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LEADING THE IRVINE COMPANY RESORT PROPERTIES

Scott Hermes is bringing innovation and deep knowledge of the meetings industry to his new role.

BY SHELLEY LEVITT

As the new president of the Irvine Company Resort Properties, Scott Hermes, CMP, will oversee operations and marketing for The Resort at Pelican Hill, Fashion Island Hotel and Hotel Irvine, as well as Irvine's Oak Creek Golf Club and California Recreation Company. Hermes has held executive positions at Marriott, Starwood and Sheraton, and also had leadership roles with Meeting Professionals International, including being

a chapter president and member of the MPI Foundation Board of Directors.

CAM+E: You've been a member of MPI since 1983. How will that inform your new role?

SH: I started in banquets, events and catering, delivering meetings on the operations side, and then moved into the sales area. I think this broad experience really helps me relate to the meetings market. And,

throughout it all, MPI was a continuing education in what's important to meeting professionals

CAM+E: How are your properties evolving to meet the needs of the meetings market?

SH: One thing we're doing is introducing virtual reality (VR) technology into the site-inspection process. At IMEX last year, we brought along several pairs of goggles and when planners stopped by our booth, we were able to transport them to Orange County to see our meeting spaces set up for special events. It conveyed in a very realistic way what we can deliver. It's pretty slick.

More importantly, it enhances and simplifies efficiency for meeting professionals in determining whether a hotel they haven't seen is a good candidate for their needs. We can send planners a pair of VR glasses and they can sit in their office in Chicago or Washington, D.C., and walk through our hotel meeting space.

We're also moving toward making keyless entry available for meeting planners.

That means attendees can use their smartphones to bypass the front desk and go right to their guest rooms. It eliminates a pain point for planners, long lines at registration when attendees are all arriving at the same time.

CAM+E: What do you see as the biggest challenge for the meetings industry?

SH: Happily, what had seemed like a big challenge—namely, that teleconferencing and videoconferencing was going to adversely affect the meetings industry—didn't play out. It turns out, that people do not want to give up face-to-face interaction. You can't replace that in a digital world.

That leaves us with the more exciting challenge of creating new experiences for groups. Iron skillet competitions and the like are getting a little stale. One successful new experience we've introduced at The Resort at Pelican Hill is "Plein Air and Prosecco." Plein air, or "in the open air" painting, is very much a Southern California art form. So we set attendees up with easels and paints at an outdoor event area overlooking the Pacific at sunset and give them some instruction. Turns out, plein air, the Pacific and prosecco go very well together. 🍷

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