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NEW VENUES INCREASE COLUMBIA MEETING SPACE (Published in the August 13, 2005, Columbia Business Times) - 8/13/2005

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About 400 Words

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NEW VENUES INCREASE COLUMBIA MEETING SPACE

COLUMBIA, Mo. – With new meeting locations coming on line quickly, Columbia should see an increase in meeting space availability.

The Upper Crust held a grand opening last month for its new 2,700-square-foot Elm Street Ballroom, located downtown behind the bakery café at 904 E. Elm Street. Upper Crust co-owner Bill Buck said his facility could accommodate between 170 and 300 people.

"We did see a need for more meeting space in close proximity to the University and downtown, not so much in the perimeter of Columbia because you have all the hotels on the Interstate and now on 63," Buck said.

Two new Marriott hotels are slated to open soon near major thoroughfares: a Marriott Courtyard in August at the Grindstone Parkway exit on U.S. Highway 63 and a Residence Inn by Marriott on Clark Lane. The Courtyard will bring 6,000 square feet (DAVID, CVB CHECKED THIS FIGURE WITH THE MARRIOTT CORPORATE SALES OFFICE; THE FIGURE OF 8,000 IN THE OTHER STORY, GIVEN IN YOUR E-MAIL, IS INCORRECT.) of meeting space to the market, while the Residence Inn will house only one 25-person meeting room. In addition, a new Hilton Garden Inn is opening in November near the Bass Pro store with 3,000 square feet of meeting space.

The new locations and meeting rooms should affect the Columbia market. "Initially, there will probably be a little bit of a shakeup in the market because we're adding a lot of new rooms and really not as much meeting space as rooms," said Lorah Steiner, executive director of the Columbia Convention and Visitors Bureau. "It's certainly a win for the consumer because they have more options. Whenever new product comes into the market, that's a positive for the people who want to hold meetings and conventions in Columbia. For our hotels, it's a 'remain-to-be-seen' situation."

Concerned that about 500 new hotel rooms have appeared in recent months, Steiner said Columbia's hotels face tough competition from alternative locations that do not have to fill hotel rooms and do not pay the room tax. These alternative sites include such locations as social club

halls or retirement communities such as the Lenoir Woods Community Center, which hosts 1,000 weddings, conferences and business meetings a year, and Tiger Columns, which recently renovated its ballroom and will open a new ninth-floor meeting room in November.

For local businesses that don't need to purchase hotel rooms, an alternate location can be more economical. "Don't be afraid that our prices may be a little bit less than other people's; our service is exceptional," said Elliott Bentley, event coordinator for Lenoir Woods.

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SIDEBAR: COLUMBIA OFFERS MANY MEETING LOCATIONS

The Convention and Visitors Bureau lists four local hotels that offer on-site restaurants, at least 6,000 square feet of meeting space and banquet facilities: the Best Western Columbia Inn, the Days Inn Conference Center, the Holiday Inn Select Executive Center and the Ramada Inn Conference Center.

For large expositions or conventions, the major venues in town are the Columbia Expo Center and the Hearnes Center. Other hotels with at least 3,000 square feet of meeting space include the Quality Inn, with 3,500 square feet and the Stoney Creek Inn, with over 12,000 square feet. Several other Columbia hotels offer one or two meeting rooms, ranging in size from a board room to a banquet room:

Baymont Inn and Suites	8-person boardroom
Campus Inn	728 sq. ft. room
Comfort Suites	336 sq. ft. room
Drury Inn	8-person board room, 600 sq. ft. room
Econo Lodge	1,200 sq. ft. room
Hampton Inn	425 sq. ft. room
Hawthorn Suites	990 sq. ft. room
Holiday Inn Express	425 sq. ft. room
Motel 6 East	728 sq. ft. room
Regency Hotel Downtown	2,800 sq. ft. room
Wingate Inn	700 sq. ft. room

There are also several major alternate facilities that are not connected to hotels, including:

Alpine Parks and Gardens	3,200 sq. ft., 200 people
American Legion	225- to 300-person banquet room
Boone County Historical Society	20-person room, 70-person auditorium
Boone Tavern	2 private dining rooms, 60 or 180 people
Columbia Board of Realtors	70- to 130-person conference room
Columbia Business Center	5-person and 12-person rooms
Columbia College	several rooms and auditoriums, 25 to 500 people
Columbia Country Club	four rooms, 15 to 225 people
Columbia Elks Club	65-person room (new facility within six months to include 600-person, 70-person rooms)
Columbia Jaycees	2,700 to 3,000 sq. ft., 100 people
Cosmo Community Center	6,500 sq. ft., 350 people
Country Club of Missouri	four rooms, 18 to 200 people
Golden Corral	2 rooms, 35 to 65 people
Kemper Arena	5,000 sq. ft., 600 people
Knights of Columbus	500 to 600 people
Lenoir Community Center	five rooms, 30 to 400 people
Optimist Club-Sunrise	rooms for 20 to 200 people
Osaka	130 people

	The Pasta Factory	50 people
	Peachtree Conference Center	four rooms, 300 to 600 people
	Scottish Rite Valley of Columbia	100 people
	Stephens College	8 rooms, 20 to 300 people
	Tiger Columns	175-person ballroom, 50-person Mizzou
room	Tiger Shrine Club	150 people
	University of Missouri-Columbia	several facilities, small and large rooms

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