



A stellar career

IF you don't know Valerie Percival, it's likely you are new to the industry; a stalwart at IBM for 38 years, Valerie is leaving today, but insists it's not the end.



"I plan to open my own company - Valerie Percival VIP Event Management - and continue in our demanding and rewarding event industry."

Joining IBM in New Zealand in 1977, Valerie moved to IBM Australia in 1984.

Unlike many IBMers, who Valerie says change career paths regularly, she remained in the special event arena - mostly managing incentives throughout Asia Pacific and working with IBM's long term cultural partners Opera Australia and the Australian Chamber Orchestra.

Not too many people could boast a career that includes working with Neil Armstrong, recreating his moon landing on stage in a lunar module for the 20th anniversary, to an audience who were children when he walked on the moon.

Then there was Mother Theresa, Sir Edmund Hilary and the Dalai Lama to name a few.

CLICK HERE and enter 'Pandora' for some memories of a life well lived - so far! We look forward to the next chapter.

You can contact Valerie at:
valerie.c.percival@gmail.com
 Jill

Calls for industry training

ACCOR has called on the government to invest in hospitality training to ensure long-term employment for Australians.

The company referenced the Federal Department of Employment report which forecast that the accommodation and hospitality sector was set to grow at an average rate of 7.1% per year, adding 55,200 jobs.

Accor Pacific chief operating officer Simon McGrath (**pictured**) said there was "significant" new hotel and tourism infrastructure developments but no corresponding increase in training resources.

"It is not just about numbers, it is also about quality of service in what is an increasingly competitive environment.

"Australia needs to significantly increase its training if we are to compete with overseas countries and both attract more international visitors and build domestic tourism."

The private sector should support government plans and contribute by up-skilling workers who were "ideal" for tourism and hospitality, particularly Indigenous and mature-age employees, who offered life experience in a human-oriented industry, he said.

Accommodation Association of Australia ceo Richard Munro said the organisation backed this call from Accor, particularly since



growth was expected.

Training was important for the industry, since growth markets, particularly China and SE Asia, expected world class levels of service, he said.

There would be excellent returns for an investment in training, both socially in getting people back to work and financially in taxes on growing businesses, Munro said.

MEA ceo Linda Gaunt said she supported the push for training funding but believed it should be open to all registered training organisations with hospitality on their scope.

"There is definitely a great need for accredited training.

"And whilst it is commendable that companies become training providers in their own right, funding should be spread amongst training providers to train youth who wish to work in all aspects of the hospitality industry."

The Department of Industry had not replied to requests for comment at time of writing.

Six pages today

BEN has four pages of editorial plus full pages from (**click**):

- BridgeClimb Sydney
- Mantra Lorne

Online edu conference

THE Association of Corporate Travel Executives (ACTE) and INXPO have announced an online educational conference, which will launch in September.

The two day on-demand program would be a partnership between the two companies, ACTE said.

This was an important step in developing greater mobility for industry education, ACTE managing director of global engagement Amber Kelleher said.

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Pan Pacific websites

PAN Pacific Hotels Group and Parkroyal Hotels & Resorts have launched new websites, following a \$2m investment.

This followed a study into the browsing habits and booking preferences of users, Pan Pacific said.

The websites are optimised for mobiles and available in English, Chinese and Japanese, with a simplified, faster booking process requiring a reduced number of mandatory fields.

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business events news

30th April 2014

IHPA's \$500,000 conference



THE Independent Hospital Pricing Authority (IHPA) is looking for a conference organiser who can handle 400 to 600 delegates and a budget of \$500,000.

The organisation is looking to organise its three day Activity Based Funding Conference in an Australian city, including Hobart, Canberra or Perth, in 2015.

The 2014 conference is being held at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre from 23 to 25 June, managed by

Arixex.

The tender calls for pre-conference management, entering into a contract with appropriate venues and organising marketing, including a website, and accommodation.

Applications for the tender close on 19 May.

For more, **CLICK HERE**.

Swiss allergy-friendly

FROM May onwards, Swiss International Air Lines will introduce a number of ground and in flight products geared towards travellers with allergies.

The initiative is in concert with the European Centre for Allergy Research Foundation (ECARF) and the products are designed to make air travel experience for allergy sufferers better.

Swiss is the first carrier to meet ECARF criteria for 'allergy-friendly' airlines, including new alternative food and drinks such as lactose-free coffee cream and a lactose-free version of the popular Swiss chocolate bar.

Additionally, the airline is making allergy-friendly modifications to its cabins too, with First and Business Class passengers offered pillows stuffed with synthetic materials as an alternative to down.

The airline said it would also stop using flowers and air fresheners that could cause nose and throat irritations and toilets would use "gentle on the skin" soaps.

TAA Easter update

TOURISM Accommodation Australia (TAA) said the Easter break had been much as the organisation forecast, with most hotels in Sydney having limited services open during the day on each of the public holidays, although weather conditions probably helped ameliorate the situation.

A survey from the organisation said 67% of hoteliers would close outlets or reduce services over the Easter and ANZAC Day holiday period due to penalty rates (**BEN** 16 Apr).

Outlets which relied mostly on casual labour were most affected due to the 275% penalty loadings on the public holidays, a TAA spokesman said.

Resort hotels generally had more outlets operating to meet customer expectations, and most believed that at best they would break even, he said.

The United Voice Union has previously said long weekends were an important part of society and workers needed to be compensated for giving this up, with the accommodation industry having trouble attracting and retaining staff due to demanding work and low pay.

Eat for a good cause!

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Taste is a social enterprise, our profits are invested into community initiatives.

A train of thought

TRAIN buff, star of screen, stage and television, Scott McGregor and his travel company Scott McGregor's Railway Adventures, have some interesting new themed rail tours for 2015 that include wine, golf, aviation and the arts.

How about Christmas in Switzerland, New Years in Salzburg and Burma by train, boat and plane?

This year's offerings cover destinations such as Sri Lanka on the Viceroy Special, Outback Queensland by rail and Vietnam by private train.

Find out more at
www.railwayadventures.com.

Simmons honoured



BUSINESS Events Sydney's ambassador Professor Michelle Simmons has been elected a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Simmons is a world leader in the field of quantum computing, a director of the Australian Research Council (ARC) Centre of Excellence for Quantum Computation & Communication Technology at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) and was last year awarded an ARC Laureate Fellowship.

She joins the likes of Stephen Hawking, Albert Einstein, Alexander Graham Bell and more than 250 Nobel laureates as a member of the Academy.

Describing her election as a "complete surprise," she said was honoured.

"This is such an exciting time for quantum computing internationally and our research here at UNSW is at the forefront of this global effort."

No ACTE fees

BUSINESS travel managers who are members of the Association of Corporate Travel Executives (ACTE) no longer have to pay registration fees for the association's upcoming conferences in Hong Kong and Copenhagen.

These fees would be included in membership for managers, ACTE executive director Greeley Koch said.

ATP's rich past



AUSTRALIAN Technology Park (ATP) at the Eveleigh Railyards is home to a range of businesses leading the way in innovation, science, technology and media, with the ATP Conference Centre on site.

It will be sharing its rich past at the ATP Heritage Community Days on 16 to 17 May, as part of the National Trust Heritage Festival.

Richard Butcher, who worked on site for six years, will be sharing his fascinating stories as a blacksmith there in the 1950s, including using buckets to wash with water warmed by placing a piece of heated steel in the liquid.

"There were 4,900 people that worked here so my role as a tour guide for this event will capture the activities and the history that once was."

There will be real blacksmith demonstrations by Wrought Artworks and train displays where everyone will be welcomed aboard to explore restored historical carriages and engines.

Devonshire tea will be served in the buffet.

For more information visit:
www.atp.com.au/heritage-community-days.



business events news

30th April 2014

NZ's new Accor



ACCOR has announced a new \$22m hotel in New Zealand, the Novotel New Plymouth.

A short walk from the town centre, the new hotel would have 100 rooms with a mix of executive and studio rooms and two meeting rooms, Accor said.

The building would be Accor's eighth Novotel in the country and would stimulate travel to the region, particularly from the business travel market, Accor NZ, Fiji and Japan operations vice president Garth Simmons said.

Developed by owner Philip Brown, the hotel would employ about 70 staff once opened, slated for early 2015 in around March or April, Accor said.

Accor said New Plymouth was booming due to farming, oil and gas and was one of the fastest growing regional cities in NZ.

An international branded hotel such as Novotel would unlock the tourism potential in the area, the company said.

Crown-ing gifts

THE vexed question of what to give to the guest speaker, the ceo or an employee for a job well done has been answered with the opening this month of a new signature retail outlet Crown Gifts, located on level one of Crown Metropol.

An extension of Crown's online store, it offers a range of Crown products that encompass all five hotels and Crown's premium restaurants such as Crown Towers and Crown Metropol bathrobes to recipes from the Bistro Guillaume cook book.

Also on the agenda for New Zealand this year is the opening of the Sofitel Wellington in the fourth quarter and Sofitel So Auckland, the first Sofitel design hotel, in 2015.

MEANWHILE Starwood Hotels and Resorts has no news on the NZ front, following Pacific regional director of sales and marketing Daniella Tonetto saying at AIME that the group hoped to be back in the country this year (**BEN** 19 Feb).

South Coast Segway

SEGWAY tours of the historic Coolangatta Estate vineyard are available through Segway Tours South Coast.

Two hours south of Sydney and two and a half hours from Canberra, the tours are priced at \$99 per person for the 60 minute tour and from \$119 for the 90 minute tour.



They are ideal for team-building group experiences, with obstacle courses, time trials and ball sports available.

Day and overnight accommodation packages are also available with one night's accommodation at Coolangatta Estate, continental breakfast and a 90 minute Segway tour priced from \$330 per couple, and \$550 for four adults from Sunday to Thursday nights.

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Vienna No.1 again

VIENNA'S 2013 congress report has shown further growth for the top congress destination.

Last year, the number of delegates attending congresses was up one percent compared with 2012 at 501,337, the Vienna Tourist Board said.

They attended 3,389 congresses and corporate events in Vienna, 13 more than the previous year.

While a reported 1,401,888 bed nights fell eight per cent short of the preceding year's high, the national value-add generated by the Vienna conference industry contributed €832m, or about AUD\$1.2b, to Austria's gross domestic product, securing 16,000 jobs in the process, it said.

The city recorded about 12.7m visitors overnights in 2013.



Congress tourism accounted for 11% of this amount.

The Vienna Tourist Board said statistics from the International Congress and Convention Association, published last year, named Vienna as the world's top destination for international congresses in 2012, the eighth year in a row.

The city's success as a "congress metropolis" was based on many different factors, Vienna director of tourism Norbert Kettner said.

"Meetings in the Austrian capital are optimally supported by municipal and academic facilities, and with 24 licensed certification agencies for Green Meetings, Vienna has already demonstrated vision with respect to environmental sustainability, and the city's growing importance as a Central European hub is proving a valuable asset."

The Vienna Meeting Planners' Guide app is available on iPads; visit the website for more:

www.vienna.convention.at.



PITTING yourself against the odds, going that extra mile and overcoming your greatest fear is one thing, but would you leap off Dubai's Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building?

Skydive Dubai, a leader in extreme skydiving, sponsored Soul Flyers World Champions, Vince Reffet and Fred Fugen, to BASE jump off this pinnacle of heightened vertigo, leaping into a Guinness World Record on 21 Apr and claiming a new world record title of the highest BASE jump from the tallest building.

The jump from 828 m was made possible with the construction of a three by one metre platform at the very top of the pinnacle, a mammoth task that took three days to construct, to ensure the highest safety standards and that the pinnacle didn't get damaged.

Conditioning themselves by BASE jumping out of helicopters, Fugen said it was the "jump of a lifetime" and an achievement of three years of hard training.

"This was by far my most exciting jump, a dream come true," said Vince Reffet.

Their dream, another person's nightmare!

Unique offers

DMS' Unique Venues has a number of special offers for groups including New York's luxurious Waldorf Astoria.

Book a minimum of 50 rooms at the hotel before 30 Jun and you will receive a complimentary suite upgrade per 40 paid group room nights.

The deal includes extras such as Hilton Honour Meeting Planner Bonus Points to a maximum of 100,000, and booking more than 50 rooms nets you more extras.

To find out about other special offers at Vietnam's Furama Resort Danang and the Nirwana Gardens Resort on Bintan Island, visit the website at:

www.uniquevenues.com.au/special-offers.



Letter to the editor

GRAY'S Say author Peter Gray, whose column about charging for WiFi in hotels prompted industry response, has replied:

As the author of the Gray's Say column it is encouraging to know that this topic is so hotly disputed.

As well as the letter printed in BEN today, I have received a number of emails from people who agree with the comments in my column.

As for those attributed to Sean Hunt (Starwood Hotels & Resorts regional vice president) these are completely at odds with the facts.

For example the (free) WiFi offered by Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts and those in the Carlson Residor Group is at the fastest

speed available in their location.

This is also true of many independent hotels in and around Australia's major cities and in much of Asia.

As for charging \$20 a day, yes this is at the lower end of the unenlightened hotel WiFi charges but still represents the equivalent of a month from almost any of the ISPs for most people.

Andre Jacques (the Sheraton's director of sales and marketing) may well be prepared to negotiate away the charge if it is queried for a group but this is like asking for a chance to re-quote when a room rate is higher than a competitor in response to an RFP.

The attitude should be 'first price is best price' and if business is lost because this hotel actually believes what is printed in your article then so be it.

We welcome all feedback.

If you would like to weigh in on this or any other subject, email us at

info@businesseventsnews.com.au.

Celebrate & Save

AN offer of 20% off the Thailand-based ONYX Hospitality Group published residential meeting packages coincides with the 20th anniversary of Amari Watgate Bangkok.

Designed especially for business events, other Amari hotels joining in the anniversary celebrations are in Bangkok, Pattaya, Hua Hin, Koh Chang and the Oriental Residence Bangkok.

The residential delegate rates are for bookings made by 20 Jul and held before 31 Dec and include accommodation, buffet breakfast and full-day meeting packages.

For more information visit www.onyx-hospitality.com.

IMEX bound

FOR those heading to IMEX Frankfurt from 20 to 22 May and want to know more about Portugal, Eduarda Neves of Portugal Travel Team will be there together with Euromic on Euromic's Stand E780 or you can book an appointment via email or online at www.portal.imex-frankfurt.com/login.



Face to Face with...

Ross Steele, General Manager Cairns Convention Centre



BEN recently caught up with Ross Steele, GM of the Cairns Convention Centre for the past 10 years. The Centre is operated by AEG Ogden, Asia Pacific's largest venue management company. Under Ross' management, the Centre has been acknowledged as the World's Best Congress Centre in the AIPC 2004 APEX Award and selected in the AIPC World Top 4 Centres in 2005, 2008 and 2010.

What does your role entail?

Leading and representing the Cairns Convention Centre in the communities to which we belong. Providing our executive team with strategies and resources to fulfil their roles and to ensure the success of our client's events.

What's the first thing you do when you get in the office?

Fire up my computer, grab a coffee and say good morning to those in the office.

What is the most challenging aspect of your job?

Constantly looking for improvements in all aspects of our business to remain competitive on an international scale.

How do you inspire your team?

The whole team at the Cairns Convention Centre actually inspires me. The executive team for instance has around 80 years' experience in the business events industry and continually challenges themselves to look for ways to keep our centre one of the best in the world.

Dealing with new technology - bonus or headache?

Definitely bonus – We have invested heavily in AV and IT infrastructure at the Cairns Convention Centre and have the latest protocol WiFi with up to date IT and AV systems throughout the building. This has kept us at the forefront of client technology requirements and is a definite strength for us.

What would you be doing if you were not general manager of Cairns Convention Centre?

Sheep farmer.

Who has inspired you?

My family are my most

inspirational guidance and keep me grounded when I get too big for my boots.

We also get to meet some of the world's best practitioners in their field of expertise and it never ceases to amaze me how many of these are Aussies. They are all inspiring in their own way and contribute to our ability to bring such influential conferences to Cairns.

How do you relax?

By playing golf, albeit poorly.

What makes a great conference?

When the client tells us their event was a success. For our clients, success comes in many forms; it may be access to new members, an engaging and thought provoking program, productive outcomes for participants, sponsor satisfaction, profitability, delegate satisfaction or all of these and more. A great conference is one that reaches the targets set by the client.

What is the most inspiring conference you have been involved in?

We have hosted many inspiring conferences including the recent Coral Reef Symposium where over 3,000 leading scientists signed a moratorium to protect the world's reefs. The International Conference on Atomic Physics had several Nobel Laureates attending, one of which went to our local schools and spoke to students inspiring them to look at a scientific career. He was treated like a rock star and having that experience may result in a kid from Cairns one day becoming a great scientist too.

How many conferences have you attended in the last 12 months?

Four.

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