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northwest meetings + events

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Northwest Meetings + Events held its 2014 Best of Awards at The Foundry in Seattle to honor its readers' choice nominees and winners.



ON THE COVER
Northern Quest Resort & Casino's lobby bar offers guests a warm welcome. **Photo by Peter Hassel Photography**

PHOTOS: (CLOCKWISE) JEFF SCHULTZ/ALASKA PHOTO TREKS; HAYLEY YOUNG; WUNDERLIST; EVA MRACK/TOM DOUGLAS RESTAURANTS

STOP TRAFFICKING

The hospitality industry is in a unique position to help end the forced sex and labor trade.

BY AUDREY FAN

IN THE WORLD OF MEETINGS AND EVENTS, planners typically judge the success of a program by its high attendance numbers and effective content delivery, while vendors look to revenue numbers and the successful execution of products or services. There is, however, another number that is often associated with large conferences and conventions that both planners and vendors can work toward decreasing: the number of children exploited through sex trafficking. It is a problem in communities across the country—not just large metropolitan cities or at high-profile special events that draw big crowds. And as members of the hospitality industry, it is one we cannot ignore.

According to the United Nations Global Study on Violence Against Children, an estimated 150 million girls and 73 million boys under 18 years of age experience sexual exploitation or other forms of sexual violence. Every year, millions of children are bought and sold for the purposes of sexual exploitation. On any given night in Seattle's King County, there are 300–500 youths prostituted, and the majority of these crimes happen in hotels. In a press release announcing a new initiative to reduce the demand for online prostitution by targeting the solicitors, King County Prosecuting Attorney Dan Satterberg noted, "In King County, each day an estimated 27,000 men are actively soliciting sex online at one of over 100 websites." He added: "Our message for buyers is simple: 'We are working together to hold you accountable for the harms of prostitution.'"

With January designated by President Barack Obama as Human Trafficking Awareness and Prevention Month, how can we in the hospitality industry collectively work together to end human trafficking? The answer is for us to do what we do best: educate.

Lesley Young Cutler, CMP, principal of Seattle-based Envision Meetings & Incentives Inc., was instrumental in having Meeting Professionals International (MPI), Washington State Chapter, be the first MPI chapter to sign The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel

and Tourism (The Code). The Code provides a set of six guidelines travel and tourism companies can implement to prevent and react to instances of child sex trafficking.

As a planner, Cutler includes a clause in all of her contracts stating a zero tolerance policy of sexual exploitation of children, and she has added this signature line to all of her email correspondence: "Envision Meetings &

In addition to adding a clause in contracts, The Code's essential steps to help protect children include:

- » Establishing a policy and procedure against sexual exploitation of children
- » Training employees in children's rights, the prevention of sexual exploitation and how to report suspected cases
- » Providing information to travelers



"Envision Meetings & Incentives is an official member of The Code and condemns the sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism. To this end we have signed the Tourism Child-Protection Code of Conduct (thecode.org, ecpatusa.org). We ask our travel partners to do the same." —LESLEY YOUNG CUTLER, CMP

Incentives is an official member of The Code and condemns the sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism. To this end we have signed the Tourism Child-Protection Code of Conduct (thecode.org, ecpatusa.org). We ask our travel partners to do the same." She has included similar verbiage on her website.

- » Supporting, collaborating with and engaging stakeholders
 - » Reporting annually on your implementation of The Code
- Hospitality companies that follow The Code are provided with online tools, support and training programs.




Get Involved

» To sign up for a BEST training program or make a donation to support its efforts, visit bestalliance.org.

» To join The Code and take a stand against sexual exploitation of children, visit thecode.org.

» If you suspect someone is being forced or coerced into prostitution or labor against their will, contact the human trafficking hotline at 888.373.7888.

Another Seattle-based nonprofit organization working in the hospitality industry to end sex and labor trafficking is Businesses Ending Slavery & Trafficking, or BEST. Working in collaboration with local law enforcement, BEST provides public awareness materials and hands-on training to businesses such as hotels, stores and medical practices. Some of the signs of human trafficking outlined in BEST's materials include teaching hotels to recognize guests' use of multiple keys and cell phones, excessive fear or submission and one person's sole control over money and documents for another person, such as a passport or driver's license.

The more awareness and knowledge we can raise within the hospitality industry, the more we can make our industry inhospitable for human traffickers. 



AUDREY FAN IS A SEATTLE-BASED MEETINGS AND EVENTS PLANNER. SHE IS AN ACTIVE MEMBER AND PAST BOARD PRESIDENT OF THE WASHINGTON STATE CHAPTER OF MPI.

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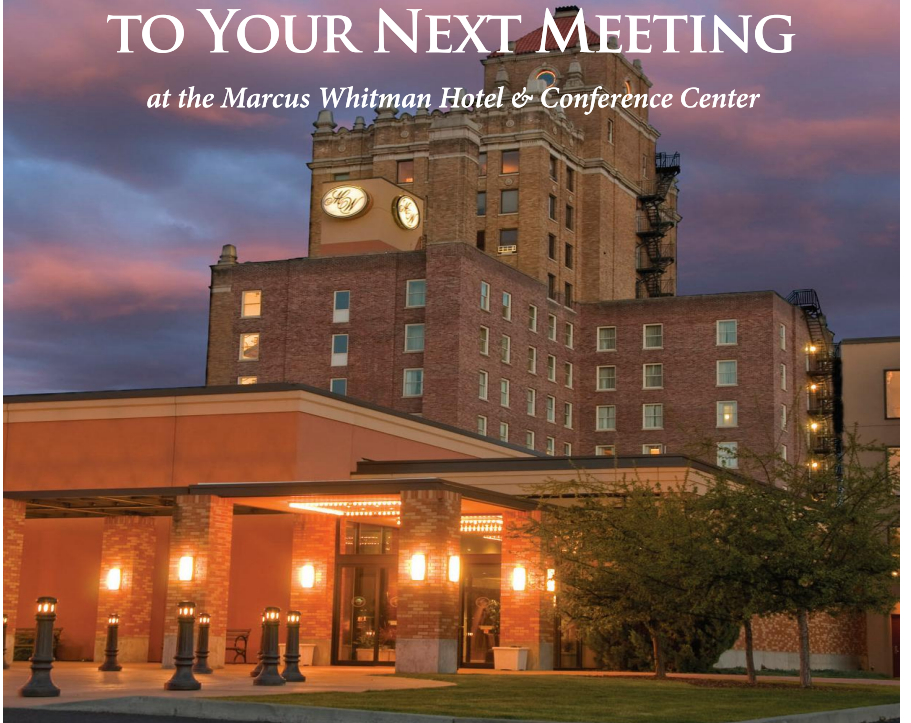


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