



THE MPI
VIRGINIA VIEW

NEWSLETTER
SECOND QUARTER, 2025

BEYOND THE BOXED LUNCH



Meeting food is ... well, meeting food. Under-seasoned and underwhelming. But not at Kalahari. Start your event meal with mouthwatering appetizers, like our Nashville Hot Texas Quail with pickled slaw, green tomato, orange blossom honey, and buttercrust bread. Our passion for food is beyond conventional.



Updates & Announcements

Welcome Back to The MPI Virginia View!

Thank you for the warm response to our inaugural issue — we're thrilled to keep the momentum going! In this edition, you'll find fresh insights, upcoming opportunities to connect, and spotlights on members who are making an impact across our community.

We're committed to making The Virginia View valuable for you, so keep sharing your ideas and feedback — your voice helps shape what's next!

**SUBMIT YOUR
FEEDBACK**

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President's Letter

DWIGHT DRISKILL



Dear MPI Virginia Chapter Members,

As we reach the midpoint of 2025, I want to take a moment to reflect on the current state of our industry and share what we're seeing across the dynamic and ever-evolving world of meeting and event planning.

Despite economic shifts and continued conversations around hybrid work, the meetings and events industry is proving to be more resilient and innovative than ever. In-person gatherings are not only rebounding — they're evolving in creative, meaningful ways that prioritize attendee experience, mental well-being, and sustainability.

Trends Shaping Our Industry

One of the most exciting developments is the renewed emphasis on experiential design. On platforms like LinkedIn and Instagram, planners are showcasing events that go beyond the traditional ballroom setup — incorporating immersive installations, wellness lounges, local food and culture, and even outdoor "unconferences." These experiences are designed to engage attendees not just intellectually, but emotionally and physically.

Another visible trend is the rise of AI and automation tools to streamline planning processes. From chatbots for registration support to AI-curated agendas, planners are openly sharing their wins — and lessons learned — in real time. If you're on LinkedIn, you've probably seen posts about tools like Cvent's AI Matchmaking or AI-powered event marketing copywriters making waves. Embracing these technologies is becoming less of a choice and more of a necessity.

Equally important is the growing commitment to inclusivity and accessibility. Social conversations on Twitter/X and Threads often highlight how event planners are rethinking venue selection, signage, dietary options, and programming to ensure every attendee feels welcome and included. This is more than a trend – it's a movement that reflects the heart of what MPI stands for.

Local Strength, Global Vision

Here in Virginia, we're seeing our members lead with creativity and purpose. From Richmond to Virginia Beach, local planners are executing events that serve as models for national audiences. Whether you're organizing corporate retreats, association conferences, or social events, your adaptability, grit, and innovation are turning challenges into new standards of excellence.

I encourage all of you to continue sharing your stories online using your posts not only to inspire, but they also contribute to our industry's collective growth.

Looking Ahead

As your chapter president, I remain committed to helping you connect, learn, and lead. Through upcoming chapter events, including our Annual Conference August 6-8 in Norfolk, education sessions, and peer mentorship, MPI Virginia will continue to be your trusted source for community and career development.

Thank you for being part of this incredible chapter. Your leadership, creativity, and heart are shaping the future of our industry – and it's a future full of promise.

See you at the Annual Conference!

Dwight Driskill
President
MPI-VA Chapter

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Welcome Newest Members



Allison Dunn
Tiffany Gist
Andrea Harris
Erica McGrory
Valencia Moore
Maria Nehring
Kimberly Oleson
Darla Owens
Nancy Rosen
Caleb Shifflett

Sydney Way

Cvent, Inc
National Defense Industrial Association
The College of William & Mary

Chesapeake Convention & Visitors Bureau
Fluidity Performance Troupe Entertain
American Association of Tissue Banks
Future Business Leaders of America

Hotel Madison & Shenandoah Valley
Conference Center
Town Point Club



REFER
A FRIEND

We are pleased to offer you an opportunity to help a colleague, friend, or young professional experience the benefits of MPI membership.

[LEARN MORE HERE](#)

Membership Milestones

Join us in celebrating these amazing members and their commitment to MPI Virginia

1-Year Members

- Kate Celeste, *LTD Hospitality*
- Willette Ellis, *Altria Client Services*
- Tracy Fink, *Institute for Advanced Learning and Research Conference Center*
- Megan Gavano, *Harrison Group, Resort Hotels & Restaurants*
- Amy Gorman, *IEEE-USA*
- William Kerr, *Camryn Executive Transportation and Limousine, LLC*
- Kelly Mancusi, *The New York State Society of Anesthesiologists, Inc.*
- Perkins Morgan
- Austin Susman, *Ciena Corporation*
- Natalie Tyer, *Hit Play*
- Tarah Warner
- Michelle Whitesie, *Global Genes*

2-Year Members

- Reed Patterson

5+ Year Members

- Marc Matthews, *Pulse Experiential Travel* - **5 Years**
- Anita Gambill, *STIHL, Inc.* - **7 Years**
- Susan Moore, *Virginia Sheriff's Association* - **8 Years**
- Frank Passanant, *Hilton Worldwide* - **8 Years**
- Andi Minor, *University of Richmond, School of Business* - **11 Years**
- Ann Buhl, *Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond* - **17 Years**
- Nicole Walker, *Consultant* - **21 Years**
- Christy Ruddy, *Covington Meetings & Events* - **35 Years**



Member Spotlight



Ariel Cole, CMP

Director of Events,
Reynolds Community College

Member Since: June 2009

Can't Live Without: My outlook calendar - if it is not on the calendar it does not exist!

Go-to Meal: Tacos

Why She Joined MPI VA

"I initially joined MPI-VA for the education and support to earn my CMP certification, but I gained so much more—career growth, professional development, meaningful connections, and lifelong friends."

What She Loves Most About the Industry

"I love bringing an idea to life from concept to execution, and the variety of events keeps things exciting with new challenges and opportunities—plus, the good food never hurts!"

Her Advice to Newcomers

"Get involved and say yes—whether it's joining a committee, attending events, or writing an article, MPI offers countless ways to grow, connect, and make the most of your membership. Some of my greatest skills and relationships started simply by raising my hand."

*Know someone we should spotlight next? Or want to
be featured yourself? Let us know now!*

Nominate

VOLUNTEER

Opportunities

LOOKING TO GET INVOLVED WITH MPI VA?

We're currently welcoming volunteers across a variety of areas—whether you're passionate about planning events, creating content, connecting with members, or supporting behind the scenes, there's a place for you! Bring your creativity, leadership, and enthusiasm to help us grow and serve our community.

Complete the Volunteer Interest Form below to let us know how you'd like to get involved with MPI VA! We'd love to have you on board.

[Volunteer Today](#) 



Education Committee

Passionate about learning and professional development? Join the Education Committee and help shape the programming that brings valuable insights and meaningful experiences to our members throughout the year.

Interested? Contact [Rachael Holt](#)



Marketing and Communications Committee

Are you creative, social-savvy, or love writing? Help us tell our chapter's story! We're looking for volunteers to support social media, email marketing, and content creation for The MPI Virginia View.

Interested? Contact [Shamera Stewart](#) or [Lauren Keys](#)

BENEFITS OF GETTING INVOLVED

- Expand your network of event and hospitality professionals
- Build your leadership and communication skills
- Get early access to chapter events and planning
- Boost your resume while having fun with a collaborative team

Upcoming Events

MEMBER ORIENTATIONS

SAVE THE DATES: Join us to meet fellow members of the MPI Virginia Chapter, and learn more about how to get the most out of your membership.



Upcoming Orientations:

1. **July 16, 2025: 11 am - 11:30 am EST** [Register Here](#)
2. **August 15, 2025: 11 am - 11:30 am EST** [Register Here](#)

Learn more about ...

- Networking Opportunities
- CMP Information
- Virtual & Live Educational Sessions
- Member Engagement & Getting Involved
- And Much More!

After registering, you will receive a Zoom link to attend the event virtually the day before the event.

**INTERESTED IN SHOWCASING YOUR VENUE
BY HOSTING A QUARTERLY EVENT?**

Please contact Kathleen Hinger, Director of Sponsorships, for more details at khinger@cwf.org.

2025 Annual Conference

Where Events Evolve — And So Will You

MPI Virginia's 2025 Annual Education Conference will take place **August 6-8, 2025** at the **Renaissance Portsmouth Norfolk Waterfront Hotel**.

This year's agenda is packed with content that's as timely as it is practical. Learn how to **integrate AI into your workflow without overwhelm, build stronger self-leadership habits, approach job transitions with confidence, make your events more accessible and inclusive, and much more**. Each session is designed to deliver tools, insights, and real-world strategies you can put into action right away — all led by professionals who understand the challenges and opportunities in today's events industry.

[Register Today](#)
Early Bird ends July 9

Renaissance Portsmouth-Norfolk Waterfront Hotel is located in the arts and culture district of Portsmouth, VA which features a scenic working harbor waterfront, upscale dining, a plethora of antique and boutique shops, and the largest collection of historic homes.

Book your room [here](#) by July 7th!

Support Today: MPI Virginia relies on generous sponsors and auction donors to help us deliver valuable programming, networking, and scholarships for our members.

- **Silent Auction Donations:** [Contribute an item or experience](#) to help fund chapter initiatives.
- **Sponsorship Opportunities:** Explore ways to showcase your brand in our [2025 Sponsorship Packet](#).



Introducing our 2025 Annual Conference Speakers!



Samantha Bean,
GTP®, GLP®
Vice President of
Sales & LTD Culture
Champion
LTD Hospitality Group



Dwight Driskill, CTA
MPI Virginia Chapter
President | Sr Account
Executive
Kings Dominion / Six
Flags America



Rob Haislip
Vice President of
Business
Development
Covington Travel



Ann Hayes
Director of Sales,
Groups & Meetings
Visit Loudoun /
Loudoun Convention &
Visitors Association



Joe Jamison, CPACC
CEO & Founder
VisitAble



Marianne Johnson
Manager, Events &
Fundraising
MedRVA Foundation



Ling (Ally) Ling, Ph.D.
Lecturer | Undergraduate
Program Director of Park,
Recreation and Tourism
Studies
Old Dominion University



Lisa Meriwether
Tourism Manager
City of Danville, VA



Kapil Patel
Founder, Chief
Happiness Officer
Inspiring Happiness
at Work



Jamie Rawls, CMP
Convention Sales Manager
Virginia Beach Convention
and Visitors Bureau



Trevor Sookraj
GM, New Business
Exposoft Solutions



Melissa Vine
Event Planner & Designer
The Hive Wedding
Collective

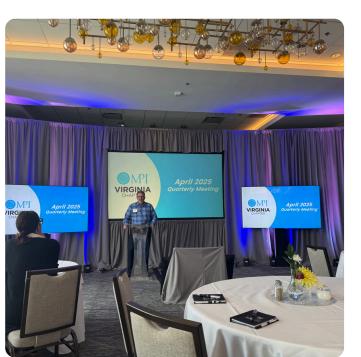
Past Events



APRIL 2025 EDUCATION & NETWORKING PROGRAM

APRIL 16-17, 2025

MPI Virginia brought together meeting and event professionals in Harrisonburg for two impactful days of learning and connection at Hotel Madison & Shenandoah Valley Conference Center, April 16–17, 2025. The program featured engaging sessions on AI and cybersecurity, leadership in the digital age, and emotional intelligence, along with interactive discussions and valuable networking opportunities. Attendees left with fresh insights, practical takeaways, and new connections to help shape the future of our industry.



[Stay Up-To-Date and View All Our Events](#)

MPI-VA Rallied at WEC

I had the opportunity to attend my first MPI World Education Congress (WEC) in St. Louis from June 18 to 20, and let me tell you, it did not disappoint. With this year's "Let's Rally!" theme, the energy, learning, and connections really captured the spirit of our industry.

Over three jam-packed days, nearly 2,000 of us gathered at the newly renovated America's Center to learn, grow, and celebrate how far we've come. There were more than 100 education sessions and several "Learning Journeys" that took us out into the city for immersive experiences.

The keynote speakers this year were phenomenal. A couple of my favorites were Brittany Packnett Cunningham, who opened with a powerful message on confidence and leadership, and Temple Grandin, whose keynote reminded us of the importance of diverse minds in our work and our world.

One of the best parts of the conference was connecting with so many fellow members from around the world, especially our Virginia Chapter members. From coffee catch-ups to attending sessions together, it was great seeing us represented in St. Louis. We also had an incredible Southeast Regional Meetup at Tin Roof, where members from all across the Southeast gathered for an evening of fun and networking. The room was packed, the energy was high, and it was such a great reminder of how strong and supportive our MPI community really is.



And of course, the social events were unforgettable, from the Opening Celebration at Busch Stadium to the Closing Night party in the Grand Center Arts District, where none other than St. Louis' own Nelly surprised us with a live performance. Definitely a WEC moment I won't forget.

Attending WEC has left me energized and motivated, and I am already looking forward to next year. If you haven't attended WEC yet, I highly recommend adding it to your professional development plans. It is one of the best ways to invest in yourself and grow within this amazing industry.

Can't wait to rally again in 2026.

By Shamera Stewart, VP of Communications, MPI Virginia

Industry Insights

Curated reads to keep you sharp, savvy, and in-the-know.



MPI WEC 2025 WRAPS ITS ST. LOUIS RALLY

By Taylor Smith | Meetings Today

St. Louis knows how to rally.

The Gateway to the West played host to MPI's World Education Congress (WEC) June 18-20, which welcomed approximately 1,900 in-person attendees to the newly expanded America's Center Convention Complex in the heart of downtown St. Louis.

[Read More](#)



8 MEETINGS AND EVENTS CONTRACT POINTS FOR TURBULENT TIMES

By Joshua Grimes | Meetings Today

By It's truly an interesting time to be a meeting professional. Attendance is down and prices are up due to tariffs, government funding cuts, uncertainty at the borders and spending restrictions.

...Here are eight critical points you should consider for your meeting and event contracts in these turbulent times.

[Read More](#)



NEW AI AGENT WOVS EVENT ORGANIZERS

By Lisa Plummer Savas | Corporate Event News

A new AI company claims its platform empowers business event organizers to boost lead conversion rates while cutting workload in half through AI agents that automatically prioritize leads, personalize follow-ups, and measure campaign performance across their existing tech stack.

[Read More](#)



9 OUT OF 10 EVENT PROFESSIONALS SAY WORK-LIFE BALANCE EXPTACIONS ARE IMPACTING INDUSTRY RETENTION

By Adam Parry | Event Industry News

Professionals from across the business meetings and events sector have reported work-life balance expectations are the leading factor impacting staff retention, according to the latest survey by the Meetings Industry Association (MIA).

[Read More](#)



CALLING ALL INDUSTRY EXPERTS: SHARE YOUR VOICE IN THE VIRGINIA VIEW!

MPI Virginia is now accepting original article submissions for our quarterly newsletter — and we want you to contribute!

We know our members are some of the most talented and insightful professionals in the meetings and events industry, and we want to showcase your expertise! Whether it's a unique perspective, lessons learned, emerging trends, best practices, or creative solutions, your voice deserves to be heard.

Why Submit?

- Engage with the chapter in a meaningful, visible way
- Elevate your professional profile — published articles are perfect for sharing on LinkedIn or adding to your résumé
- Earn recognition among your peers as a thought leader
- Contribute to the industry's growth by sharing your knowledge
- In some cases, published work may qualify for continuing education (CE) credits toward professional certifications

Guidelines:

- Articles should be original content and relevant to the meetings and events industry
- Submissions may include personal insights, case studies, how-to guides, or commentary on industry trends
- Word count: 400–800 words (flexible)
- All submissions are subject to editorial review

Whether you're a seasoned planner or an emerging leader with fresh ideas, we encourage you to submit!

Ready to contribute? Submit your article information: [SUBMIT ARTICLE HERE](#)

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Thank you for reading this issue of The MPI Virginia View and being part of our community. Your involvement is what keeps us growing and thriving.

We hope you'll join us at our upcoming events, stay connected with fellow members, and keep finding new ways to engage. Together, we're shaping a stronger future for our industry — and we can't wait to see you at the next gathering!



LET'S CONNECT!

Stay in the know with event updates, industry trends, and networking opportunities. Follow us on social media to stay connected with the MPI Virginia community!



[Instagram](#)



[Facebook](#)



[LinkedIn](#)

HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

We'd love to feature your success, insights, or industry expertise in the next edition of The MPI Virginia View! Submit your ideas here:

[Submit Your Ideas](#)