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CSM of the Year: And the Award Goes to...Top convention services managers honored for exceptional work.

By Andrea Doyle

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Sure, there are the Oscars and the Emmys. But for members of the convention service industry, the awards to watch are the CSMs — the Convention Services Manager of the Year Awards. Sponsored by Successful Meetings, in conjunction with the Event Service Professionals Association (ESPA), the awards honor a top CSM at a convention center, CVB, and hotel each year. Here are this year's recipients.

Convention Center

Kimberly Kreml, CMP

Former Manager of Conference Service and Facility Marketing

University Center of Lake County

Grayslake, IL

The day before Kreml was to attend the ESPA 2014 Annual Conference and accept her CSM of the Year Award she learned that her position as the manager of conference service and facility marketing at the University Center of Lake County had been eliminated, after serving at the center for eight years.

Many meeting professionals who worked with Kreml speak highly of her. "Kim has the unique ability to truly do it all," says Wendy White, who was business development manager of Penmac Staffing, based in Four Seasons, MO. She points to Kreml's skill with planning and carrying out complex meetings for the Chicago area's largest companies.

Though no longer with the University Center, Kreml is optimistic about what the future holds. "I'm faced with an open slate at this time. Let's see where the wind takes me."

CVB

Zack Davis, CMP

Convention Services Manager

Louisville Convention & Visitors Bureau

Louisville, KY

For his work as a convention services manager with the Louisville Convention & Visitors Bureau, Zack Davis taps into his training with the U.S. Marine Corp.

"The military taught of which is that you get out of life what you put in to it. So in my current role I've just tried to do everything," says Davis. "As we all know in this business and in life, people skills and relationships are everything. We can all be taught certain skills, but learning to build relationships with a wide variety of people and personality types is the single most important thing we can do."

Many planners praise Davis as exceptional. Beth Hecquet, CMP, CMM, director of meetings and events for the National Association of Sports Commissions, based in Cincinnati, says the highlight of the 2013 NASC Sports Event Symposium was working with Davis. "His professionalism, thoughtful response to my requests, careful consideration of our attendees' needs, and dedication to the city of Louisville are second to none," she says.

Hotel

Gregory Halka

Catering/Convention Services Manager

Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa

Atlantic City, NJ

Gregory Halka was working as a truck driver in 2003 when he saw a billboard for Borgata (then under construction), which read: "Work someplace different." Ready for a new career, he soon took its advice and applied.

Halka landed a job as valet shift manager and worked his way up to front desk shift manager, then on to banquet supervisor and finally catering manager. "I have to say that working in those departments and building those lasting relationships has been a great resource for me as a CSM," says Halka.

His empathy for planners contributes to this success. "I realize if I was in [the planner's] position, I would want to have a CSM that puts my mind at ease...and basically just makes me feel like I was in good hands and did not have to worry."

Abby Kahn, global event manager of New York-based Numerix, an analytics provider, knows she has that CSM in Halka. "He ran errands for us after he was done with work, and came in the next day with everything we needed," she says. "He goes above and beyond what I would expect a CSM to do."

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