

# FRONT & CENTER

INFORMATION AND EVENTS FROM THE GEORGIA INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTER



**Full Treatment**  
Service-oriented Marriott hotels and GICC go hand-in-hand



**Director's Focus**  
City government plays important role in GICC's success



**Grand Openings**  
An up-to-date timeline of Gateway Center construction

## A Front & Center Interview with: Ann Godi, CMP

President, Benchmark360, Inc. and Chairwoman of the Board, Meeting Professionals International



*What are a few of the pressing issues facing the meeting professional in light of the current slow economy?*

This past year has elevated the need for the meeting professional to clearly communicate the value proposition for meetings and live events. A recent research report from Forbes Insights, "Business Meetings: The Case for Face-to-Face," shows an overwhelming preference by business executives for in-person meetings (more than 80 percent) over virtual. Top reasons cited included stronger, more meaningful relationships (85%) and greater interaction (75%). This research supports MPI's Event View Annual Research, which for the last five years has shown that chief marketing officers identify events as the most effective of marketing activities. Meeting professionals need to learn to speak the language of business in order to be able to share the business value of meetings.

*Also, if the economy has resulted in a reduction in the number of corporate meetings, do you see that turning around? What is the current trend?*

The economic environment of the past year is unprecedented, and meetings and events have not been exempt from feeling the sting. As the economy begins to stabilize and starts growing again, so will our industry. Already the signs in our community are encouraging — more RFPs and returning demand.

(continued on page 4)

# Connected!

The ATL SkyTrain is up and running, connecting GICC visitors to the airport via a two-minute ride.

**O**FFICIALLY UNVEILED WITH A GRAND OPENING ON DECEMBER 8, the ATL SkyTrain is up and running, moving passengers from inside Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport to the GICC and on to the new off-site airport rental car center.

The beginning of guided-rail service gives GICC the distinction of being America's first convention center directly connected to a major airport. And with the two new on-site Marriott-brand hotels nearing their opening dates, the GICC complex, now known as the Gateway Center, offers meetings and conventions an unprecedented combination of travel, lodging and meeting facilities and convenience.

(continued on page 4)



The newly-opened ATL SkyTrain puts Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport (1) just minutes from the GICC (2), Marriott Atlanta Airport Gateway (3), SpringHill Suites Marriott (4) and Gateway Center Office Complex (5).

### WHAT THEY'RE SAYING ...

"This is metro Atlanta's most exciting new hospitality development."

— JIM STORMONT,  
Partner, Grove Street Partners

"The GICC has the outdoor space and communications technology we need. And the airport is right next door."

— BRUCE BUTTON,  
General Manager, North American Quarry and Recycling Show

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Georgia International Convention Center  
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College Park, GA 30337





onstruction of the two Marriott brand hotels on the GICC Gateway Center campus is complete and they are staffing up for their impending openings: SpringHill Suites on December 18, 2009; the full-service Atlanta Airport Marriott Gateway in August



**ROBERT WOOLRIDGE**

General Manager, Marriott Airport Gateway Hotel

Mr. Woolridge counts 23 years with the Marriott Corporation, including management roles at 14 Marriott properties, from New York to Boston to Orlando to Philadelphia and Atlanta. He has been in Atlanta since 2001 and served as General Manager of the Atlanta Marriott Perimeter Center for the past three years.



**AMANDA PERLMAN**

General Manager, SpringHill Suites

Ms. Perlman has spent the bulk of her career managing Marriott properties for a third-party management firm, then joined Marriott in 2006 as Assistant General Manager of the Courtyard Midtown. Most recently she was General Manager of the Residence Inn Alpharetta Windward.



# THE FULL TREATMENT

Service-Oriented Marriott Hotels and GICC Go Hand-in-Hand



**F&C: Marriott is rated tops by business travelers. What does Marriott do to keep them coming back?**

**Woolridge.** Marriott has been committed to the business traveler for more than a quarter century. Our core hotels are geared to the business traveler. Our focus is on consistency from one hotel to the next. From pre-arrival to arrival to post-departure, it is going to be the same from hotel to hotel. That is what the business traveler likes most, knowing exactly what he or she is going to get from city to city, state to state.



**Perlman.** The business traveler appreciates our consistency in product and service, the positive environment created by our service teams and our rewards program.

**“Our initial response indicates 2010 will be a very good year. Call volume has been consistent since September, when our opening dates were announced, and we have a growing list of confirmed bookings.”**

— AMANDA PERLMAN | General Manager, SpringHill Suites



2010. *Front & Center* spoke with the General Managers of the two properties about their focus on the meetings and convention industry, and in particular, guests of the GICC.

**F&C: As a hotel on site at the GICC, many of your customers will be meeting planners and their clients. What are you doing here to serve that constituency?**

**Woolridge.** First, we are very excited to partner with the GICC in this complex. That is, we are a full-service, 400-room, core-branded Marriott, but with incredible access to 300,000 square feet of convention space.

Among our many services for meeting planners are our Red Coat and Gold Key services. Our Red Coat staff are attired in red coats to be easily identified as the meeting planner's point of contact for anything needed at a moment's notice. Our Gold Key service starts the instant the meeting is booked. We ask the meeting planner for the three things related to our service that are most critical to that meeting. It may be a smooth arrival process, meeting room temperatures, catering services — whatever those three hot buttons, we communicate them throughout our organization so everyone of us knows what is most important.

**Perlman.** We are going to be very flexible to meet the varying needs of our meeting and convention guests. We will have a variety of food offerings in the lounge for guests wanting to take a seat and relax. For people who want something quick, easy we have a 24 hour Market.

**F&C: Are you concerned that the current economy will negatively impact hotel business here?**

**Perlman.** Our initial response indicates 2010 will be a very good year. Call volume has been consistent since September, when our opening dates were announced, and we have a growing list of confirmed bookings, some for as early as our December 18 opening date.

**Woolridge.** The negative rhetoric around some of the higher profile convention cities may actually benefit Atlanta. We're a great conference city because we're easy to get to and it's easy to do business here — and we don't suffer from the negative perceptions associated with some of those more eccentric locations.

*(continued on page 4)*



FOCUS

by Hugh Austin  
GICC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## It Takes a Team

**M**ORE THAN 60 PERCENT of the convention centers in the U.S. are public facilities — that is, owned and overseen by government entities. For meeting and trade show planners, the distinction between public and private typically is not a consideration. Still, behind the scenes, the fact that the GICC is owned and operated by the City of College Park, Ga., is fundamental to how we function and the service we provide.

Studies have shown for many years that the most important thing about a facility to an event planner is the quality of service. It is a great source of pride for us at the GICC that universally our clients are thrilled with our service, that almost without fail we are complimented by our guests on the commitment and effectiveness of our staff. I suggest that it is the support we receive from the College Park officials to whom we report that enables us to operate so effectively, and I offer the completion of our new on-site hotels and transportation projects, the ATL SkyTrain and neighboring Rental Car Center, as evidence of how well our city government works.

Successful public-private partnerships require a lot of teamwork and a great team. All projects we undertake in College Park involve dedicated public servants who play vital roles in the process. While the Mayor and Council are responsible for final decisions on projects, many individuals

Completing a project successfully with such a group of diverse interests and responsibilities requires effective communication and most importantly, good old-fashioned teamwork.

and groups provide critical input as they formulate strategy, timelines and financing — the city finance department, economic development department, public utilities department, city building inspectors, fire marshals, city engineering, city planner, city and authority attorneys, bond council, financial advisor and city department directors reporting to the city manager. Our council-appointed Business and Industrial Development Authority also reviews projects that involve bond financing, as did the construction of our hotel and transportation projects.

Completing a project successfully with such a group of diverse interests and responsibilities requires effective communication and most importantly, good old-fashioned teamwork. That extends to developers, architects and construction companies, such as Hartsfield Jackson's Construction Management Department, which did such admirable work in completing the ATL SkyTrain and Rental Car Center. Cooperation has been the key to the laudable record College Park has compiled in completing projects on time and under budget, including the GICC, the Public Safety Complex, numerous new recreation facilities, and College Park Power's Compressed Natural Gas facility, to name just a few.

We may be a small city, but we have always dreamed big and converted those dreams to prosperous realities. The ATL SkyTrain, Rental Car Center and on-site Marriott hotels are the three most recent examples of what can be accomplished with the kind of teamwork that capitalizes on the energy and expertise of everyone in the process. ■



# Interview with: Ann Godi, CMP

(continued from page 1)

**F&C:** Has the poor economy given rise to more technology-enabled meetings, and if so, is that a long-term threat to face-to-face meetings?

Interestingly, a lot of short-term decisions were made to replace live meetings and events this past year with technology solutions. The main reasons given were cost and time savings. Research has shown the desired results just weren't there. Technology can enhance live events and in some rare cases be a standalone solution. When you compare value to cost, the live event outperforms. Personally I know of several corporations who tried alternatives to live meetings in 2009 and are returning to live meetings.

**F&C:** Should meeting professionals be concerned about the increased use of social media?

Not at all. Social media can enhance the live experience. Meeting professionals should learn how to incorporate social media into their events — it's no different than using other technology as part of the live event and to continue the dialogue post event.

**F&C:** What do you hope to accomplish during your term as Chairwoman of Meeting Planners International?

Well, I have a long list. One really important focus is on building the body of knowledge that will help define our profession, both internally and externally. There has been a lack of standards in this industry, and the time is right to define the skills and competencies that make this a profession.

We are well on our way to accomplishing this goal, bringing together a task force of industry and academic leaders and MPI staff. Once this body of knowledge is defined and accepted by industry and academia, it will serve to elevate our profession. This is a very exciting initiative. ■

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— ANN GODI, CMP  
President, Benchmark360, Inc. and Chairwoman of the Board, Meeting Professionals International

# The Full Treatment (continued from page 3)

**F&C:** How do SpringHill Suites and the full-service Marriott complement each other?

**Perlman.** The Suites property is an option to the traditional hotel room. Our rooms are 25 percent larger. We'll have a fresh food market open around the clock and a gourmet coffee option such as Starbucks.

Together the hotels will offer a full complement of food options. When our guests want the experience of full-service dining, they are right across campus, a walkway away, from Champions, the new restaurant located in the full-service Marriott.

**Woolridge.** If I have a customer who is not looking for the full-service experience, or who is rate sensitive or wants a suite and ours are booked, the SpringHill Suites right across the street is the perfect option.

**F&C:** How important is it that both hotels have been LEED-certified as "green" properties?

**Perlman.** LEED certification is very important to us. It was a major concern in building both hotels — waste reduction, water and energy conservation through such things as Energy Star appliances, a white roof to keep the building cool, drought-resistant plants and flowers to conserve on water, low-flow water fixtures. Our housekeeping staffs use green cleaning products and we purchase green power from the City of College Park.

It's just as important to our guests. Bids and proposals typically inquire about our green initiatives and status. ■

# Connected! (continued from page 1)

## ATL SKYTRAIN

The elevated ATL SkyTrain consists of 12 cars, each with 52-passenger capacity, which operate in pairs to shuttle customers from the terminal to the GICC/Gateway Center station and then to the rental car center, which also celebrated its grand opening on November 10. Similar in style and design to the existing people mover system that carries travelers to and from the passenger concourses, the ATL SkyTrain can transport more than 10,000 people an hour along its 1.5-mile elevated railway.

The wait time between trains during the day is about three minutes. During off-peak hours and overnight, the wait time is no longer than 10 minutes.

## RCC

The rental car center (RCC), a 67.5-acre site across Interstate 85 from the airport, houses all airport rental car companies and their associated operations, including customer service, administrative offices, car pickup and return, fueling and maintenance facilities. It serves 10 rental car agencies with

8,700 parking spaces. The RCC replaces on-site operations, which have closed resulting in significantly reduced traffic around the airport and easier vehicle access to the airport, even during peak hours.

## 10-YEAR PROGRAM

The Skytrain and rental car center are key elements in a 10-year, \$6 billion-plus Capital Improvement Program designed to support the airport's overall mission of planning, designing, building and maintaining facilities to meet projected growth in domestic and international travel. CIP projects are already working to reduce flight delays, increase airfield and terminal capacity, and enhance overall customer service, and in the process, contribute substantially to Georgia's economic development. ■

**Similar in style and design to the existing people mover system that carries travelers to and from the passenger concourses, the ATL SkyTrain can transport more than 10,000 people an hour along its 1.5-mile elevated railway.**



## KEY CONTACTS

To book your next meeting or trade show at the GICC, contact the Sales Department:  
Phone: 770-997-3566  
Email: [dcole@gicc.com](mailto:dcole@gicc.com)

To book hotel reservations directly with the on-site Marriott or SpringHill Suites hotel:  
Phone: 404-459-5681  
Website:  
[www.SpringHillSuitesAtlantaAirportGateway.com](http://www.SpringHillSuitesAtlantaAirportGateway.com)

For leasing information on the Atlanta Gateway Center Office Building:  
Call C. Lee Evans, III; Colliers Spectrum Cauble, Inc.  
Phone: 404.877.9203  
Email: [lee.evans@colliers.com](mailto:lee.evans@colliers.com)

## FAST FACTS: GRAND OPENINGS

2009		2010		
<b>ATL SkyTrain</b> <small>(people mover connecting airport, GICC and Rental Car Center)</small>	<b>RCC</b> <small>(Rental Car Center)</small>	<b>Gateway Center Class A Office Complex</b>	<b>SpringHill Suites Hotel</b>	<b>Marriott Airport Gateway Hotel</b>
Airport to GICC in 2 minutes	Off-site facility housing all airport rental car operations	130,000 NSF & 526 parking spaces	147 guest rooms	403 guest rooms
<b>Service begins Dec. 8, 2009</b>	<b>Opens Dec. 8, 2009</b>	<b>Ready for occupancy September 2009</b>	<b>Opens Dec. 18, 2010</b>	<b>Opens August 2010</b>

For information on booking space, please call the GICC Sales Department at 770-997-3566.



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2000 Convention Center Concourse  
College Park, Georgia 30337  
Phone 770.997.3566

Fax 770.994.8559  
E-mail [gicc@gicc.com](mailto:gicc@gicc.com)  
[www.gicc.com](http://www.gicc.com)