

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF MPI OHIO CHAPTER.

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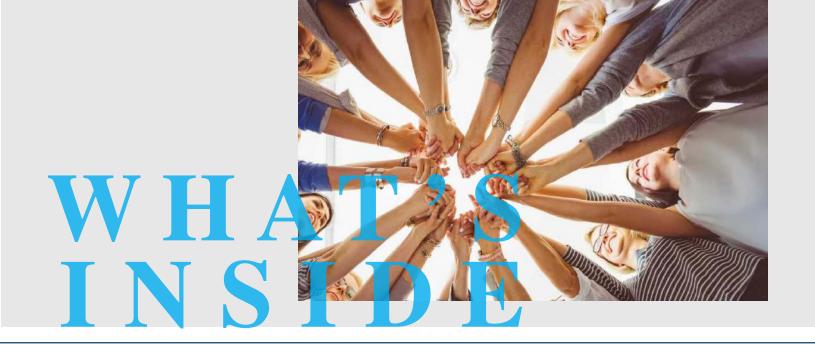
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OUR MISSION.

To enhance the overall quality and awareness of the meetings industry by ensuring the professional development and growth of its membership through targeted educational programs and networking opportunities.



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PRESIDENT'S LETTER



Hello MPI Ohio,

This quarter, I've been thinking a lot about what it means to thrive in the moments we don't plan for. Because let's be honest—our industry is built on timelines, diagrams, and run-of-shows, but the real magic often happens when none of those go as expected.

That's what makes this issue of DEFINE so special. It's filled with stories of pivots, quick thinking, and grace under pressure. From a band mishap that turned into a seamless save, and even a porta potty placement gone sideways that turned into a million-dollar partnership. These aren't just entertaining reads—they're reminders of the skill, creativity, and grit this industry demands.

We've also had a lot to celebrate this quarter. Our Chapter Meeting at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame gave us a chance to learn, connect, and share laughs with Mandi Graziano, who reminded us to show up and stand out. GMID gave us the opportunity to connect across the state—from Cincinnati to Cleveland to Columbus—and raise awareness about the real impact our work has. And of course, Camp Connect at Maumee Bay brought us back to the heart of it all: community. Whether it was roasting s'mores inside during a rainy game night or learning new ways to lead and grow together, we proved once again that flexibility isn't a backup plan—it's a strength.

We also gathered for our mid-year board retreat, and I couldn't be more energized by the thoughtful engagement and big ideas shared by our leadership team. We're not only focused on finishing 2025 strong, but also laying the groundwork for a fantastic 2026.

If I could leave you with one message this quarter, it's this: our value isn't measured by how perfectly we execute Plan A. It's measured by how confidently we handle Plans B through Z. Keep showing up. Keep adapting. And keep telling the stories behind the scenes. That's where the breakthroughs live.

Proud to lead alongside you,

Adam Kowaleski President, MPI Ohio Chapter

PI OHIO CHAPTER BOARD OF DIRECTORS





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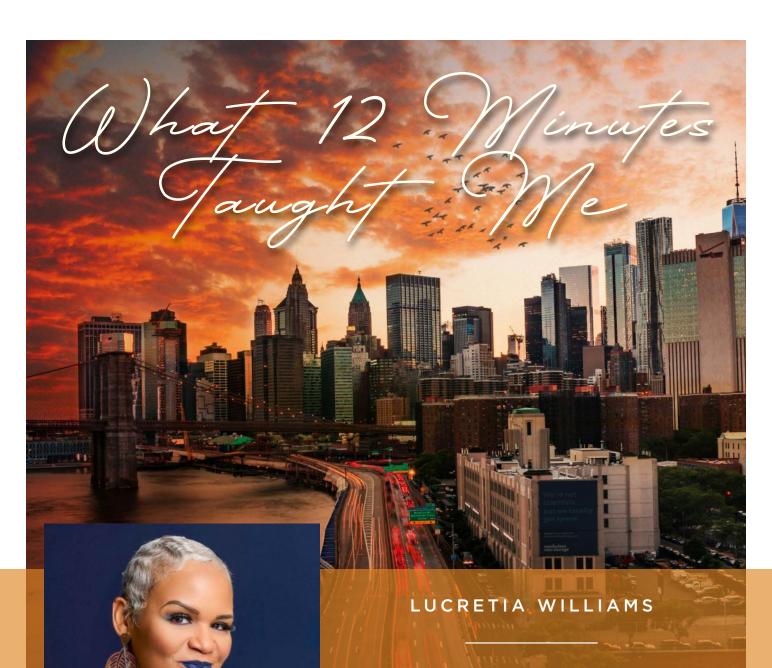
Cleveland Clinic

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Lucretia is an award-winning event planner and innovative designer. As the President & CEO of Distinct Event Planning, LLC, she leads a premier full-service event planning and design company that caters to a diverse clientele across the Midwest and internationally.

With over 26 years of experience, Lucretia specializes in creating memorable events, from elegant fundraising galas and vibrant themed parties to impactful corporate conferences and unforgettable holiday celebrations. Her expertise ensures that each experience resonates deeply, with notable clients including Victoria's Secret & Co., NBA, NiSource, and OhioHealth, among others.

Planning a high-stakes business matchmaker event for a major brand in New York City is exciting until the service elevator breaks, the loading dock is packed floor to ceiling with Christmas inventory, and your rentals are stuck on the sidewalk. That's exactly how our day began.

We were three floors up from where we needed to be, with no clear path in. Cue the pivot: after a fast but persuasive conversation with the store manager, we were granted the ultimate holiday miracle - permission to bring all rentals through the front door of a flagship store. During peak holiday shopping hours!

With just four hours on the clock and a deadline of 3:00 p.m., we rallied security, store staff, our own team, and even a few NYC - based vendors to create a plan B on the fly. Everyone pulled together, moving with precision, urgency, and just a bit of holiday magic. Despite the chaos, we completed the full room transformation by 3:12 p.m. Twelve minutes late - but right on time for a breakthrough.

The client, aware of the earlier blunders, walked in stunned. The space exceeded their expectations - and ours. What stayed with me wasn't just the event's success or even the client's reaction (though that smile and the private jet ride home were unforgettable). It was the reminder that in the face of setbacks, adaptability, teamwork, and trust turn near-misses into proud milestones.

In the end, the real breakthrough wasn't just the flawless setup - it was the power of collaboration, quick thinking, and the reminder that even the biggest blunders can lead to the brightest moments.

LUCRETIA WILLIAMS

President & CEO Distinct Event Planning, LLC https://distincteventplanning.com







HIGHLIGHTS FROM GLOBAL MEETINGS INDUSTRY DAY

Global Meetings Industry Day (GMID) is an international day dedicated to celebrating the impact of face-to-face meetings and events on businesses, communities, and the economy. It is a time for professionals across the industry to come together, raise awareness, and advocate for the power of in-person connection.

For us in Ohio, GMID was all about connection. We hosted meetups across the state to mark the occasion and build stronger ties within our industry. In Columbus, we gathered at the Residence Inn Columbus Downtown. In Cleveland, we met at the newly reimagined Hotel Cleveland. And in Cincinnati, the event took place at the 21C Museum Hotel. Each location brought together planners, suppliers, and partners to network, share insights, and celebrate the incredible work happening throughout Ohio.

























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THE CASE OF THE MISSING PLAQUE:

A LESSON IN GRACE UNDER PRESSURE



Just ten minutes before the awards program was set to begin, a team member frantically pulled me aside: one of the winner's plaques was missing. Gone. Vanished. Cue the panic. With tears welling up in a staff member's eyes and the clock ticking, we had a choice: fall apart or get creative.

We got creative.

A quick ask to the hosting hotel turned up a lifesaver: a plaque from their own 2023 Salesperson of the Year award. We borrowed it, slipped it into the presentation, and pulled off the moment without a hitch. The winner beamed, the cameras clicked, and not a single guest knew the difference. It was a perfect illusion, and an even better example of how the best-laid plans can go sideways in an instant.

We've since reordered the proper plaque and apologized to the recipient (who was incredibly gracious), but the moment stuck with me. It was one of those behind-the-scenes pivots that could have easily turned into a show-stopping disaster. Instead became a quick-thinking win. The kind of moment that highlights just how much of event planning relies on adaptability, trust in your team, and a good sense of humor when things go off script.

In hindsight, the missing plaque wasn't a blunder, it was a reminder that some of the most memorable victories don't come from perfection, but from the creative ways we respond to imperfection. The audience never knew. The winner got their standing ovation. And the team? We got a story we'll be laughing about for years. Because sometimes the best moments come from the ones you never planned.



MARK S. BICE, MBA, CMP

Meetings and Education Director
Optometric Vision Development & Rehabilitation Association (OVDRA)

Mark Bice, CMP, is an accomplished meetings professional with over two decades of experience planning and executing conferences across the association, corporate, medical, and international markets. He currently serves as the Meetings and Education Director for the Optometric Vision Development & Rehabilitation Association, where he has led the organization's event strategy since 2015. Previously, Mark spent nearly 13 years with HPN Global as a Meeting Planner and Consultant, where he specialized in strategic meeting management, site selection, vendor negotiation, and on-site logistics for clients around the world. In recognition of his contributions, he was recently named to the MPI Ohio Chapter's Legion of Honor.





HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE MID-YEAR BOARD RETREAT

Our mid-year board retreat at the Chautauqua Harbor Hotel was a focused and energizing checkpoint for the MPI Ohio Chapter leadership team.

We reviewed progress on our goals, addressed challenges, and had open discussions about what's working and where we can improve. Key priorities included strengthening member engagement, enhancing event impact, and preparing for board succession and long-term strategy. The setting gave us space to think clearly, collaborate honestly, and align on how we'll finish the year strong while laying the groundwork for a successful 2026.













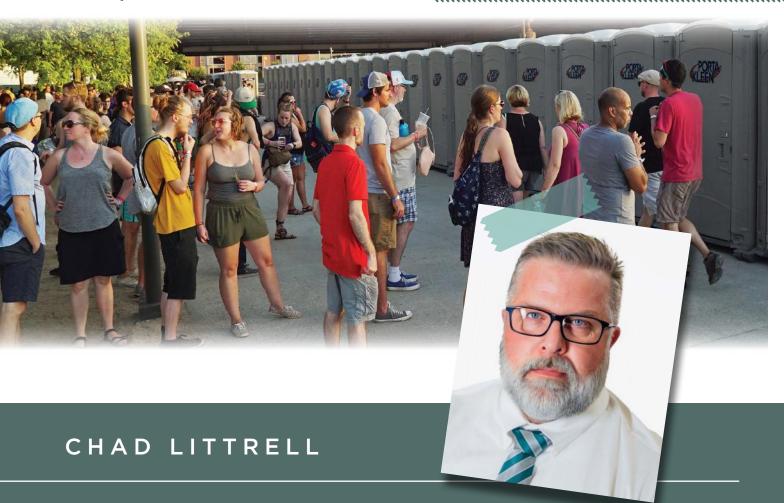


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How Porta-Potties and Patience Sealed the Peal

ummummm



Chad Littrell is the Marketing Director at MPW Industrial Services, where he leads the strategic growth of the company's aftermarket sales and e-commerce division. He is responsible for digital advertising, SEO, PPC, website performance, and analytics, with a focus on delivering a seamless, B2C-style experience for MPW's B2B partners. With nearly 20 years of experience spanning sales, operations, and marketing, Chad combines technical expertise with hands-on leadership to drive measurable results.

Before stepping into his current role, Chad managed MPW's Products Direct division and spent over a decade at Porta Kleen, where he led large-scale event operations, sales teams, and national partnerships across industries such as power generation, disaster relief, and live entertainment. His career reflects a deep understanding of customer needs, operational excellence, and the value of calm leadership under pressure.

Lets talk porta-potties!

I know. Probably not your favorite event topic. But when you're in the business of largescale event sanitation, like I was as Operations Director for Porta Kleen, you learn pretty quickly that the guest experience lives and dies in the details. The kind of details nobody really wants to think about until they're standing in line in the heat, in desperate need of a clean, fully stocked portable restroom that doesn't smell like regret.

That's where I came in. I took serious pride in my work. Every unit was lined up with military precision. Every handwashing station was stocked like it was a five-star hotel. If it didn't look, feel, and smell better than what you'd expect, I didn't sleep. Literally. At a multi-day music festival, you don't sleep much anyway. You just keep working in the sun, through the night, exhausted but determined, because no one remembers the portapotty that worked perfectly. But everyone remembers the one that didn't.

And then came the moment.

The event planner asked me to move a line of units, so I did. No big deal, right? Wrong. The event operations director, who hadn't gotten that memo, came marching up like a freight train. Red in the face. Breathing fire. They screamed, full volume, inches from my face. I could practically count their fillings. "WHY DID YOU MOVE THEM?" they bellowed.



Now keep in mind, I hadn't slept in two days. I was sunburned, sore, and standing next to a row of toilets. But this wasn't the time to get defensive or throw the planner under the bus. That wouldn't help anyone. So I took a breath and said, "Yes, okay. No problem. I understand." Then I moved the units again and got back to work.

A few hours later, the planner clued him in on what had happened. They came back and, credit where it's due, they apologized. They thanked me for keeping calm. That single moment of professionalism turned into a real relationship. In fact, it led to millions of dollars in contracts for the company.

Look, events are high-stakes. People are under pressure to create joy, run on time, hit margins, and keep thousands of people happy. Someone is going to lose their cool. It happens. But how you handle it—that's what sets you apart. That's what turns a vendor into a partner. That's what makes you top notch in this wild industry.

And maybe, just maybe, that's how a guy in charge of toilets helped make a whole festival run a little smoother.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE CHAPTER MEETING

Chapter Meeting at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame with Mandi.

Our latest chapter meeting hit a high note at the iconic Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland. Surrounded by legendary guitars, costumes, and the soundtrack of generations, attendees gathered for an inspiring session led by keynote speaker Mandi Graziano. Known for her dynamic presence and practical insight, Mandi delivered an engaging talk on elevating your personal brand and standing out in a crowded market.

The event struck the perfect balance of education and energy. Members enjoyed interactive networking, explored museum exhibits, and left with actionable takeaways and a renewed sense of professional purpose. With a rockstar venue and a powerhouse speaker, it was a meeting that reminded us all to turn up the volume on our impact.







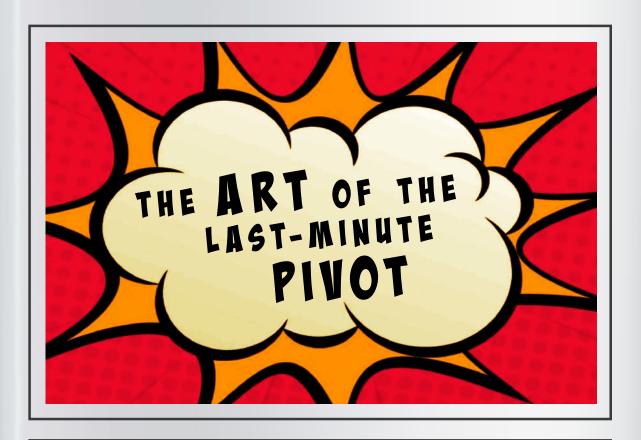






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ROCK&ROLL HALLOFFAME



BY: ANGELA HOFFORD, DMCP

Angela Hofford is a Business Development Manager for Global Sales at PRA Business Events, where she helps organizations transform ordinary meetings into meaningful, high-impact experiences. With over eight years at PRA and a passion for purposeful connection, Angela partners with planners to craft strategic, engaging business events that drive real results. From destination sourcing to onsite execution, she brings a consultative approach rooted in creativity, collaboration, and a deep understanding of the business event landscape.





The ballroom shimmered with possibility. Elegant table décor caught the light just right, and the awards, polished to a gleam, were lined up and ready to be handed out. Everything was perfectly set. Until the unexpected happened.

An hour before showtime, we got the call: the drummer for the band had been in a minor car accident en route to the hotel. Thankfully, he was okay, but a broken arm meant he wouldn't be joining us on stage.

In our world, success isn't about avoiding problems – it's about how you respond to them. Calm, quick thinking is everything. Fortunately, we had a second event at the same hotel that night, complete with a full band. We quietly rearranged musicians, temporarily filling the gap, and later brought in the second band's drummer for a rockin' after-party.





The clients were grateful. The guests never knew anything had changed. The awards were celebrated, the music filled the room, and the energy never dipped.

Moments like this are why I believe deeply in preparation, flexibility, and strong relationships. Challenges will always appear, often when you least expect them — but with the right team and mindset, they don't have to define the experience. Sometimes, they even make the night all the more rewarding.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE JOINT CHAPTER MEETING

Our Joint Michigan/Ohio Chapter Camp Connect at Maumee Bay Lodge was the perfect mix of connection, learning, and fun. We kicked things off with a warm welcome reception featuring drinks, dinner, pool games, and shared stories.

When rain changed our outdoor plans, the Maumee Bay team pivoted quickly, turning the evening into a cozy fireplace game night with s'mores from a s'more-cuterie display, laughs, and intense Euchre battles.

The next day brought movement and meaning. Trevor Dunlap from Nuhop got us energized with interactive activities, and Dr. Paula Ruffin inspired us to embrace more green time and less screen time. We also enjoyed a visit from the Maumee Bay Nature Center and wrapped up with fraud prevention tips from Gretchen Fisher of Sun Federal Credit Union.

Even with the weather, it was a weekend full of learning, laughter, and lasting connections.



















THANK YOU TO OUR EVENT SPONSORS!







Blunders to Breakthroughs . QUICK STORIES.

We asked our fellow planners to share a few quick stories where things didn't go quite as planned—but ended up better than expected.

Here are their musings on unexpected turns and memorable saves.

One of my most memorable onsite experiences happened in Puerto Rico during a national sales conference for a major beauty company. That year, one of their perfume campaigns featured a cat. Just two hours before going on stage, the brand's CEO suddenly decided he needed a real cat for his presentation.

With the clock ticking, we teamed up with our local DMC and managed to "rent" a cat from a nearby shelter—just in time. The CEO got his perfect prop, the presentation went off without a hitch, and the best part? An employee in the audience ended up adopting the cat. A win all around!

Maggie Marble

Marketing Strategy Lead, Events for Chase Business Banking



I loved being a wedding coordinator back in the day because the blunders are what make them unforgettable. At one event, a vendor dropped off the cake without mentioning it was made of ice cream. Under the hot camera lights, it started to melt. It literally slouched off one side. I quickly let the bride's mom know, and we jumped into action. We got the cake back in the freezer, and as luck would have it, the florist had accidentally delivered an extra bouquet meant for the bride's maid. We took it apart and created a beautiful waterfall of flowers to cover the damage. Like showstopping beautiful. We finished just in time for the bride to walk in and see it. She was thrilled! She thought it was a surprise her mom had coordinated between the baker and florist. Total save.

Mary Dismitrijeska
Marketing Director, Cherry Valley Hotel

At Navigate Conference 2023, what began as a blunder quickly turned into a breakthrough when a sudden tornado warning forced all attendees to shelter in the General Assembly room—right as breakout sessions had just begun. With only moments to pivot, the planning committee brought all three breakout speakers together to collaborate on the fly. Each delivered a condensed version of their presentation, followed by a dynamic panel discussion that invited audience questions and spontaneous dialogue. What could have been a major disruption became one of the most talked-about highlights of the conference. Attendees praised the format for its energy, variety, and engagement—proof that adaptability can turn a weather-related wrench into a memorable win.

Regina Piercefield

Association Management Professional, Association Connection

MARK YOUR CALENDAR.



August 14 2025

Cornament
Columbus, Cleveland,
Cincinnati OH

September 12 2025

MPI Ohio & OSAP Joint Industry Event Hilton Columbus at Easton, Columbus OH

October 15 2025

Chapter Meeting
The Summit Hotel,
Cincinnati OH

February 23 & 24 2026

Navigate Conference Embassy Suite, Dublin OH



*All dates & locations are subject to change

Host the Next MPI Ohio Chapter Meeting!

Spotlight your hotel, property or meeting space by sponsoring an MPIOH Chapter luncheon! In addition to gaining immediate exposure to meeting professionals attending the event, your hotel will receive exposure to MPI Ohio Chapter members and non-members throughout Ohio, Michigan, Kentucky and Indiana with over \$1,600 of sponsorship advertising.

Call or email Leslianne Lake, Director of Strategic Partnerships, to secure your date at education@mpioh.org

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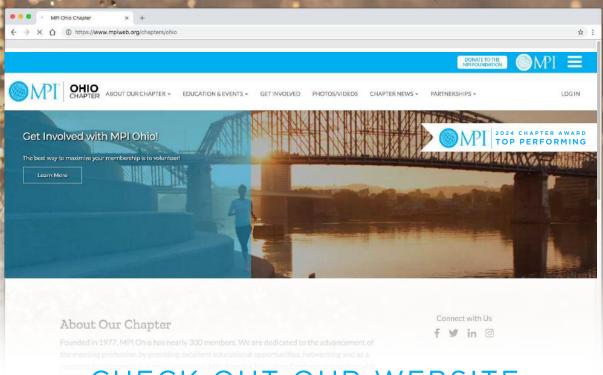
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Join our Group Forums at **http://u.MPI.org** where MPI members can engage in conversations, ask questions, share best practices, and network with the world's most vibrant online community.



They say learn something new everyday. There is no easier way than participating in our LinkedIn group at "MPI Ohio Chapter." You may even teach your peers a thing or two!



To stay in the loop, be sure to follow us at "MPI Ohio Chapter"



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