

Monterey County Convention & Visitors Bureau

Meetings Advisory Board

November 21-24, 2013

Minutes

General Session

Welcome & Introductions • Nancy Morrell Swanson

Nancy Morrell Swanson, President, GMS, Inc., welcomed Board members to the fifth Advisory Board meeting. She then introduced Mairead Hennessy, General Manager, Asilomar Conference Grounds, who detailed features and renovation plans at the hotel, notably that \$20 million has been spent to improve accessibility and on historic restoration work. She outlined the target market, which is primarily group (80%). Board members then introduced themselves with a brief biographical sketch; new members are Darrell Benning, Principal, San Diego Meetings & Incentives; Chet Hogenson, Business Development Manager, ITA Group; Jackie M. Mark, Administrative Assistant, Product Development, Land O'Lakes, Inc. and Stacy Weber, Meeting & Procurement Manager, Moss Adams, LLP.

State of the Destination/Updates • Tammy Blount

Session Objective: To give Board members the CEO's perspective and vision on Monterey as a destination, as well as future initiatives, and to hear the progress on Board recommendations from the last meeting.

Tammy Blount, President/CEO, Monterey County Visitors and Convention Bureau, thanked hosts and partners for their generosity, and reiterated Monterey's commitment to learning from and listening to its customers. She outlined new developments, including: the new Pinnacles National Park, new wine tasting venues in Carmel, guided Segway tours. She gave the following additional information:

- Improvements/renovations and technology upgrades have occurred at several local properties..
- Rate, RevPar and occupancy are up but the destination is lagging in growth compared to the competition.
- There is a new Strategic Client Services division to enhance the value of the destination and serve its customers better through more targeted servicing.
- Funding is being discussed for the Monterey Conference Center, however, no construction date has been set.
- Carmel-by-the-Sea offers smaller-size lodging and now has a person to handle booking and identify target markets, as well as a new website.
- The final printed paper *Meeting Planner Guide* has been distributed and is more of a marketing piece. More technology planning tools are in progress, including a searchable database and changes to the meeting planner portion of the website.

Board Feedback:

Board Recommendations

- Any new online *Meeting Planner Guide* should have easily accessible descriptions and images that planners can use in proposals.
- In response to Ms. Blount's reiteration that Monterey is working on the idea of multi-venue services and contracts that cover multiple properties in Monterey, Board members stressed this is important for Monterey to include as its long-term vision.

- Carmel-by-the-Sea’s new consortium of inns should be listed in these guides.
- An online Meeting Planner Guide should be a resource with links to social media.
- The new online Guide should be educational and easily accessible, so that planners can connect with resources and vendors in Monterey.
- Board members responded positively to Monterey CVB’s decision to include all local venues (and not just members) on its website.

Sales Overview/Strategies for Target Markets • Linda Ruby

Session Objective: To give Board members an overview of MCCVB’s sales analysis, including market segments, market origin, competitive set and marketing spend. .

Linda Ruby, Vice-President, Sales & Group Services, Monterey County CVB, described Monterey’s current market; mostly domestic, with weekend leisure customers mostly from San Francisco, and average length of meetings being two to three days. International visitors love Monterey, and the region would like to attract more international visitors. Most business comes from California and then Mid-Atlantic/Northeast. There is a 50%/50% corporate/association split. The STAR Report shows that Monterey is experiencing a 3% growth over last year. Ms. Ruby said Monterey is focusing on group business to increase growth; one way to do this is to work with planners to attract larger groups, high-yield groups, and better collaborative efforts with partners. She also detailed the *Champion Monterey* program, which should be launched in the next few months; this recognizes local people who help bring meetings to Monterey. The most opportunity in Monterey is from November to April with a Sunday to Wednesday stay. Monterey CVB worked with 14 hotels in the community to set goals for annual room nights as part of a *Room Night Index* program.

Board Feedback: Increasing Group Business to Monterey

Board Recommendations

- Offer credit to the master during slow periods; this incentive program could be funded by the CVB. Be flexible but don’t make this confusing by offering too many options. One destination offered a multi-year incentive. Second-tier destinations offer incentives to the master during their slow periods.
- To counter this destination’s identity problem, the CVB needs to reach out to areas outside California to educate planners about Monterey. For example, many people do not know that Carmel is part of Monterey; Napa/Sonoma is better known. Board Members felt that Monterey should leverage the well known identities of Carmel and Pebble Beach to better identify the region.
- One example of successful destination marketing was when MGM Resorts rented a food truck for their visits; they brought the hotel to the planners.
- Add more face-to-face meetings with planners in 2014.

Board Feedback: Trade Shows

Board Recommendations

- Board members discussed trade shows. If planners had more awareness of Monterey, they would be likely to seek out the destination at a trade show.
- Planners are more likely to respond to customized, targeted trade show emails; these show that the sender thought about what the planner needs by addressing the planner personally and mentioned what the planner’s group does.
- The tradeshow experience is changing; buyers want efficient, targeted time. Know your customer and how to reach out to them—instead of targeting everyone. Send a brief email to a few targeted customers and ask them to meet at the trade show.

- Consider following the model of hosted buyer shows and schedule 15-minute appointments with prospective customers at tradeshow; offer an incentive to meet.

Board Feedback: Reaching the New Customer

*Board
Recommendations*

- Find out how the customer wants to be contacted, i.e., email or phone, etc.
- Before contacting a prospective client/planner, look at the conference website, research what types of events/locations fit for that group and know the name of the group's CEO. The subject line should also be personalized. This catches the planner's attention. Phone calls are more effective when this is done first.
- Testimonials also catch planners' attention, especially if there are recognizable names. Testimonials should include city details, not general kudos.
- Advertise in media that reaches the demand drivers and key decision makers. Focus on why they would choose Monterey over Napa.
- If Monterey competes with Napa/Sonoma County, it needs to extol its unique virtues, e.g., the Conde Nast listing and wine. "Toot your horn."
- Sonoma is aggressive about doing business; one Board member planned a board retreat for 12 people. To close the deal, Sonoma threw in a case of expensive wine, which swayed the organization's leadership. Monterey has a variety of partners who could help close the deal.
- Many planners do not know that Monterey is also wine country. There is a huge opportunity for Monterey to wave the wine flag.
- Monterey should market its value/price over Napa/Sonoma.
- One member said his organization finds sales calls to be personal and effective.
- Many planners have long-term relationships with people they met through associations and boards; peer-to-peer referrals are extremely effective, because they are based on trust. Monterey should ask Advisory Board members to give testimonials about Monterey's destination experience.
- Continue to bring local partners—not just hotels—to tradeshow and sales calls. Other CVBs do this, which lets planners know that the destination's CVB has a solid partnership with its vendors/suppliers.
- Collective regional partnerships with other cities like San Francisco should be strengthened.
- IMEX is a good place to attract international customers, and to expand the international market.

General Session

Branding and Marketing Monterey • Rob O'Keefe

Session Objective: To provide an update on the Monterey branding campaign and gain further feedback on marketing strategies.

Rob O'Keefe, Vice-President/Chief Marketing Officer, Monterey CVB, outlined changes made based on Board feedback, including dropping "county" from Monterey's branding. He explained that Monterey looked at its own leisure branding vision (based on key customer-originated phrases, e.g., "Invigorate Your Soul" and "Grabbing the Moment"), as well as the competition's branding concepts to form its own unique vision, based on the key ideas of Inspiration and Invigoration. Monterey's goal is to create an inspired meeting; its natural assets, creative design and focused staff are all invaluable resources to work with clients to create a meeting that fuels ideas and invigorates and inspires everyone who attends.

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| <i>Board Recommendations</i> | <p>Board Feedback: The Purpose of Meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Meeting participants find that face-to-face meetings enable them to get work done and make important connections within their organizations. ➤ Successful meetings can be tracked by observing the “wow” moments experienced by attendees and the changes that result from those moments. ➤ A successful meeting presents common data/ideas in a different way, which spurs creativity and solutions. ➤ The purpose of meetings is tied to the concept of human capital. ➤ Younger attendees do not go to meetings just to get out of the office; they want to be fulfilled and, for them, meetings must be life-enriching. |
| <i>Board Recommendations</i> | <p>Board Feedback: Advertisements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ On one of the ads move the word ideas so that the phrase is “ideas are born”. The word “Monterey” must be bigger and against a dark background to stand out. Add “California” so as not to confuse this with Mexico. ➤ The slide (before the slide showing CVB staff) was clean and crisp. Board Members loved the picture and the quote. ➤ There should be a bigger font if these advertisements are in print or trade magazines; they need to capture the reader’s attention. ➤ Promote Monterey’s agricultural aspect to Midwestern and agricultural markets. ➤ It is a challenge to engage the younger generation, e.g., digital watermarking. Conventional advertising will not work with them. ➤ “You see an endless beach; your participants will see endless opportunities,” is an example of a good ad tagline. ➤ There was strong consensus that ads should plant a seed to make planners want to find more information. Therefore, less copy, utilize taglines, social media tags, website address—nothing else. ➤ The idea of a “change the world” retreat is compelling and will catch planners’ attention. ➤ This is a golf destination and golf should be included in some ads. ➤ Including a photograph of a salesperson does not help an ad. |
| <i>Board Recommendations</i> | <p>Board Feedback: Social Media</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Monterey should be on all social media sites. Social content is important for planners looking at unfamiliar destinations. Monterey could provide “What to Do in Monterey” links for planners. ➤ Be present on Twitter and Yelp. ➤ Carmel Valley Ranch has a great Facebook presence. They offer topics such as what the chef is cooking in the kitchen, as well as helpful hints for groups. ➤ Share other great Facebook pages of local venues with planners, e.g., the FB of Fandango’s. ➤ Have connections to all partners in Monterey on Monterey’s page. ➤ Consider posting a 30-second Monterey video with a destination overview on YouTube that planners can use. Monterey should model these on their leisure videos, which are well done. ➤ Monterey should have a plan to deal quickly with negative feedback on social sites. ➤ Use social media sites to sell the destination to attendees. |
| <i>Board Recommendations</i> | <p>Board Feedback: Meeting Planner Website</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Planners want to be able to quickly connect to various elements on the site, rather than flipping back and forth. ➤ Include a searchable database of restaurants and venues. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Make it easy for planners to find meeting room specs and other basic information ➤ Make the site easy to navigate. Provide all the segments on the page, so that planners can easily find what they are looking for. |
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Board Feedback: Selling versus Education

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| <p><i>Board Recommendations</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Planners want education. Build relationships—don't just sell to people. ➤ The CVB should provide accountability and be an impartial liaison, not just promote the interests of its membership. ➤ Building relationships should be front-of-mind for the CVB staff. ➤ Monterey has something unique in its <i>Strategic Client Services</i> program—inspiration and a team ready to implement that idea. This should be played up in all presentations. ➤ The idea of Monterey's CVB offering an enhanced role is extremely compelling to planners: most CVBs do not have good follow-through for customers. ➤ If Monterey wants to be ahead of the game, it should offer an app. More and more groups want an app; if Monterey offered this, planners could link attendees to this. A Monterey inspiration app is a good idea. An app should contain speaker information, conference information, scheduling, changes, and destination content. One CVB offers this as a comp service to help its clients market. ➤ Customize an app to a client's patterns, i.e. ➤ The <i>Explore Monterey</i> mobile site has a great deal of useful information, although it is not an app. ➤ Use testimonials that are more of a case study/story that feature a real planner who has put on an event in Monterey. These will get picked up by an online search. ➤ Monterey's e-newsletter should be more visible. ➤ Use content marketing to promote Monterey's <i>Inspiring Meetings</i> concept; this will establish Monterey as the expert in this area, and will draw planners to the destination because of this expertise. ➤ E-newsletters should be sent to planners. ➤ Board members were unanimously positive about making Monterey's website more of a social site with information. |
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Roundtables

Roundtable Report: Trends in the Meeting Industry • Board Members

Session Objective: To give findings from the roundtable groups on various industry issues and trends.

Board members reported on topics discussed in their roundtable sessions.

Board Feedback: Three Strongest Trends Influencing Meetings

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| <p><i>Board Recommendations</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Associations are seeing a decrease in the number of people attending in-person meetings; this is across the board—not just the annual meetings. The number of meetings is still the same but the number of attendees has fallen. ➤ From a corporate perspective, there is a rise in strategic meetings management, resulting in a consolidation/centralization of meetings from a spend and planning perspective. There is a resurgence of more experienced planners doing meetings, showing the value of a CMP and strategic planning. ➤ Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a hot topic, especially with the younger generation. It is becoming more prominent in the association world, however it cannot add to the bottom line. Make it easy for customers and don't make it more expensive; Monterey is already doing this and should promote this. |
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- There is a growing interest in green meetings, especially in California. This gets serious when it comes to measurements, e.g., waste, carbon offsets and charitable donations. Hotels are more helpful in this area now. Many corporations are using GMIC standards as a benchmark for their green standards, e.g., McDonalds and Wal-Mart. One member in the pharmaceutical sector said that being green is not as pressing as meeting pharma codes. Several members said not printing handouts/programs is a strong trend; this was driven much more by cost savings than being green. Having CSR and green programs in place could show that Monterey would offer better service and care more. One member said that operating in a sustainable manner is now an industry expectation. Carbon offset is probably requested more in California, and not everyone is aware of offset programs, e.g., the *Offset Project*.
- LEED certification is important; Board Members agreed that any renovation of the Conference Center should be to make it LEED certified. This will become even more important in the future and it makes more sense to accomplish it during a current renovation.
- Job retention is a challenge for many workers, with a focus on credentials and keeping pace with the world by evolving one's skill set. Associations are in a prime position to offer credentialing through continuing education.
- Budgets are down in the incentive arena.
- The federal government has de-incentivized people to attend meetings, e.g., the Sunshine Act discourages medical professionals.
- Technology infrastructure is a continuing challenge, e.g., bandwidth and attendees carrying more than one electronic device. Even though attendees want this to be free, planners know that there is a cost to the supplier. This will have to be more of a shared solution. Planners will have to incorporate these costs into their budgets.
- Safety, liability and risk management are significant changes for many meetings. The destination's image is important when it comes to safety/risk management.
- For F&B, planners are seeing more dietary restrictions, calling for more food labeling. There is a trend towards lighter lunches and strolling receptions instead of banquet dinners.
- Booking windows are becoming more of an issue for many groups, particularly government groups. The booking windows are getting shorter and shorter, because of adversity to risk and reluctance to commit. Associations are seeing shorter windows (2-4 years) to get better deals and not to get caught in a downturn. The current buyers market puts pressure on planners to find space, given shorter booking windows and higher expectations in the corporate world.

Board Feedback: Making Monterey Easier to do Business With/More Compelling

Board Recommendations

- Increase the value proposition of a CVB. Identify Monterey's CVB's value proposition, i.e., that it partners with customers on a personalized and customized basis, to provide a menu of services based on the group's needs. Showing that this CVB and its partners understand the group's program and attendees' interests and then offer options and suggestions. Offer an app that asks questions such as goals, size of group, event interests, spouse attending, where coming from, etc.; HGTV app does this well. This offers bespoke information. Use categories to determine what customer would like, i.e., "we think you'd like this," for hotels, activities, etc.
- Promote CSR by offering pro-active suggestions, e.g., a tie in with golf or other activities with a fundraiser; offer a 5K run to raise money; link a charity with a team-building activity such as a blind wine-tasting. Monterey's range of

offerings should be in menu form on the website. Many planners do not know what the options are so Monterey must tell them.

- Stop worrying about the lack of nonstop flights into Monterey and focus on what it can do, i.e., making it more relaxing to get here. Market how easy it is to get from San Francisco and San Jose; it is easy and economical. Distance from Chicago to downtown during rush hour is the same as getting from San Francisco to Monterey. Have information readily available for planners on how to easily get to Monterey hotels/venues. It is hard to find transportation companies that can handle group movements from the airport and resources are needed so that pre-vetted companies can be offered to clients. This is an invaluable service that would help planners sell Monterey to their decision makers.
- Update the Center to draw larger groups to Monterey.
- Deal with bandwidth issues. There is a need to educate suppliers and planners on asking the right questions to get what is needed. Show Monterey's competitive advantage by doing so. (Convention Industry Council's APEX standards committee has a useful website.) There will have to be a cost associated, so this should be factored into the budget.
- Promote more partnering with planners to grow the attendance. Monterey should create an app at low or no cost that could help with this.
- Collaborate with partners and offer multi-year/multi-property deals; this attracts more attendees and benefits groups, hotels and the destination.
- Deal with the perception that Monterey is expensive; show the savings.
- Show planners how they can stay within their F&B/catering minimums. Be creative with groups that want to go off the menu and have the chef create unique dishes. Offer lighter food and easier-to-eat food for strolling banquets.
- Take the politics out of who gets the credit for booking in a destination; planners don't care.
- The area is rich with so much diversity of attractions, e.g., cuisine, food, nature, etc. Choose three "hooks" to hang the advertising on, e.g., wine, food and activities. Pebble Beach should be part of the identity. Create programs for attendees with free time so they can take advantage of local activities, e.g., farmers markets in downtown Monterey. Provide passes for the trolley so attendees get out and see the area and feel restored.
- Offer free parking, especially given competitors' high parking rates.
- For renovations, plan infrastructure technology for the future—not today.
- Everything here is so close to each other; offer Zip Cars for people who want to explore on their own. Package some small tours for people.
- Expand the concept of *A Taste of Monterey* into a taste of all the experiences that Monterey has to offer.
- Testimonials are so important; if a local winery is rated in a publication/media, use this to showcase Monterey.
- Offer a fact sheet with bulleted points, e.g., *Ten Things to Do in Monterey* or how close everything is in Monterey. The CVB could give this to clients as well as to local hotels/venues; this would demonstrate a cohesive sense of marketing Monterey. This helps partners understand the value of the CVB.
- The CVB should take the opportunity to make presentations to boards and association committees. The CVB should also be thought of as a partner to planners/clients as well.

Strategic Client Services• Nancy Morrell Swanson

Session Objective: To delve into what services are most important to planners, and which of those services might influence the decision to choose Monterey

Board Feedback: Services Monterey that Would Alleviate Planner Challenges

Board Recommendations

- Lack of time is the biggest challenge. Anything Monterey can do to make the planner's job easier with pre-packaged services, the better.
- One value-add is to create a presentation that the planner can show to C-level decision makers. Face-to-face is so important; if not possible, have a Monterey CVB person introduce him/herself via Skype.
- Give structured cost comparisons (hotels, etc.) in a grid that can be presented; there will be different costs for different groups. This shows that the planner's choice of Monterey was strategic, rather than emotional.
- Response time is extremely important. The expectation is a quick response to e-mails and phone calls; if not, there should be an interim message regarding the information being gathered. The CVB could oversee response time accountability. Don't keep the planner waiting; be upfront about a lack of answer (e.g., the hotel or staff person is out of town.) Some planners said they do not want an email out-of-town response; another staff person should be covering that absent person. Planners want to know when they call their CVB contact, he/she will give them the exact right person, put them in the right hotel for the right group, and not push only CVB members. Planners want honesty and transparency.
- Strategic Client Services could be the CVB advocate for timely partner responses to leads.
- When meeting with the CVB, planners expect a depth of knowledge, e.g., lesser-known venues in the destination. Bring the right partners to the meeting.
- For corporate planners, offer a "Lunch and Learn." This could be geared towards either admins or C-level executives. Many people do not know what a CVB does or offers, often for free. Be an advocate and partner for the corporate planner by offering education rather than just a sales call, e.g., bring in hotel revenue management to explain rates; this helps corporate travel planners prepare.

Board Feedback: Services to Build Attendance

Board Recommendations

- Associations need sponsorship assistance from CVBs to identify opportunities for programs for both domestic and international audience. Some ideas are sponsorship of a beach party or sand castle building for European attendees.
- A list of local speakers would be helpful; this cuts down on transportation costs and showcases the talent living near/in Monterey.
- If the organization/association doesn't have a local group/membership, offer a list of resources/facilities that fit that group.
- The CVB could offer a list of ideas different from DMCs and save the planners an additional step or be a help to those planners who cannot afford a DMC.
- Help develop compelling arguments when planners get objections to meeting in Monterey. Give the planner talking points to overcome any resistance.
- Regarding transportation, offer a list of the savings that offset any additional transportation costs of getting from San Francisco. This helps the planner sell the destination. Don't ignore the elephant in the room; anticipate the transportation concern and have a proactive solution ready.

- Because the CVB is selling successful meetings, not just a destination, it should have a depth of knowledge that astounds the planner. To get this knowledge, study those successful meetings that have occurred in Monterey and find out what made those meetings successful. There is a lack of data collection of planner surveys to understand what makes a stellar meeting in Monterey. Make this data-driven, not just anecdotal. Ask planners directly why their Monterey meeting worked/didn't work compared to other meetings. Start thinking about "pearls you can pull from planners." Use this information to sell meetings to prospective clients; these are actual facts and results. Show the trends the CVB is seeing in Monterey, e.g., TED talk-style meetings might work better.
- Talk about technology issues; look at what innovative strategies groups are coming up with in hotels and centers.
- The relationship with the CVB should be for the life cycle of the meeting; many planners never see their salesperson after booking.
- A customized marketing video would put Monterey above the competition. Be proactive about offering marketing help and make it easily accessible.
- Offer social media help/links to planners. One possibility is for the CVB to provide a social media expert to work with the group's social media group during the meeting.
- Provide marketing help for next year's meeting in Monterey, e.g., a YouTube video for attendees and others. One member said this could be a general short "sound bite" video customized for different groups. Different stock videos could promote different aspects of Monterey.
- Promote Monterey at the previous years meeting. Most associations will provide time or a booth space if Monterey can provide a person and can cover their expenses.

General Session

The Perfect Site inspection • Nancy Morrell Swanson

Session Objective: To discuss planner expectations on a site inspection and ways to best show Monterey's unique qualities.

Board members gave feedback on how Monterey can offer site inspections that engage all parts of the region, and how to make site inspections stand out.

Board Feedback

Board Recommendations

- One Board member that attended the mini site inspection at this meeting Thursday morning said it was outstanding; model all site inspections on this tour. The site inspection should showcase the proximity of all the parts of the region and less-known venues.
- This tour coupled with the helicopter tour from the last meeting gave a thorough look at Monterey.
- This mini tour showed parts of Monterey that even locals were unaware of.
- This tour offered an overview of culture that should be in all site inspections.
- Flexibility is key, as the window for site inspections is short for most people.
- It depends on destination who the planner contacts first; larger conventions usually use CVB. Otherwise, it's about relationships; if the planner has good relationship with NSO, will use them.
- A value-add is that the CVB is a careful listener to what the customer needs.
- It is a confidence booster for clients to see that the CVB partners seamlessly with local DMCs and hotels.

- Have decision makers at the site inspection. It is frustrating to planners to be told no one can make a decision at the site inspection.
- A site inspection should be pro-active; Monterey does this by asking how they can help, rather than waiting for the client to ask.
- The access that the CVB has to private places is important; the feeling of exclusivity is a value-add.
- Gather information from clients before the site inspection so they only see what they need, e.g., just a few rooms at the hotel. If a pharmaceutical company can't use five-star hotels, don't show them those properties. Work with the hotels to keep the site inspection relevant to the client's needs.
- One member detailed a site inspection in which the hotel displayed the exact set-up of that group's uncommon specs. The screen had the group's logo displayed on it; this was impressive and sealed the deal.
- The CS person should be at the site visit to create a relationship from the beginning. This person can answer all questions about details.
- Know your planner's company culture/ethics; e.g., don't offer gifts to planners with conflict-of-interest clauses. The hotel could ask beforehand about appropriate amenities/gifts.
- The New Orleans CVB site inspection featured the hotel chef who created customized meals (based on previous questioning of planners) so that planners could experience the meals, instead of seeing a brochure or menus.
- One planner was impressed when her CVB person revisited the schedule after picking her up and asked about last-minute changes. This CVB knew what the planner wanted and allowed for adjustments the day of the site visit.
- Nashville Lowe's featured hotel staff/maintenance people spontaneously breaking into singing/dancing to highlight Nashville's unique music culture.

Wrap-Up/Honor Outgoing Members

- Ms. Blount thanked Board members for their participation and honored outgoing Board members for their contributions to Monterey. Outgoing Board members were: Chad Ammon, Michael Hancock, Grace Jan, Vicki Johnson, Carolyn Pund, Eve Schmitt and Pam Wilson. Hosts and sponsors for the meeting were also given thanks.