



THE MPI
VIRGINIA VIEW

NEWSLETTER
THIRD QUARTER, 2025

BEYOND

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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.



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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](#)

In This Issue

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- ✓ Welcome Newest Members
- ✓ Member Milestones
- ✓ Member Spotlight
- ✓ Event Recaps
- ✓ Annual Award Winners
- ✓ Upcoming Events
- ✓ Industry Insights
- ✓ Volunteer Opportunities





VIRGINIA
CHAPTER

President's Letter

DWIGHT DRISKILL



A Vibrant Season of Engagement

The past six months have been a dynamic and inspiring time for the MPI Virginia Chapter. Through a diverse lineup of events, from intimate Morning Brew Meet-Ups to the high-energy Annual Education Conference, the chapter has cultivated a thriving community of meetings and events professionals across the Commonwealth. These gatherings have gone beyond networking; they've sparked meaningful conversations, shared innovative ideas, and built lasting relationships among planners, suppliers, and hospitality leaders. Educational sessions have tackled timely topics like sustainability, DEI, and the integration of AI in event planning, equipping members with tools to stay ahead in a rapidly evolving industry. With a strong commitment to professional development, inclusion, and collaboration, MPI Virginia continues to elevate the meetings industry and empower its members to lead with purpose and creativity.

Spring & Summer Highlights

MPI Virginia saw a mix of virtual and in-person gatherings designed to foster member engagement and professional development. Southeast Regional Meetup at WEC (June 19, St. Louis, MO): MPI Virginia joined forces with other southeastern chapters for a collaborative networking event during the World Education Congress. Virtual Member Orientations in April, May, and June helped onboard new members and re-engage existing ones with chapter resources and benefits.

The centerpiece of the chapter's calendar was the Annual Education Conference, held August 6–8 at the Renaissance Portsmouth–Norfolk Waterfront Hotel. This multi-day event brought together planners, suppliers, and industry leaders that included a keynote presentation on innovation in event design and the future of hybrid meetings. Breakout sessions covering topics such as DEI in hospitality, sustainability practices, and leveraging AI in event planning. Networking Socials included a waterfront reception and themed happy hours that encouraged collaboration and camaraderie. The conference was widely praised for its professional execution and relevance to current industry challenges.

Following the conference, MPI Virginia kept the momentum going with several local events. Morning Brew Meet-Up (August 22, Richmond): A casual coffee gathering for members to reconnect post-conference. Happy Hour (August 20, Richmond): A relaxed social event to celebrate the success of the Annual Conference. Virtual Member Orientation (August 15): Continued efforts to welcome and educate new members. Education & Networking Social (September 23, Echelon Wine Bar, Richmond): A blend of learning and leisure in a vibrant setting.

Looking Ahead

We have a strong foundation, and MPI Virginia is poised for continued growth and impact. The momentum built through successful events, meaningful connections, and high-quality education has created a vibrant community of professionals eager to take the next step.

As we move into the final quarter of 2025, members can look forward to a robust calendar of events designed to enrich their professional lives. Upcoming Morning Brew Meet-Ups will offer relaxed, early-morning networking opportunities in cities like Bon Air and Richmond. Happy Hours will continue to provide casual, after-work settings for collaboration and camaraderie, while Education Sessions will dive deeper into industry trends and best practices.

These events are more than just dates on a calendar—they're touchpoints for inspiration, learning, and leadership development. Whether you're a seasoned planner or new to the industry, MPI Virginia is committed to helping you grow, connect, and thrive.

Dwight Driskill
President
MPI-VA Chapter

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LET'S TALK



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Welcome Newest Members



VIRGINIA CHAPTER

Dayna Flowers
Kassidy Kool
Barry Moore
Kourtney Ramirez
Michelle Rao
Kristi Saunders

Teresa Darnell
Jacqueline Evans
Shirley Hamblet
Will Minnich
Stephanie Philcox

Robin Sweeney
Kiernan Wilkins

Richmond Region Tourism

Better Business Bureau

Chesapeake Conference Center
Hotel Madison and Shenandoah Valley
Conference Center

Eastman Chemical Company
Groovin Gourmets
University of Virginia

Delta Hotels by Marriott Richmond
Downtown

Nicewonder Farm & Vineyards

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

- Nadia Borta
- Donna Casanave
- Marianne Johnson, MEDRVA Foundation
- Rachel Poarch

2-Year Members

- Kate Belleman, Dover Hall Experiences, LLC
- Melanie Bowman, GoldKey PHR
- Alexa Kirkpatrick
- Erica Long, University of Richmond
- Jessica McCarthy-Hills, McCarthy Hills LLC
- Valencia Moore, Chesapeake Convention & Visitors Bureau
- Perkins Morgan, Paisley and Jade
- Janel Pleasant, Greater Richmond Convention Center
- Kristi Saunders, Hotel Madison and Shenandoah Valley Conference Center
- Lindsay Thompson
- Beth Wood, Wintergreen Resort

5+ Year Members

- Connie Brewer, C3 Coverage Coaching Consulting - **19 Years**
- Ariel Cole, Reynolds Community College - **18 Years**
- Ursula Dees, American Public Power Association - **9 Years**
- Penny Guiles, Richmond Marriott Downtown - **6 Years**
- Kathleen Hinger, Colonial Williamsburg Company - **6 Years**
- Lauren Keys, IBM - **7 Years**
- Michele Moker, Omni Richmond Hotel - **22 Years**
- Marla Popkin, Outdoor Power Equipment Institute - **25 Years**
- Shamera Stewart, American Physical Society - **5 Years**
- Abigail Tammen, Charlottesville Area Association of REALTORS - **27 Years**
- Megan Williams, Virginia Sheriffs' Association, Inc. - **25 Years**

Member Spotlight



Sydney Way

Event Sales Director

Town Point Club

Member Since: March 2025

Can't Live Without: My pillow! The perfect pillow is crucial to a perfect night's sleep.

Favorite Hobby: I don't have a favorite, but lately I've been reading a lot more.

Why She Joined MPI VA

"I joined MPI to expand my network, connections, and knowledge of the industry. It's also a tool for personal and professional growth, something I think everyone should strive for."

What She Loves Most About the Industry

"The comradery and support amongst peers in this industry is unmatched. There are so many people I could call on to have my back if I ever needed help"

Her Advice to Newcomers

"Network, network, network. 'It's about who you know not what you know' is a phrase I always heard from a professor and mentor in college. He was right. I am not successful on my own. Having supportive staff, colleagues, and peers helps me achieve success. Nurtured connections is key in this industry."

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

[**Nominate**](#)

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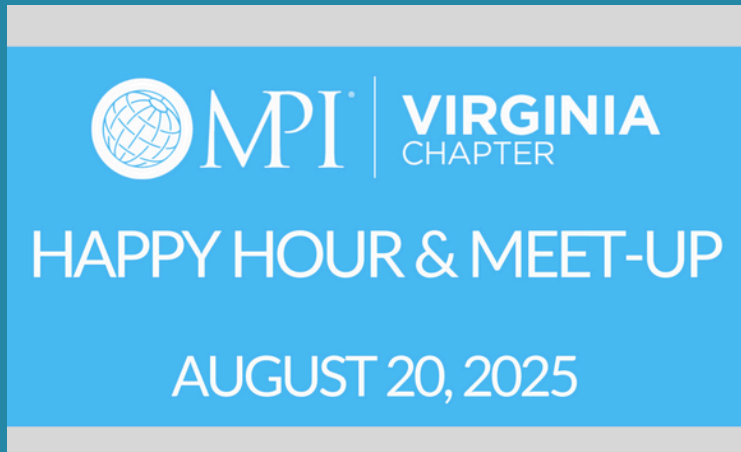
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Past Events



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the next
MPI-VA Event!

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Past Events



MORNING BREW MEET-UP

SEPTEMBER 12, 2025



MEMBER ORIENTATION

SEPTEMBER 15, 2025



HAPPY HOUR & MEET-UP

SEPTEMBER 16, 2025



EDUCATION & NETWORKING SOCIAL

SEPTEMBER 23, 2025



Don't miss
the next
MPI-VA Event!

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Annual Conference Recap



We're still buzzing with excitement and gratitude after gathering with so many of you at this year's **MPI Virginia Annual Conference**. From thought-provoking keynotes to hands-on labs, this event truly had something for everyone.

Our lineup of **13 speakers** brought such diverse expertise and perspectives to the stage, sparking conversations and new ideas that we'll carry back into our daily work.



AI can simplify the everyday

Trevor Sookraj showed us how artificial intelligence can turn daily event tasks into smarter workflows in *AI on the Ground*.

Inclusion isn't Optional

Joe Jamison highlighted practical ways to design accessible, welcoming meetings in *Introduction to Disability Inclusion*.

Partnership is Power

Lisa Meriwether, Jamie Rawls, & Ann Hayes gave us insider insights on maximizing DMO and CVB collaborations.

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

Stories Connect Us

Rob Haislip reminded us of the Incredible *Power of Story* to move and inspire.

Leadership Starts Within

Sam Bean shared high-impact habits for becoming stronger leaders in *Learning to Lead Yourself*.

The Future is hands-on

Dr. Ling Ally Ling closed with the importance of building future-ready meeting talent through real-world experience.

Each presentation gave us new tools, fresh perspectives, and plenty of inspiration to bring back to our communities and careers.



Of course, the conference was also a time to network and celebrate one another. At our **Annual Awards Dinner**, we had the privilege of recognizing outstanding members who continue to raise the bar for our industry. A heartfelt congratulations to all of our award winners for your leadership, passion, and commitment.

We are deeply thankful to our speakers for sharing your expertise, to our sponsors for helping make this event possible, and to every single person who attended. Your energy, curiosity, and support made this year's conference unforgettable. Here's to continuing the conversations, building connections, and bringing all that we learned into the year ahead.

- Rachael Holt, CMP, **VP of Education**



Event Photos

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

Congratulations to our MPI VA Annual Award Winners



**Most Creative Host
Facility of the Year
(Tie):**

Hilton Norfolk The
Main



**Most Creative Host
Facility of the Year
(Tie):**

Hotel Madison &
Shenandoah Valley
Conference Center



**Howard Feiertag
Impact Member of
the Year Award:**
Martina James



**The Cecil H. Bailey,
CMP, Mentor
Award:**
Ariel Cole, CMP



**The J.B. Bostic
Torchlight Award:**
Steve Tewksbury,
CMP



**Young Professional
Award:**
Rachael Holt, CMP



**Meeting Industry
Leadership Award:**
Megan Hazzard



**Education Program of
the Year:**
"Unmasking Success:
Using Emotional
Intelligence to Conquer
Imposter Syndrome" –
Letitia Bates



President's Award:
Martina James

Upcoming Events



HAPPY HOUR & MEET-UP

HAPPY HOUR MEET UPS

SAVE THE DATES: Join MPI Virginia for casual networking and conversation with fellow meeting professionals. These **Happy Hour Meet Ups** are a great way to connect, exchange ideas, and strengthen your community in a relaxed setting.

Upcoming Meet Ups:

1. **October 17, 2025 | 5:00 – 6:30 pm | Doswell, VA – [Register](#)**
2. **November 19, 2025 | 4:30 – 6:30 pm | Mechanicsville, VA – [Register](#)**
3. **December 3, 2025 | 4:30 – 6:30 pm | Richmond, VA – [Register](#)**

MORNING BREW MEET UPS

SAVE THE DATES: Start your day with MPI Virginia! Our **Morning Brew Meet Ups** are a relaxed way to connect with fellow meeting professionals over coffee, conversation, and community.



MORNING BREW MEET-UP



Upcoming Meet Ups:

1. **October 10, 2025 | 8:00 – 9:00 am | Bon Air, VA – [Register](#)**
2. **November 7, 2025 | 8:00 – 9:00 am | Richmond, VA – [Register](#)**
3. **December 12, 2025 | 8:00 – 9:00 am | Richmond, VA – [Register](#)**

More 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. **October 15, 2025: 10 am – 10:30 am EST** [Register Here](#)
2. **November 18, 2025: 10 am – 10:30 am EST** [Register Here](#)
3. **December 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.

November 2025 Education and Networking Program



NOVEMBER 2025 EDUCATION & NETWORKING PROGRAM

NOVEMBER 5-6, 2025

Date: November 5–6, 2025

Location: DoubleTree Midlothian | Richmond, VA

Join us in Richmond for two days of education, insights, and networking designed to help you grow and connect.

Highlights include:

- Building Employee Trust with **Dr. Heather Williamson**
- Board Seats, Big Impact panel featuring **Penny Guiles** & industry leaders
- ...and much more!

Key Deadlines:

- Early-bird registration ends **October 17**
- Hotel rate deadline **October 20**

[Register Today](#)



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Industry Insights

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



10 LESSONS FOR EVENT PROFS FROM HAMILTONS' DECADE OF SUCCESS

By Matt Swenson | Corporate Event News

Ten years after its groundbreaking debut, 'Hamilton' is more than just a musical, it's a masterclass in innovation, storytelling, and audience engagement. Consider these 10 powerful lessons event professionals can learn from the show that rewrote the rules

[Read More](#)



IMEX AMERICA: THE SCIENCE OF WOW

By Michael Pinchera | MPI Blog

A wow experienced by event attendees is measured by real-time brain responses that objectively show that the experience is valuable to them, second by second. Valuable experiences are enjoyable, remembered and create a craving to repeat them. In 20 years of academic research, my group discovered the brain's valuation network for social-emotional experiences that I named "Immersion" and I'll be sharing a free app at IMEX America so anyone can measure wow during events.

[Read More](#)



SILENT SEMINARS MAKES NORTH AMERICAN DEBUT

By Adam Parry | Event Industry News

Silent Seminars, a global leader in silent audio technology for events, marked a major milestone with its first large-scale deployment in North America at a leading investment industry conference. In partnership with Show Gear, the company delivered crystal-clear audio across a multi-zone setup, supporting more than 1,500 attendees with wireless headsets across nine concurrent seminar areas

[Read More](#)



AIRLINE FOOD INNOVATORS HAVE HIGH ASPIRATIONS

By Robert Silk | Travel Weekly

It's Wednesday afternoon, and a few dozen people have gathered to watch Turkish Airlines chef Demir Duzel do a cooking demonstration of manti, a classic Turkish dish...

Turkish Airlines catering contracts manager Esra Karayaka addresses the crowd. Turkish Airlines, she says, views connecting the world through food to be one of its missions.

[Read More](#)



Share your
Voice

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](#)

VOLUNTEER

Opportunities

LOOKING TO GET INVOLVED WITH MPI VA?

Are you new to the MPI Virginia Chapter, a current member looking to deepen your involvement, or someone seeking personal leadership opportunities? We are welcoming volunteers in a variety of areas such as planning events, creating content, connecting with members, and supporting behind the scenes. 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. We'd love to have you on board.

[Volunteer Today](#) >

INSPIRE MEETINGS IN VIRGINIA'S HISTORIC TRIANGLE

Host your next meeting in Williamsburg, Jamestown, and Yorktown, where historic charm meets modern hospitality, and exclusive perks await planners. From historic venues to waterfront resorts, you'll find spaces that spark ideas and foster connections. Beyond the world's largest living history museum, attendees can enjoy award-winning golf, culinary gems, craft breweries and wineries, roller coaster thrills, and outdoor adventure.

Plan your next meeting in unforgettable venues and create impact while maximizing your budget with exclusive perks and discounts through our Meetings Incentive Plan.

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Stay Engaged with MPI Virginia!

This newsletter is just the beginning, the real impact happens when we come together. Join us at upcoming events, explore new ways to get involved, and celebrate the power of connection within our chapter.

We look forward to seeing 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!



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SHARE YOUR STORY

Have a success, insight, or lesson learned that could inspire others? Submit your ideas to be featured in the next edition of The Virginia View.

[Spotlight Your Story](#) >