

NEWS

Fairmont Washington Lightens Up Certification Class With "Top Chef" Competition

By Mike Santa Rita

Professional development doesn't have to only be about endless power point presentations and management classes. That's what Cameron Curtis discovered when she participated in a "Top Chef"-style competition at the ASAE coordinated certification classes held July 8 and 9 at the Fairmont Washington D.C.

The Fairmont lightened up the two day program of classes geared towards Certified Association Executive (CAE) and Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) certification with a "Top Chef" competition for participants to teach them the importance of teamwork.

Four teams of four people each competed with each other. But to drive home the value of communication none of the team members were allowed to talk to each other, Curtis, 35, manager of meetings at the Association of American Medical Colleges in Washington said.

Curtis, who was on the winning team told *USAE* that one person prepared ingredients, another prepared the meal, one designed the plate and another explained it to the judges. She came away impressed with the importance of teamwork.

When you're not allowed to communicate, "It proves that really you need to be able to communicate," she said.

Curtis who chose the ingredients for

her team's winning entry, picked beef tenderloin, lettuces, berries and plums to make a winning salad.

Judges told her the combined effort won her the award, she added.

"They liked our ingredients, it tasted good and they liked the way it looked," she said.

But the two day session was not all about blending ingredients and taste experiences. About ten leaders in meeting and association fields taught classes to the 18 people who were there to bone up on their professional skills and advance their careers, said Joy Mason, associate director of registration and customer care for ASAE.

The CAE program, run by ASAE, certifies association leaders in the area of association governance, finance and management, while a CMP certification, under the auspices of the Convention Industry Council, certifies meeting planners in the necessary craft of meeting planning, Mason said. The classes held at the Fairmont could be used for both certifications, Mason added.

The two day series of classes covered a wide variety of subjects from hotel operations, to sales and revenue management, to gauging room and space ratios in hotels, to the ins and outs of catering, managing room blocks and generally understanding the needs of meeting planners, Mason said.



The Fairmont Washington, D.C., recently held a two-day program for meeting planners that included a "Top Chef" competition. From left to right seated are Shannon Schneider, Fairmont's director of sales and marketing, Marshall Nayer, American Society of Hematology and Lonnie Giametti, Fairmont's director of banquets. Standing left to right are Elizabeth Haines, National Aircraft Association, Cameron Curtis, Association of American Medical Colleges, Jason Dalling, Fairmont's executive chef, Lisa Sparrow, Association of School Business Officials International and Gabi Laguarda, CMP, Association Management Group.

ASAE holds six such meetings a year, two in the fall, two in the winter, one in the spring, one in the summer, Mason said. They regularly receive high ratings from their attendees, Mason said.

"It has consistently done well," she said.

For Curtis, however, it was the food preparation that stood out.

"It was fun, it was actually a lot of fun," she said. "I love Top Chef, I watch that all the time. So it was kind of fun to do a small competition."

Association Management Companies May Be Recession-Proof

Study Shows Standalones Fair Worse During Poor Economic Times

By Rebecca Keister

It may not be a cure for the recession that ails them, but stand-alone associations may want to consider what could be a long-term care plan for staying afloat during the economic downturn.

"Are AMC-Managed Organizations Shielded From Recession?," – a study authored by AMC Institute member Michael LoBue, shows that standalone associations may be nearly twice as likely to suffer financially during the recession as those managed by Association Management Companies.

"AMC-managed organizations seem to fare in difficult economic times better than standalones. That's conclusion number one," LoBue told *USAE*. "(Standalones) should look internally and try to identify, are they getting the special returns for their higher cost model."

The study, which was published by AMC Institute in early June and modeled after an October 2009 similar study by *CEO Update*, compares two groups of associations – those who are managed by AMCs and those that are not – of similar sizes, types, tax exempt status and age.

Standalones were defined as organizations that employ their own staff, lease their own office space and incur their own capital expenses.

The conclusion, from examining two non-random samples (109 standalones and 113 AMC-managed organizations) of these organizations for the years 2006, 2007 and 2008, was that more than 50 percent of standalones operated at a loss for 2008, while only 7 percent of AMC-managed organizations suffered a loss that year.

Additionally, two-thirds of AMC-managed

organizations reported a surplus for that year, after both groups, according to the study, performed almost identically in 2006 and 2007.

"We have two years of relative stability, and we have one year of the economy hit the fan," LoBue said. "In 2006 and 2007 we all thought the economy was flying along and then boom, reality was there."

LoBue acknowledges that the study is limited. The elimination of random samples and the profiles of the two groups were not consistently matched by size, although they all were under \$5 million in annual operating revenue for the fiscal year 2008.

But he maintains that the study's findings are no less accurate and should be no less enlightening to standalone organizations.

"I didn't use random because it was too expensive, time-wise and otherwise," LoBue said. "You would need to do that if you wanted to prove something, and maybe we can do that at some point in the future."

The study, he said, eliminated as much error as possible; narrowing the list of AMC-managed organizations to only those managed by an AMC Institute member. He also thoroughly whittled the list of standalones from 700 possible examples.

LaBue said understanding why standalones are operating at a greater rate of deficit may be simple. Standalones, he said, need more revenue and their operating costs are higher.

"They have a fuller responsibility being an employer," he said. "They're turning out less result. It's kind of a double whammy."

More than just consider becoming an AMC-managed association, standalone organizations, LaBue said, should examine their operating structures and ask if they are getting a return on what they invest and spend.



Michael LoBue

"My guess is most of them don't even entertain that question," he said. "The evidence suggests that AMC-managed organizations are more able and nimble to deliver on their missions and programs with thinner reserves."

Going forward, LaBue said he has every intention of examining data for the 2009 fiscal year and would welcome the opportunity to publish a subsequent study, using this one as a baseline.

"I don't know how much of this is really a game changer," LaBue said, adding that he thinks some organizations are just tightening their belts to sustain themselves during the recession and aren't planning on how to come out of it on top. "It may be a big surprise when we come out of the recession, that things aren't what they used to be."

Deadline Approaching For CIC Hall Of Leaders Nominations

By Ben Shlesinger

The deadline is fast approaching for those who want to submit a nomination for the Convention Industry Council's 2011 Hall of Leaders class. Interested parties have until 5 p.m. EST on July 26, to submit a name for induction into the prestigious group. Nominations can be made by CIC member organizations or by any individual in the meetings and convention industry.

More information about the nominations process and nomination forms can be found on the CIC's web site at www.conventionindustry.org/hol/about.htm.

The 2011 Hall of Leaders Gala will be held at the Baltimore Convention Center on June 21. CIC is holding this dinner in conjunction with AIBTM-The Americas Meeting and Events Exhibition.

"We're very excited to be hosting the gala during AIBTM. I think it's going to bring us even greater attendance to this very prestige event because it's in this Northeast corridor that's very easily accessible from Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and New York," said Karen Kotowski, CMP, CAE, CEO of CIC. "I think that bodes well for the attendance that it will achieve. And in addition to the international attendees AIBTM is bringing in, it will give us the opportunity to share with international meeting executives that might not have been able to attend in the past."