

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF MPI OHIO CHAPTER.

Define is the official publication of the Ohio Chapter of Meeting Professionals International. It is published quarterly as a benefit of membership and circulated free of charge to MPIOH members.

Copyright, 2025. All rights reserved.

Permission requests to reproduce written materials should be sent to 4010 Executive Park Drive, Suite 100, Cincinnati, OH 45241.

Information appearing in this publication is obtained from sources we believe to be reliable. The information may not be a complete statement of all available data and is guaranteed as such. Calculations are based solely on editorial judgment and analysis of technical factors and meeting professional industry information sources. Define is copyrighted and portions may be reprinted with the permission of MPIOH. Define is not responsible for the contents of its advertisements and advises all members to investigate claims before making any purchases.



EXECUTIVE OFFICE.

REGINA PIERCEFIELD

4010 Executive Park Drive Suite 100, Cincinnati, OH 45241

CONTACT

P: 513.563.8674
F: 513.563.9743
E: admin@mpioh.org

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.



02

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

BY: ADAM KOWALESKI

03

MPI OHIO CHAPTER DIRECTORY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

04

NEW MEMBERS

HIGHLIGHT

05

OUR SPONSORS

HIGHLIGHT

06

NETWORKING BEYOND THE SURFACE

BY: JAMIE THERESA SMITH

08

NAVIGATE 2025

HIGHLIGHTS

10

LEGION OF HONORS

& NAVIGATE 2025 PHOTOS

14

THE FRIENDSHIP FACTOR

BY: JAMIE SCHAFRATH

16

BRAND CONNECTION

BY: PIERRE LE

18

THE POWER OF COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

BY: KIM NEAL DAVIS

20

THE THREE LEVELS OF NETWORKING

BY: DON TALBERT

22

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

UPCOMING EVENTS

23

AT YOUR SERVICE

MEMBER DIRECTORY

PRESIDENT'S LETTER



I'm incredibly honored to step into the role of President for MPI Ohio Chapter. First, a huge thank you to our past board members and leadership for their hard work and dedication. Their efforts have built a strong foundation, and I'm excited to continue that momentum into 2025.

We kicked off the year with Navigate, and what an event it was! The energy in the room, the connections made, and the insights shared truly set the tone for what's ahead. If you were there, you know exactly what I mean. If you missed it, don't worry—we have plenty of great events and opportunities coming your way.

This issue of DEFINE focuses on The Power of Connection, which couldn't be more fitting. At its core, MPI is about building relationships—whether through networking, partnerships, or simply showing up for each other. Those connections drive business, career growth, and even friendships, and that's exactly what we want to continue fostering in 2025.

Looking ahead, our goal is simple: keep building on what works. That means meaningful programming, opportunities for engagement, and making sure MPI Ohio remains a valuable resource for every member. Whether you're new to the chapter or a longtime supporter, now is the time to get involved—attend an event, join a committee, or just reach out and start a conversation.

I'm looking forward to working alongside all of you this year. Let's make it a great one!

Adam Kowaleski President, MPI Ohio Chapter

PI OHIO CHAPTER BOARD OF DIRECTORS





PRESIDENT ADAM KOWALESKI Sales Manager Hotel Levegue 419.515.4377 adamkowaleski@firsthospitality.com



PRESIDENT ELECT JOSH BRICKER STS, CTA Sales Manager Visit Dublin Ohio 614.792.7666 jbricker@visitdublinohio.com



PAST PRESIDENT JASON LINSCOTT Regional Vice President HPN Global 614.565.2617 JLinscott@HPNGlobal.com



VICE PRESIDENT, COMMUNICATIONS MARY DIMITRIJESKA **Marketing Director** Cherry Valley Hotel 740.788.1200 mdimitrijeska@cherryvalleyhotel.com



VICE PRESIDENT, EDUCATION JANE LEE Senior Planner/OUS Program Manager Cardinal Health 614.757.1621 jane.lee@cardinalhealth.com



VICE PRESIDENT, FINANCE Dir. of National Accounts, Midwest Regional Office Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp. 615.571.4401 pierre@visitmusiccity.com



VICE PRESIDENT, MEMBERSHIP LISA SWAN **Retired Planner** MPI Ohio 330.687.1881 lswan19@outlook.com



VICE PRESIDENT, SPECIAL EVENTS LESLIANNE LAKE Sales Manager Visit Canton 330.542.6379 lesliannel@visitcanton.com



DIR. OF REGIONAL COUNCIL RELATIONS JENNIFER VESELKO CITP CMP FELLOW **Event Strategist** Maritz Global Events 440.488.3537 jennifer.veselko@maritzselect.com



DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION ANGELA HOFFORD DMCP **Business Development Mgr, Global Sales** PRA 602.762.1469 angela.hofford@pra.com



DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS SHAWN STIDHAM Vice President of Sales Travel Butler County 513.526.0815 shawn@travelbutlercounty.com



DIRECTOR OF MEMBERSHIP BRANDON BLANKENSHIP Hyatt Regency Cincinnati Sales Manager 513.354.4072 brandon.blankenship@hyatt.com



DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL EVENTS RYAN HARMON, CERP **Director of Sales** Lasting Impressions Event Rental 216.223.4027 ryan@lirents.net



DIRECTOR OF MONTHLY PROGRAMS PATRICIA HUSTON, CMP **Director of Conference and Event Services** Columbus State Community College 614.287.5761 Phuston4@cscc.edu



DIRECTOR OF RECRUITMENT SARAH FERRAGONIO Sales Manager Hilton Cleveland Downtown 216.413.5033 Sarah.Ferragonio@hilton.com



DIR. OF VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT GINA WASHINGTON Corporate Sales Manager Hilton Cincinnati Netherland Plaza 513.564.6494 gina.washington@hilton.com



CHAPTER ADMINISTRATOR REGINA PIERCEFIELD Association Connection 4010 Executive Park Drive, Suite 100, Cincinnati, OH 45241 513.563.8674 admin@mpioh.org

WELCOME our lew MEMBERS!

ANDREW ARONOFF

RxBenefits

EMILY BREEZE

Hall of Fame Village

ANN-MARIE BRETZIN

Rubber Division, ACS

LIZ CARSON

Visit Cincy

EJ CORPORAN

Go With Live

LAZENDRA DANFORTH

Studio D Meetings & Events

MICHAELA GRAHAM

SARAH KEISER

TERESA KIRKLAND

Doubletree by Hilton
Canton Downtown

JESSICA LOGAN

Visit Greater Lima

CHRISTY MCILQUHAM

Champion Mill Conference Center
Spooky Nook Sports

MELODIE REED

Blackwell Hotel and Pfahl Conference Center

JULIA WALSH

Ohio University

LISA WILLIAMSON

PlusOne Coach LLC

THANK YOU to our chapter SPONSORS!







NETWORKING BEYOND THE SURFACE

BUILDING AUTHENTIC, MEANINGFUL PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS.





moment—fostering long-term partnerships, elevating customer experiences, and driving continued AV and production success.

On March 31, 2020, four MPI Indiana Chapter industry professionals came together for a virtual check-in. This informal meeting was our way to offer support, share a laugh, and cope with the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was a time of canceled in-person events, lost jobs, and major changes for our industry.





That first Zoom call inspired us to extend the invite to others in the MPI Indiana community, and what began as a simple check-in grew into a weekly event. We shared everything—from new shows we were excited about to recipes we were trying, all while supporting one another through job losses, furloughs, and career transitions. We created a community that helped us endure these challenging times.

As the meetings continued, the network expanded beyond MPI, bringing in members from the ISAE, FICP, and PCMA communities, non-associated individuals, as well as those from different states and countries. The group evolved into a diverse, inclusive space where anyone could connect, regardless of their industry affiliation. What truly mattered was a shared commitment to building authentic, meaningful relationships.

Over time, our connections deepened. We learned about each other's personal and professional lives, celebrated industry trends, discussed venues and destinations, shared job openings, and supported one another through losses. This is what professional networking is all about: making genuine connections that go beyond the surface.

While the group's name has shifted over the years-from "Happy Hour" to the more cheeky "S#%!_Show" and now "SS HH Industry Thursday Meeting"—its purpose remains the same. With over 75 people receiving our industry newsletter (yes, I started that in Jan 2023 and continue hopefully creating value) and more than 60 invited to the weekly call (people come and go as they are available), this community thrives on inclusivity and connection.

It's been an incredible journey—one that's allowed me to personally forge new partnerships in the AV/production world and continue growing my professional network. I'm always in awe as I watch others collaborate amongst themselves to better their focused needs, and bring more amazing individuals to the community. Although we mourned the loss of Joe Watson, one of our founding members, in 2024, his spirit and the community we've built together live on.

At its core, the "SS HH" call is more than just a meeting; it's a place where we connect, support, and grow together building relationships that last beyond the surface.



HIGHLIGHTS FROM NAVIGATE







Navigate Committee

Conference Co-Chairs

Abbey Border and Lori Stickley with
Regina Piercefield and Shannon Sprau

February 2025

Navigate 2025, hosted at Cherry Valley Hotel & Ohio Event Center, brought together industry professionals for two days of education, networking, and engaging activations. The conference kicked off with a dynamic welcome from emcee Devon Pasha, followed by keynote presentations from industry leaders like Geoff McLachlan and Courtney Stanley, who inspired attendees with insights on leadership, innovation, and professional growth. Attendees participated in hands-on sessions, including AI for event planning, risk management, and maximizing LinkedIn, while also engaging in a CSR project benefiting Ronald McDonald House Charities. The exhibitor showcase provided opportunities to connect with top suppliers and the popular puppy break. Day one concluded with a reception presented by Cherry Valley Hotel featuring the band Hat Trick with great food, drink, and networking. The conference also introduced new initiatives such as the Legion of Honor recognition and a steps challenge to keep participants moving. The conference culminated in a high-energy Lightning Round Keynote and a look ahead to next year's event at Embassy Suites Dublin, energizing attendees and equipped with new insights to elevate their events.

























LEGION OF HONORS

MPI Ohio Member for 15 years or longer who has made a lasting impression through their leadership and support of the chapter.

LEGION

HONOREES



MARK BICE **JANET BOISSY** SHAWNNA DUNAWAY **JERRY FORSTING** DAVID FREEMAN **AARON ADAM HAYES BETH HECQUET** KATIE JONES JOHN KILLACKY **DWIGHT LOKEN**

DWIGHT LOKEN ANN LUKETIC DON MILLER MARIA MILLER **DENISE MONGOVEN** JOAN O'CONNOR **GINENNE ROTHLISBERGER** ANNA RYAN SARAH SCHMIDT KIM THOMPSON **JENNIFER VESELKO**

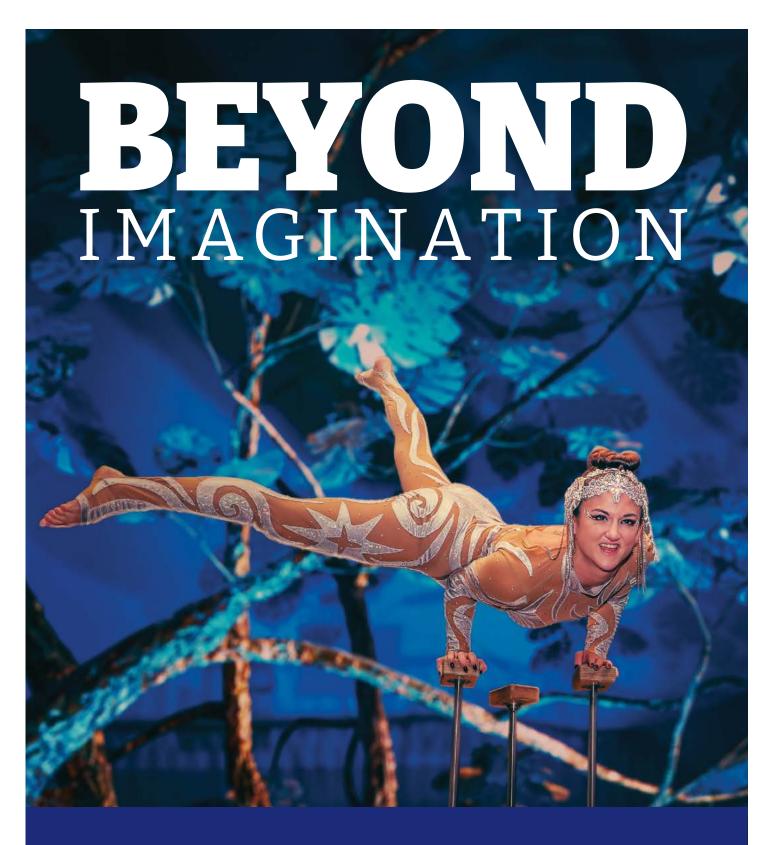












You dream it; we make it happen. Our team is here to support meeting planners in creating customizable, one-of-a-kind events your guests will be talking about for years. That's beyond conventional.



KALAHARIMEETINGS.COM

©2025 Kalahari Management Co. LLC

The Friendship Factor

HOW PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS EVOLVE INTO PERSONAL CONNECTIONS



JAMIE SCHAFRATH

Director of Business Development

Bartha

Jamie is a seasoned business development leader with over 25 years of experience in sales, project management, and strategic relationship building. As Director of Business Development at Bartha, Jamie excels at aligning commitments, optimizing resources, and delivering impactful solutions for clients, from C-suite executives to cross-functional teams. Jamie also recently was the recipient of 2024 Supplier Of The Year Award at the Elevate Reception in December.

I have been in the hospitality industry for over 25 years.

My experience ranges from hotel and CVB sales to association and nonprofit management, décor design, and AV production. Along the way, I've learned that building professional friendships in the events world is a bit like choosing where to eat. Sometimes, you're in a rush; other times, you crave reliability, and occasionally—when the stars align—you indulge in a Michelin-star experience. Here's what I mean:

THE DRIVE-THRU RELATIONSHIP

Sometimes, you need a venue or supplier, pronto! No time for pleasantries just a quick exchange to get the job done. It's like hitting a fast-food drive-thru when you're starving. Efficient? Yes. Memorable? Not so much. And while the folks at the drive-thru are kind and attentive, those fleeting moments don't offer the space for deeper, more personal ties.

THE RELIABLE DINER CONNECTION

Then, some relationships feel like your favorite local diner—the one that knows your order by heart (black coffee, no drama) and always delivers with a smile. These connections are consistent and dependable. You soon find yourself sharing more than just project details—swapping family vacation stories while waiting for the AV check—and before you know it, you're exchanging memes and laughs.

THE FINE DINING FRIENDSHIP

Now, the real magic happens with fine dining friendships. These are bonds that simmer over the years. You cross paths at conferences, tackle last-minute crises together, and share exasperated laughs over quirky client requests. Then, out of the blue, you join forces on a major project—a multi-course, expertly-plated partnership that feels both earned and unforgettable.

REALLY, WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

In our high-energy events industry, friendships make everything better. They lead to smoother events, stronger teams, and memorable experiences. That's why being part of organizations like MPI—crafted for making meaningful connections—is so important. In our fast-paced industry, these evolving relationships not only drive success but also enrich our lives, proving that sometimes, the best collaborations begin with a simple hello.



BRAND CONNECTION

How aligning your brand with strategic partnerships can expand your reach

PIERRE LE

Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp Director of National Accounts, Midwest Sales Office

Director of National Accounts at the Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp, specializing in connecting organizations with exceptional meeting and event experiences in Music City. With a background in hotel sales and a passion forbuilding strong industry relationships, he helps planners create seamless, impactful events while showcasing Nashville as a premier destination.



One of the greatest rewards of working in the meetings and events industry is the incredible people you meet along the way. By expanding your network, you unlock valuable opportunities and tap into new audiences. Partnering with the right individuals can amplify your marketing efforts and help you achieve your goals more efficiently.

It's important to remember that people tend to do business with those they like. By cultivating authentic relationships through shared experiences, you can create lasting friendships. As you collaborate, you not only grow your professional network but also build deeper connections that extend beyond business. These strong personal relationships often lead to more successful partnerships, fostering better collaboration and aligning mutual goals.

Sometimes, the most unlikely competitors can turn into your greatest allies. During my time at the Hyatt Regency Columbus, I focused on building strong relationships with other hotels in our competitive set. While our objectives weren't always aligned as competitors, we recognized that sharing resources could benefit everyone. Together with Experience Columbus and the Greater Columbus Convention Center, we seamlessly worked to offer a unified product and experience for our clients...

By nurturing these genuine connections, we created a memorable and lasting brand for these meeting planners. Now, as part of the Nashville Convention and Visitors Corp, these experiences have made my transition to a new role much easier. I've become well-acquainted with other hotel brands and their network of peers and clients. I've also applied this same approach to partnering with other cities, tapping into their expertise and networks to further our shared goals.

In today's competitive market, successful partnerships can elevate your brand's credibility. By showing a commitment to collaboration and customer satisfaction, you can stand out from the competition. Whether you're planning a major event, enhancing your marketing efforts, or partnering with other cities and hotel brands, don't hesitate to reach out to potential partners. Together, you can create something extraordinary—and possibly gain a lifelong friend along the way!





THE POWER OF COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS • Inspiration Studios' Impact •

At Inspiration Studios, connections are the foundation of our mission. From the beginning, we've understood that building relationships within the community is essential to creating meaningful opportunities for the individuals we serve. These connections aren't just partnerships — they are bridges that transform lives.

When we collaborate with local businesses, organizations, and individuals, we create a ripple effect. For example, partnerships with art studios and galleries provide our InsideOut Studio artists with platforms to showcase their talents, gain confidence, and earn income. Community involvement strengthens our ability to support adults with developmental disabilities in leading purposeful and self-directed lives.

A recent initiative brought together our artists and teenagers from the Boys & Girls Club of Hamilton, Ohio, to create a vibrant 550-square-foot mural for the club's Teen Center. This collaboration resulted in a stunning public artwork while fostering mentorship, creativity, and community engagement.

Another impactful project involved a partnership with The Well House, a new Tapestry by Hilton hotel, where our artists designed unique pieces to enhance 35 rooms. Each artwork, covering HVAC panels, includes the artist's name and a QR code linking to more information about the program. This collaboration not only solved a design challenge but also introduced a wider audience to the talents of artists with disabilities.

These initiatives exemplify InsideOut Studio's commitment to integrating art into the community while empowering artists with disabilities. Through these connections, we continue to break down barriers and foster inclusivity. Beyond art, partnerships provide crucial resources for programs like Inclusive Wellness, which promotes holistic well-being through SMART kitchens, sensory rooms, and educational activities.

These connections foster inclusion and understanding. Every interaction—whether attending an event, purchasing art, or volunteering—highlights the talents of individuals with disabilities, breaking down barriers and opening doors. The power of connection transforms both lives and communities, creating a network of support where everyone thrives. At Inspiration Studios, we're proud to keep strengthening these bonds for a more inclusive future.



Kim joined the InsideOut staff in February 2020. Having discovered a passion for serving the local community, Kim has dedicated her career to not-for-profit marketing and fundraising. Kim attended Miami University where she earned her Bachelor of Arts in Education. Most recently, she earned her Certificate in Fund Raising Management from Indiana University. She has a passion for serving individuals with disabilities and understands the core values of Inspiration Studios.

THE THREE LEVELS OF NETWORKING.

When I talk about this concept, it's usually met with "I didn't realize that." So what's this about three levels of networking? Networking is networking. Please open yourselves to the following. If you do, then more avenues and opportunities will present themselves.

- Let's talk about the first level of networking. This is when you are meeting people face to face, or even online. It's you and them. Ideally, a long lasting, high value relationship will develop. As such, both parties will trust one another, and set out to help one another. It could be that there is business done between the two, or some other form of business relationship develops.
- The second level of networking is when you receive referrals from your first level contacts. Because of that first level relationship, each of you will most likely refer your clients, family, business associates, and friends, to the other. These are prospects and hopefully clients that will come as the result of the referral relationship. If that first level relationship didn't exist, or wasn't very strong, there would be no access to those second level contacts.
- The third and most advanced level of networking, is that of the connector.

 Again, this requires a strong first level networking relationship. The connector is someone who listens to what others say they are seeking. Then, the connector identifies opportunities to bring people together. Unlike the referral relationship (level two), the connector sees things in others that may not be obvious to them. The connector may see how two parties can work together and achieve a common goal. Many times, neither party sees the potential value of those relationships, but the connector does. That's what makes the connector's role so valuable. Perhaps it's a strategic alliance, or a potential partnership. Or, it could be some other opportunity for the parties to work together.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR.



April 16 2025

Chapter Meeting Cleveland OH

May 21 & 22 2025

Joint MPI OH & MI Event Oregon OH

July 2025

Chapter Meeting Cincinnati OH

August 2025

Cornament Columbus, Cleveland, Cincinnati OH

September 2025

MPI Ohio & OSAP Joint Industry Event Columbus 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 Jane Lee, Director of Strategic Partnerships, to secure your date at education@mpioh.org

AT YOUR SERVICE.

TO ACCESS MPI OHIO MEMBER DIRECTORY

www.mpi.org/membership/member-directory





TO ATTEND A BOARD MEETING

Contact: Adam Kowaleski

419.515.4377

Email: OfficeOfPresident@mpioh.org

TO GET INVOLVED WITH BOARD/COMMITTEE

Visit: www.MPIOH.org or

Email: Admin@mpioh.org to join a committee

TO SPONSOR AN MPI OHIO MEETING/EVENT

Contact: The MPI Ohio Office

513.563.8674

Email: Admin@mpioh.org

TO RECEIVE MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Contact: The MPI Ohio Office

513.563.8674

Email: Admin@mpioh.org Join Online: www.MPIweb.org

SUBMIT AN ARTICLE FOR NEWSLETTER

Contact: The MPI Ohio Office

513.563.8674

Email: Admin@mpioh.org

TO RECEIVE INFORMATION REGARDING THE CMP CERTIFICATION/STUDY GROUPS

Contact: The MPI Ohio Office

513.563.8674

Email: Admin@mpioh.org

SUBMIT AN ADVERTISEMENT FOR NEWSLETTER

Contact: The MPI Ohio Office

513.563.8674

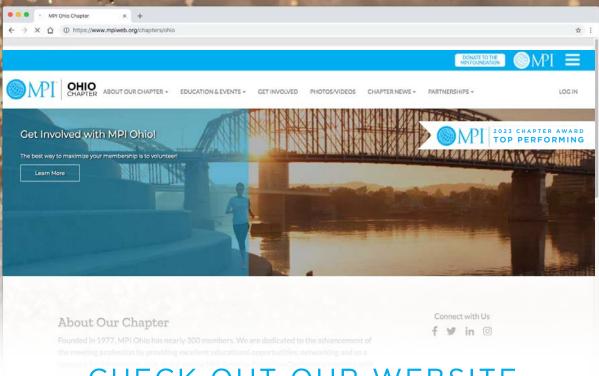
Email: Admin@mpioh.org

JOIN MPI OHIO'S SOCIAL MEDIA CONNECTIONS

To connect to our Social Media & LinkedIn accounts

Visit: www.MPIOH.org





CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE www.mpioh.org



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"



Follow us! Tag us!

@MPIOH #MPIOH #MPI