



What's New in Los Angeles

The expansive new **L.A. LIVE** entertainment campus is definitely a place to *play*—whether you're seeing Bruce Springsteen at Nokia or the Los Angeles Lakers at the STAPLES Center—but it's also a place to *stay*, whether that's for one night or one lifetime. In 2010, a 123-room Ritz-Carlton boutique hotel will open its doors in the complex alongside 224 Ritz-Carlton residences. The adjoining JW Marriott will feature 878 guest rooms.

The **California Science Center** in L.A.'s Exposition Park is in the midst of a 25-year expansion plan, including the ambitious new World of Ecology, which will open in spring 2010. Zoos and aquariums will fuse with interactive learning opportunities to double the size of the museum.

Breaking 300

Tracy Kwiker brought Southern California's most competitive, cutthroat players together for a three-day meeting that was more about problem solving than peacocking.

BY ANDREA GRIMES

IN MAY, A HUNDRED LAWYERS, REALTORS, DEVELOPERS AND OTHER LAND-HOCKING AND MANAGING GURUS ended a long day of talking about the state of Southern California real estate only to trod through downtown Los Angeles to go bowling in their pantsuits and Prada. L.A. is, after all, the land of cult bowling classic *The Big Lebowski*. Unfortunately, taking The Dude's laid-back attitude to, well, everything, isn't exactly the way to get ahead in a time when "Has the market bottomed-out yet?" is a question that gets asked every other day on every other (failing) newspaper's front page. The Dude

may abide, but attendees at the 38th annual Crocker Symposium on real estate, law and business couldn't afford to.

The Crocker Symposium is a meeting of the minds for anyone interested in getting or maintaining a slice of the Southern California real estate pie, and in a city that houses some of the world's richest, most famous folk, that can be a pretty pricy piece of pastry. Event planner Tracy Kwiker and her company, Pivotal Events, had the challenge of bringing the area's most competitive, cutthroat players together for a three-day meeting that, this year, was more about problem solving than





peacock in the name of the latest-greatest high-rise investment.

“Our theme was ‘building the new real estate paradigm,’” said Kwiker, who decided that the event should not only be about the future of real estate but physically embody that future as well. She booked the symposium at the Los Angeles Convention Center and its affiliated brand-new, bright-lights-big-city entertainment complex L.A. LIVE, placing Crocker delegates at the epicenter of new-era real estate in the city. Because, really, what kind of reputation is a symposium centered on a “new real estate paradigm” for Southern California going to have if it’s not held at one of the area’s most progressive mixed-use locations?

“The event itself was part of the learning experience,” said Kwiker, who looked at her Crocker delegates this way: “You’re collective leaders who are at this conference. You need to be engaged and involved in [the new paradigm.]”

To that end, the symposium—which began as a real estate lawyers’ meeting in 1972—is today a partnership between the University of California, Los Angeles’ Richard S. Ziman Center for Real Estate and the Los Angeles County Bar Association. Kwiker says she fought an “uphill battle” convincing her Crocker planning committee members to hold a high-profile real estate event in downtown Los Angeles, especially when SoCal residential and commercial real estate has taken some of the first and hardest hits in the struggling economy. But the US\$2.5 billion L.A.

LIVE project, which houses the STAPLES Center, the Nokia Theatre, the Grammy Museum and numerous nightspots and restaurants, represented something important to Kwiker—the hope for a brighter economic day.

“L.A. LIVE will play a major role in the health of our Los Angeles economy,” said Kwiker, who had her delegates party at L.A. LIVE’s posh Lucky Strike bowling lanes after spending the day in the adjacent Los Angeles Convention Center—which is also one of the largest U.S. “green” campuses, receiving its Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification from the U.S. Green Building Council in 2008. It’s all very forward thinking for a neighborhood and a real estate industry that’s seen better days. But don’t tell that to LA Inc., the Los Angeles CVB. A representative says there’s never been a better time to visit—or live in—downtown Los Angeles.

“It’s an exciting, lively place to be,” said Carol Martinez, LA Inc.’s vice president of communications, who moved into the neighborhood four years ago to raised eyebrows from friends when she told them she lived downtown. “People would be like, *oh, you do?*”

Today, she says, “everybody wants to live here.”

But even with L.A. LIVE, the CVB, the Los Angeles County Bar Association and the university on her side, Kwiker says her budget for the Crocker Symposium was slim and attendance potentially slimmer, thanks to the



Transportation Tips

Los Angeles International Airport—which sounds way more awesome when you call it LAX and pretend you’re Jack Bauer—is the world’s fifth-largest airport.

Don’t want to haul your luggage around during your last meeting day at the **L.A. Convention Center**? No problem—if you’re on a domestic flight, the center is TSA-certified to check your bag and hand you a boarding pass right there on the center’s campus. Sorry, long lines at LAX. You lose.

Southern Californians love their cars, but nobody’s getting by without some green on their conscience these days. **Increased light rail service and an expanded subway** connect ever farther-reaching parts of the city, whether you’re hopping on the red line to Pasadena or the blue line out to Long Beach. Affordable, fast bus service is also available from L.A.’s Union Station to LAX or, if you’re connecting, from LAX to Van Nuys Airport.

Fun Facts

It's not for nothing that the classic image of a fast, sexy, red convertible sweeping through the Hollywood Hills is so pervasive: Southern California features breathtaking landscapes from sea to summit. See some of Los Angeles' notable neighborhoods, from Beverly Hills to the Miracle Mile, by **renting wheels and motoring down Wilshire Boulevard to the Pacific Coast Highway.**

If off-roading is more your thing, get a Jeep and head down the **Angeles Crest Scenic Byway.** Mountains, forests and a picnic lunch make this an ideal day-trip for the event attendee who needs a break.

History buffs and aspiring archaeologists will want to head north out of L.A. to Old Mission Santa Barbara, **the only Franciscan mission that's remained in working order** since it was founded more than 200 years ago.



hard modern realities of ever-growing foreclosures and limited loan options.

“We have faced exceptional challenges in terms of getting the attendance we targeted,” Kwiker said, undaunted by the cloudy economic climate.

She decided to “stretch” the Crocker goal of 300 delegates to more than 400—and that she did, with a final count of 440 academics, lawyers, brokers, property owners and other real estate players in attendance. And she did it without taking out an inch of pricey advertising space. In fact, Kwiker says, getting all those folks there barely “cost us a dime.”

Her secret: targeting an interested, niche group of individuals who were already members of real estate and law-related professional associations and giving those associations high-profile placement in Crocker literature through a kind of promotional swap in what Kwiker called the event’s first-ever “allied associate program.”

Instead of disappearing in “logo soup,” Kwiker wrote magazine-style profiles for the affiliated associations in Crocker programs and created individualized press releases announcing the partnerships. Affiliated association members were given discounts on Crocker admission, which increased the value of membership dues for both the associations and the members—an important benefit in a time when everyone’s looking to get more for their money.

To that end, the Los Angeles Convention Center, which is equipped to play host to meetings for as few as 30 and as many as 70,000, is ideal for event planners looking to maximize resources and minimize cost, according to the campus chief operations officer, Phillip Hill.

“How can we use the current facilities and engineer options?” Hill asks when meeting professionals present him with economically contracted needs and budgets.

Hill says the convention center, which offers onsite catering and partnerships with surrounding businesses, has the resources to keep nearly everything in-house and high quality. Most importantly, Hill echoes Kwiker’s emphasis on the importance of downtown Los Angeles as an economic booster for the SoCal area.

“We’re an economic and employment engine for the region,” Hill said, citing a recent PricewaterhouseCoopers report that found the center helps maintain 12,000 jobs in the surrounding community.

Even in uncertain times, there are some things that even the slimmest budget can’t do without. Carving out a space for innovative minds to meet and greet is one of the reasons Kwiker says playing host to the Crocker Symposium was so important.

“This is quite crucial...these are the influencers of what will happen in real estate,” she said.

And while teleconferences and e-mails might save a little bit of money, Hall agrees, they don’t always do the trick.

“Sometimes a deal can only be made with face-to-face contact,” he said.

Old-fashioned business tactics meets green, progressive, multiuse facilities—these are things we can *definitely* abide. **one+**

ANDREA GRIMES resides in Austin, Texas, and has written for the *Austin Chronicle*, *Broadsheet*, the *Dallas Observer*, *Heartless Doll* and *Salon*.