answers.** Surround yourself with the experts. Collaboration is one of the hidden and positive side effects to this virtual world, breaking down silos between teams who would have rarely partnered on projects before.
- **Budget for the unexpected both monetarily and in your timeline.** Allow for the unexpected hidden costs. Technology is not cheap and virtual events can be just as expensive as live events. Allow for ample planning and testing time. Give yourself the buffer you need to ensure a smooth event.
- **Embrace virtual events; they are here to stay in one capacity or another.** Although at first they may seem scary, virtual events can add a whole new level of engagement for your audience. Virtual aspects are a great accessory to any event and allow for greater information sharing, work-life balance and customization.

You can take your event to the next level with virtual events. They are popping up everywhere you turn—you'll even see trends of virtual weddings, funerals, etc. Keep in mind that like anything innovative, they are a work in progress. Be honest and upfront with your key stakeholders—virtual events have risks, but the benefits are unmatched.

Though my original dreams of planning live events took a bit of a left turn from beautiful linens and floral, the journey has been one well worth taking.

Sarah Major '05 is project manager, corporate positioning for Cisco in San Jose.



alumni updates

going places

Surfing tour leads to life passion for local man

by Steven Mihailovich

(This story first appeared in *SDNews.com*,

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PACIFIC BEACH RESIDENT ZACHARY PARKER '08 SHARES A LAUGH WITH A YOUNGSTER FROM A VILLAGE IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA. PARKER STARTED WALU INTERNATIONAL WHICH SENDS TEAMS TO TEACH VILLAGERS ABOUT THE BENEFITS AND LOGISTICS OF BASIC WATER SANITATION.

PACIFIC BEACH — When a friend of a friend told surfer Zachary Parker '08 that he'd find phenomenal waves near Lido, a village of 1,200 people in Papua New Guinea about 1,000 miles northeast of Darwin, Australia, Parker decided to check it out for a week.

Instead, Parker remained for six weeks and returned to his home in Pacific Beach with the seed of an idea that eventually germinated into Walu International, a non-profit charity teaching water sanitation methods to the people of Papua New Guinea.

"I wanted to do something, but it was rather vague," Parker said. "I started with 20 different ideas. But I really didn't want to just put a Band Aid on something. Then a sustainable surf tourism professor (at San Diego State University) asked, 'What is a fundamental way to change the life of people?'"

Parker remembered the odor of human waste that pervaded Lido because the village was too remote for any water sanitation system, with people openly defecating on the beach for lack of facilities.

Parker wrote a business plan for a nonprofit charity for one of his MBA courses at San Diego State graduate school in September 2009 and within a month, Walu was incorporated.

Walu sends teams of five, including engineers, to teach 10 village leaders about the benefits and logistics of basic water sanitation, who then educate the rest of the village. Once convinced of the advantages, the locals build basic sanitation systems using their own materials and labor.



going places

(Continued from page 1)

“It’s a much more compelling argument when they hear it from their own,” Parker said.

“The good part is that once everyone is educated, they take over the project. Our goal is not to be there.”

With a full-time job at the Tower 23 Hotel, the 27-year-old Parker has his hands full between traveling to Papua New Guinea and organizing fundraisers at home. However, Parker finds the work is similar on both sides.

“We also have to educate donors as well because they expect tangible results,” Parker said. “It’s all about managing donor expectations.”

The strategy works, at least for Pacific Beach resident Thomas Carey, who volunteered for Walu fundraisers after hearing about it from friends.

“Zack is a surfer and part of the young generation, and I think that entices a lot of people,” Carey said. “He’s not a guy who worked in corporate America and made his millions and then decides to start a nonprofit. He wants to do it out of his passion to help.”



As for the name, Parker said he got it from his brother Charles, who couldn’t pronounce the word “water” as a child.

“My mom still asks us if we want a glass of walu,” Parker said. “I’m glad to provide the same opportunity to the people of Papua New Guinea.”

ZACHARY PARKER '08 (LOWER RIGHT) ADDRESSES A GROUP OF MEN IN A VILLAGE IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA.