

A woman with short blonde hair, wearing a dark blazer over a striped shirt, is sitting on a wooden stool at a bar. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background shows a bar with shelves of bottles and a person working behind the counter. The lighting is warm and ambient.

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OFF THE BEATEN PATH

Lesser-known attractions a fun twist
for meeting attendees

Meeting and Events

GUIDE

Capturing their attention

Angela Harris prefers the unique
when hosting seminars, meetings



PATRICK XIONG

"You need the right spot for your meeting to convey the feeling you're looking for," said Angela Harris of ASH Consulting, who holds seminars at the Sand Box, a nontraditional meeting site in the Iron Horse Hotel in Milwaukee.

Creating memorable meetings

Planners mix up activities, locations to keep it fun

BY MARYBETH MATZEK
Special to The Business Journal

With super-busy schedules and all the distractions life throws at them, it's more difficult than ever to capture and sustain the attention of meeting attendees. Businesses and organizations are now turning to unique locations and activities to keep their meetings vibrant and productive.

For Angela Harris of ASH Consulting in Milwaukee, the right location for a meeting can make all the difference. Harris holds seminars for job seekers looking to update and upgrade their resumes and cover letters.

"You need the right spot for your meeting to convey the feeling you're looking for," she said.

In Harris' case, that spot is the Sand Box at

the Iron Horse Hotel in Milwaukee's 5th Ward. The Sand Box is a flexible meeting space on the hotel's fifth floor. All the furniture is on wheels so it can be easily moved to accommodate meeting planners' needs. The room also has a Wii gaming system and a TV so meeting-goers can take a break from whatever they're doing and have some fun.

I 'Different venues KEEP IT INTERESTING.'

Barbara Wesener
South Suburban Chamber of Commerce

"It's not a traditional meeting space at all, which really sets apart what you're doing," Harris said. "With the furniture on wheels, it creates a very collaborative space and you can arrange the chairs anyway you want. It's a lot less formal and a lot more fun, which is what I think a lot of people are looking for."

The Sand Box is just one of the Iron Horse's meeting spaces. There's also a traditional boardroom on the fifth floor and a library where meetings and gatherings can be held.

"When we were planning the hotel's meeting spaces, people told us they liked the feeling of 'going on a field trip.' They want a place that's different and unexpected," said Brigitte Breitenbach, a spokeswoman for the Iron Horse Hotel, which opened last November. "Meeting planners love nontraditional spaces where people can meet. It keeps things interesting."

That's what Barbara Wesener, executive director of the South Suburban Chamber of Commerce, has found. The chamber, which primarily serves Oak Creek, Franklin and surrounding communities, takes its monthly gatherings on the road to meet at different members' locations.

"We get a great response from these meetings, especially if it's a new location. If we meet at a newly opened site, we get twice the response as if we were meeting somewhere that's been open awhile," she said. "People just want to see something new."

KEEPING IT UNIQUE

Besides different locations, it's also important to keep the gatherings' formats unique

and different, Wesener said. For example, the chamber is hosting a spring networking event at KEI Landscaping Co. in Oak Creek, complete with a tailgating-style meal in a location showing off the latest ideas in spring plantings.

"When holding meetings, we like to move them around. The different venues keep it interesting," Wesener said.

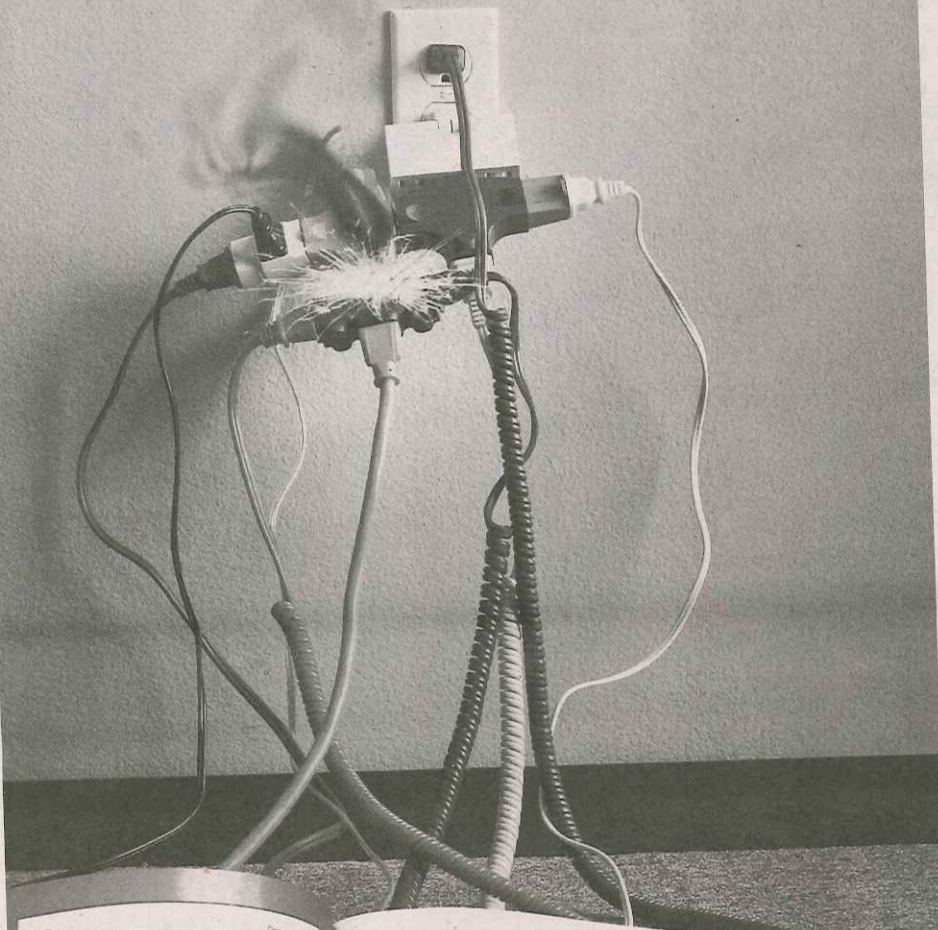
Wherever the meeting is being held, one key to a vibrant gathering is the way the meeting area looks, said Denice Waldhuetter, vice president of Professional Events & Consulting in Menomonee Falls.

"We believe in creating a very sensory-rich experience when putting together a meeting. We look at everything from the attendees' perspective. What will they see and hear?" she said.

That includes using lighting to add ambiance to the room or creating unexpected centerpieces. For example, Waldhuetter has worked with designers to make centerpieces out of nuts and bolts or small ice sculptures.

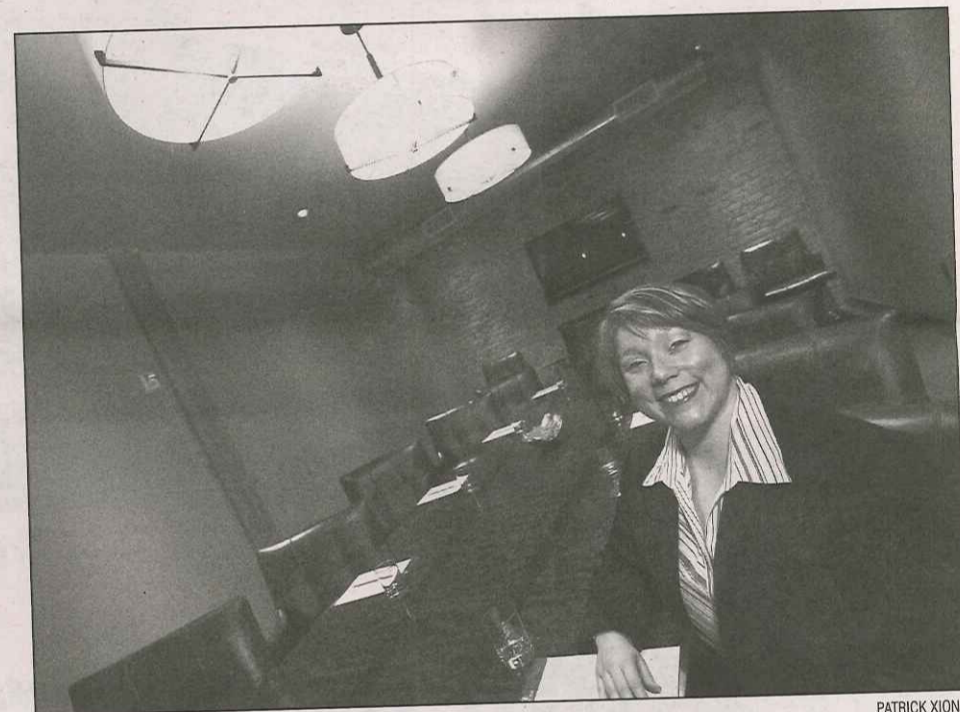
SEE MEETINGS, PAGE B8

When they need you,
how will they find you?



FILE PHOTO

The Iron Horse Hotel's library is a popular area for meetings and gatherings.



PATRICK XIONG

Angela Harris . . . "It's a lot less formal and a lot more fun, which is what I think a lot of people are looking for."

MEETINGS: Unexpected activities add to productive meeting experience

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"If you do something unexpected, it wakes people up and helps them remember the experience," she said.

Another popular meeting trend is going a little more green like replacing bottled water with a water cooler or pitchers and glasses, Waldhuetter said. More companies are looking to cut down on the paper takeaways from meetings, she said, and are putting information on jump drives so attendees can access all the information when they get home.

THE GRAND ENTRANCE

Besides the décor, Waldhuetter sees another trend for making meetings noteworthy — creating grand entrances for the featured speaker.

"I've seen meetings where the lead speaker

comes in riding on the back of a Harley or perhaps is led in by a marching band," she said. "It's something completely unexpected and again creates a lasting memory. It's also getting people excited about what's going to happen. If you come riding in on a Harley, trust me, people will pay attention."

Making meeting breaks something special also helps in setting your gathering apart, Wesener said. At the Iron Horse Hotel, a meeting break can consist of a game of Wii bowling; Waldhuetter has seen meeting breaks featuring retro candy favorites or — going to the other extreme — breaks featuring healthy juice drinks.

"Keep the breaks festive and people won't be so tempted to check their Blackberries or phones and get out of the spirit of the meeting," she said. "You're keeping them focused on the task at hand — the meeting."

2009 THE BUSINESS JOURNAL'S BOOK OF LISTS Largest Milwaukee-area electrical contractors

Rank	Company Name	Address	Phone	2008 Revenue	No. of employees	Services	Principal/Owner	Current person
1	Good Electric Co. Inc.	1823 50th St. Wauwatosa, WI 53225	(414) 781-8200	\$66,424,000	500	Commercial, residential, industrial, stage/light	Michael G. Gorman, president	467
2	Lansberg Electric Co. Inc.	1000 N. 12th St. Brookfield, WI 53005	(262) 781-1500	\$35,000,000	440	Commercial, residential, industrial, stage/light	Michael G. Gorman, president	140
3	Down & Country Electric Inc.	1000 N. 12th St. Brookfield, WI 53005	(414) 420-2410	\$24,261,767	100	Commercial, residential, industrial, stage/light	Michael G. Gorman, president	120
4	Vantage Electrical Contractors Inc.	2001 Becker Court Wauwatosa, WI 53226	(262) 540-9777	\$21,000,000	130	Commercial, residential, industrial, stage/light	Michael G. Gorman, president	120
5	Roman Electric Co. Inc.	1400 S. 7th St. Milwaukee, WI 53214	(414) 771-5400	\$20,419,000	130	Commercial, residential, industrial, stage/light	Michael G. Gorman, president	120
6	Good Electric Co.	10224 148th Eastman Ave. Wauwatosa, WI 53226	(262) 342-2000	\$16,730,000	82	Commercial, residential, industrial, stage/light	Michael G. Gorman, president	120
7	Spocum Electric Inc.	10222 148th Eastman Ave. Wauwatosa, WI 53226	(262) 342-2000	\$8,508,000	42	Commercial, residential, industrial, stage/light	Michael G. Gorman, president	120
8	Omeco Electric Inc.	11015 W. Layton Ave. Cedarburg, WI 53002	(414) 420-2700	\$7,730,000	50	Commercial, residential, industrial, stage/light	Michael G. Gorman, president	120
9	Nebo Electric Inc.	1014 161st St. Greenfield, WI 53221	(262) 342-2000	\$7,200,000	24	Commercial, residential, industrial, stage/light	Michael G. Gorman, president	120
10	Hart Electric Inc.	1000 W. 12th St. Brookfield, WI 53005	(262) 781-1500	\$4,682,530	31	Commercial, residential, industrial, stage/light	Michael G. Gorman, president	120
11	Electrical Concepts Inc.	148 W. 12th St. Brookfield, WI 53005	(262) 781-1500	\$1,300,000	19	Commercial, residential, industrial, stage/light	Michael G. Gorman, president	120
12	Pinky Electric Inc.	1000 W. 12th St. Brookfield, WI 53005	(262) 781-1500	\$1,012,900	8	Commercial, residential, industrial, stage/light	Michael G. Gorman, president	120

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