

East Regional

Seasonal Cruise Ships Take Burlington, VT, Groups on a Sail

Lake Champlain vessels are becoming meetings venues that boast amenities and accommodate diverse groups

When Mike Shea founded Green Mountain Boat Lines in 1984, his signature vessel was a 149-passenger paddle wheeler called the *Spirit of Ethan Allen*, which set sail from Burlington, VT, every summer and provided scenic tours of Lake Champlain. Since then, Shea's company has expanded both its fleet and offerings, which now include theme dinners and charter cruises for corporate groups aboard Shea's third-generation cruise liner, the *Spirit of Ethan Allen III*.

"We do four scenic tours daily, and that's how our company start-

ed," said Rachel Connor, director of sales and marketing for the *Spirit of Ethan Allen III*. "We've evolved, however, and we've recently been trying to attract more meetings because we've realized that groups are really looking for something different."

According to Connor, Burlington has long been a popular meetings destination for New England-based groups, thanks to its natural mountain setting, nearby airport, and vibrant downtown, which includes several hotels, restaurants, and shops. It was only a matter of time, therefore, before groups

found their way to Lake Champlain, which is over 110 miles long and bordered by New York to the west, Vermont to the east, and Quebec to the north.

"The lake's the perfect place for people who want to meet somewhere that's inspirational," Connor said. "We're not set up for the traditional PowerPoint meeting; we're more interested in meetings where people want to be surrounded by nature so that they can brainstorm, be creative, and build relationships."

Although the Lake Champlain area is ideally suited for smaller,

more intimate meetings, the *Spirit of Ethan Allen III* can accommodate as many as 424 passengers on three separate decks: the Admiral Deck, which seats 210; the Horizon Deck, which seats 150; and the upper Sky Deck, which seats 100 and features retractable glass walls in order to facilitate open-air events.

Although it's the largest boat on Lake Champlain, the *Spirit of Ethan Allen III* isn't the only one. In fact, Green Mountain Boat Lines launched a group-friendly yacht last year. Called the *Moon-*

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Mandarin Oriental Debuts Luxury Meeting Space in Boston's Back Bay

Approximately 13 years in the making due to chronic construction delays and a fire early last year, the new Mandarin Oriental, Boston hotel opened this past October in the city's Back Bay neighborhood, where it's positioning to be one of the city's most prestigious properties.

The Mandarin Oriental, Boston features 136 rooms, 12 suites, a 16,000-sf spa and fitness center, and 10,000 sf of function space.

There are three meeting rooms (the largest of which is 1,280 sf), a 1,950-sf prefunction space called the Oriental Gallery, as well as a 4,200-sf ballroom that can accommodate as many as 600 guests and is divisible by two.

In addition to the new, upmarket group space, the Mandarin Oriental, Boston offers meetings solutions, according to group sales manager Kai Chao, who said that technology is a major differentia-

tor for the property.

Aside from standard services like wired and wireless Internet, the property offers meeting spaces with adjustable lighting, computerized temperature control, web-enabled videoconferencing, computerized screens that can be customized to display group messages outside meeting rooms, and in-room television channels on which attendees can watch or revisit recorded meeting sessions.

Like all Mandarin Oriental hotels, five-star service is the mainstay, according to Chao. "We're all about attention to detail," he said, "which means that meeting planners have a lot less to worry about. We've got everything taken care of, so they can really focus on the content of their events."

The Boston property is Hong Kong-based Mandarin Oriental's fifth hotel in the U.S.

—Robert Curley

Newport, RI's Largest Hotel Gets 'Unprecedented' Makeover

A \$34 million retooling of the Hyatt Regency Newport—the historic Rhode Island city's largest hotel and only true destination resort—touched almost every area of the property and included major upgrades to its event and conference facilities. The hotel has an 8,000-sf grand ballroom, 16 meeting rooms, and 27,000 sf of function space in all.

"The remodeling of all the

Hyatt's meeting and event spaces, as well as the creation of a new main entrance and lobby area—offering a spectacular sense of arrival overlooking the Newport Bridge—is a great story for us," said Tim Walsh, VP of sales for the Newport Convention and Visitors Bureau. "With the Hyatt project complete, all four convention hotels in Newport, including the Hotel Viking, the

Newport Marriott, and the Newport, will have undergone major renovations."

But the 317-room Newport Marriott is not done yet. It is starting a two-month renovation of its 24,800 sf of meeting space this month. —RC

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light Lady, it's the first overnight cruise ship to operate on Lake Champlain since 1932, according to the boat's sales and marketing director, Gwendy Lauritzen.

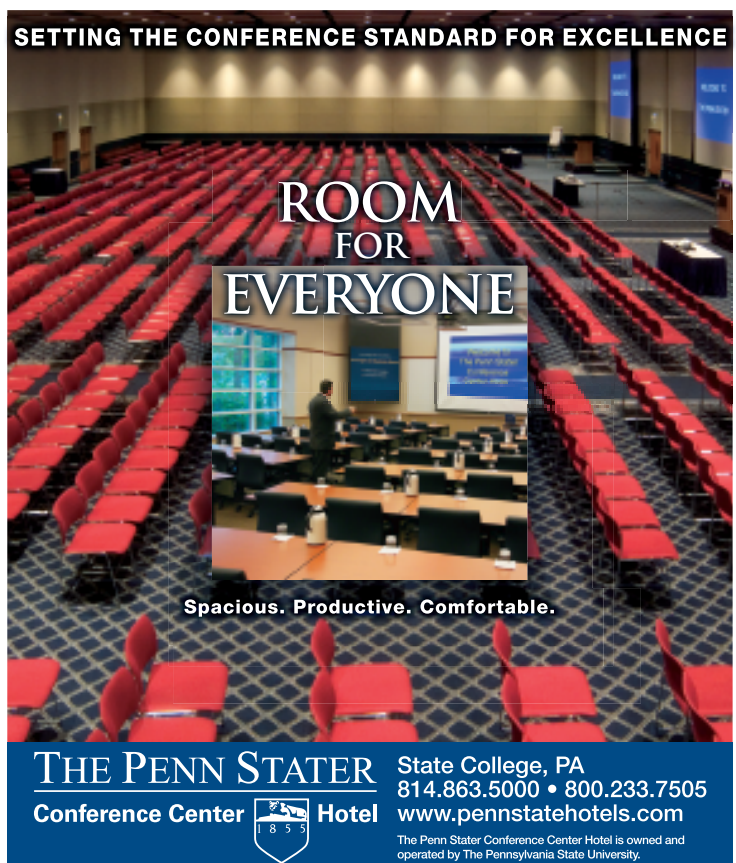
Like the *Spirit of Ethan Allen III*, the *Moonlight Lady* has three separate decks: a lower deck that's designed for entertaining, with books, nautical charts, board games, and movies; a middle deck that features eight private cabins that sleep a total of 16; and an upper deck that can seat 40 and includes an open kitchen, a bar,

and a lounge.

"It's great for small meetings, if you want to get away from cell phones, faxes, and e-mails for a two-day, one-night think tank," Lauritzen said. "Or, for larger groups, you can go out for an entire day on the upper deck."

In May, the *Moonlight Lady* will commence its second season, and the *Spirit of Ethan Allen III* its eighth. The two boats will sail in the midst of a yearlong celebration honoring Lake Champlain's 400th anniversary.

—Matt Alderton



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