

Meetings West, February 2009

Growth and Upgrades

by Tony Bartlett

Despite the slowdown in hotel development, there has been plenty of activity on the conference center front.

More Coverage

Destination Hotels & Resorts has seven IACC-certified centers among its 30-plus hotels and resorts. Last July, it took on the management of the IACC-certified 120-room Rizzo Conference Center with 20,000 square feet of conference space near the University of North Carolina campus in Chapel Hill, N.C. At the same time, it added UNC's historic Carolina Inn to its portfolio.

- [Conference Centers](#)

Annapolis, Md.-based Thayer Lodging Group, which has 14 hotels, is planning to build an executive meeting center at the Hyatt Dulles near Washington, D.C., which it purchased last June.

Thayer's new Palm Beach Gardens Doubletree executive meeting center opening April 1 will be its fifth IACC property. Others are the Doubletree Bethesda [Md.] Hotel & Executive Meeting Center, which completed a \$20 million renovation in 2007; the Wyndham Hotel and Conference Center Peachtree City [Ga.]; the Wyndham Miami Airport Hotel & Executive Meeting Center; and the Wyndham Lisle-Chicago Hotel & Executive Meeting Center.

With more than 30 hotels and resorts, Houston-based Benchmark Hospitality International has a dozen that are IACC-certified.

Last May, its 156-room Chaminade Resort & Spa overlooking Monterey Bay in Santa Cruz, Calif., completed a \$15 million renovation that included its guest rooms, restaurant and lounge and 12,000 square feet of meeting space. In March 2007, Benchmark opened The Heldrich, a new \$120 million property in New Brunswick, N.J., which a month later was the site of the 2007 IACC annual conference.

Boston-based Pyramid Hotel Group has been adding IACC properties.

Last July Pyramid took over the management of the Wylie Inn & Conference Center with 17,500 square feet of meeting space at Endicott College in Beverly, Mass. Last January in Stamford, Conn., it opened the 484-room Hilton Stamford Hotel & Executive Meeting Center, formerly the Westin Stamford, following a renovation that included a 7,500-square-foot IACC-approved facility as part of its 45,000-square feet of meeting space.

Another recent IACC addition is the 388-room Westin Southfield Detroit and Executive Meeting Center with 5,900 square feet of new IACC-approved space. A former Doubletree became the Hilton Washington DC/Rockville Hotel & Executive Meeting Center following a renovation in 2007.

Aramark Harrison Lodging, which operates more than 50 conference centers, hotels and corporate training centers, recently took over the management of the 146-room Georgetown University Hotel & Conference Center in Washington, D.C.

Its IACC-certified 917-room National Conference Center in Lansdowne, Va., outside Washington, D.C., unveiled a new ballroom with a capacity for 1,800 people in January 2008, bringing its total meeting space to 285,000 square feet.

Last June, Sodexo Conferencing held the grand opening for its 16th conference facility, the High Country Conference Center at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Ariz., with 25,000 square feet of conference space. In 2007, it unveiled the Desert Willow Conference Center, a 40,000-square-foot IACC-certified day center in Phoenix.

Montvale, N.J.-based Dolce Hotels and Resorts, which has 11 IACC-certified properties, last summer reorganized into two divisions: Hotels and Resorts and Conference Hotels. The company also changed its name from Dolce International.

As part of the rebranding, new standards being launched include a new corporate culinary program, upgraded linen and in-room amenities, cyber cafes at breakout locations, upgraded business centers and on-demand printing enabling guests to print documents from their laptops from anywhere on property.

Dolce also announced a \$100 million investment in capital improvements at various properties, including Dolce Valley Forge in King of Prussia, Pa., and Dolce Basking Ridge in Basking Ridge, N.J., both IACC properties added to its portfolio in 2007. Dolce Basking Ridge, formerly an AT&T conference center, has completed room renovations, the first phase of a multimillion-dollar makeover.

Last September, construction started on the \$70 million Dolce Munich, which will be its fifth European property.

Among properties that have joined IACC in the last year are the Assembly on Five Meeting Center at the Doubletree Hotel Philadelphia; Flik Conference Center Management's Culinary Conference Center in Hudson County Community College in Jersey City, N.J., and its Gateway Hotel & Conference Center in Ames, Iowa; the Phoenix Executive Conference Center at the Phoenix Convention Center; and the Conference Center at the Georgian Terrace Hotel in Atlanta.

Last August, the IACC-certified, 221-room Emerald Pointe Hotel & Conference Center at Lake Lanier Islands, Ga., was renamed Legacy Lodge & Conference Center following the completion of the first phase of a multiyear renovation.

Also last year, New Jersey's 364-room Wyndham Princeton Forrestal Hotel & Conference Center, managed by Wyndham and formerly the Merrill Lynch Conference Center, completed a \$7 million upgrade of its conference center, guest rooms, lobby and dining outlets.