Recreation Experience Community Network

2026 NATIONAL CONFERENCE

November 14-17, 2026

Eagle Ridge Resort & Spa

Galena, Illinois









recnet®
Recreation Experience Community Network

2026 REC NET CONFERENCE
ENGAGE • COLLABORATE • ELEVATE RECREATION

www.rec-network.com info@rec-network.org

Message From Our Association President:

Gary Bleil



Welcome to the 45th REC Net National Conference!

Dear REC Net Members,

Welcome to Galena and to the 45th REC Net National Conference! Whether this is your first REC Net conference or you've been part of our community for many years, I'm truly glad you're here.

For more than four decades, REC Net has brought together recreation professionals, educators, students, and industry partners who share a passion for creating meaningful experiences for others. Along the way, this organization has done far more than provide professional development—it has created friendships, opened doors to new opportunities, inspired careers, and strengthened the recreation profession in countless ways.

The connections we make through REC Net have a lasting impact. They influence how we lead, how we serve our communities, and how we grow as professionals and as people. I know many of us can point to relationships formed through REC Net that have shaped our careers and enriched our lives.

This year's theme – **Engage. Collaborate. Elevate.** – captures exactly what makes REC Net special. I encourage you to introduce yourself to someone new, share your ideas, ask questions, and take advantage of every opportunity to connect. Some of the most valuable conversations happen between sessions, over meals, and during our social events.

As your Board of Directors, we are committed to making REC Net a welcoming, inclusive, and engaging organization for every member. Please stop us in the hallway, introduce yourself, share your ideas, or simply say hello. We'd love to get to know you and hear how REC Net can continue to support you and your career.

Thank you for being part of this incredible community and for investing in both your own professional growth and the future of our profession. I hope you leave Galena with new ideas, new friendships, renewed energy, and a stronger connection to the REC Net family.

Welcome, and enjoy the conference!

Kind regards,

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REC NET BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Annie Pilek
Past President



Gary Bleil
President



Andrew Mintun
President Elect



Belynda Tharpe
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Stephanie Kriever
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Justin Leon
Director of Member Engagement



Ashley Miller
Director of Professional Recruitment



Kevin Noonan
Director of Vendor Recruitment

CONFERENCE ESSENTIALS

Registration

Saturday: 2:00–6:00 pm – Main Lodge Lobby

Galena Rooms Foyer (Sunday–Tuesday)
Sunday: 8:00 am–5:00 pm
Monday: 8:30 am–4:00 pm
Tuesday: 9:00 am–12:30 pm

Good to Know

Badges – Wear yours to all conference activities
Refreshments – Cash only at socials and Gala
ATM – Main Lodge Lobby and Country Store
Resort Shuttle – call front desk 815-777-5000

What we Wear When

Saturday:
Daytime – Casual
Evening – Property Pride / College Colors

Sunday:
Daytime – Business Casual
Evening – Go casual... *or Heroes & Villains costumes are highly encouraged!*

Monday:
Daytime – Business Casual
Evening – Formal

Tuesday:
Daytime – Business Casual

Included Meals

Three meals are included in the full conference registration:

Sunday – Awards Lunch Buffet
Monday – Lunch Buffet and Andy Holdnak Awards Gala Dinner

See schedule for meal times and locations.

Member Awards

Sunday – Awards Lunch:
- Student Scholarship Winners
- Outstanding Student Award
- Outstanding Professor Award
- Outstanding Vendor Award
- Newcomer Award
- University Excellence in Programming Award

Monday – Andy Holdnak Awards Gala:
- Excellence in Programming Award
- Making the Difference Award
- Debbie Regnone Service Award
- Howard Uibel Lifetime Achievement Award
- REC Net Fellowship Award

Find Your People

Your badge color helps everyone know who's who. Say hello and make a connection!

Professional
Vendor
Student
Educator

DINING & EXPLORING GALENA

Eagle Ridge Resort – Dining and Menus

Woodlands Restaurant – in Main Lodge
Upscale dining with seasonal cuisine, thoughtfully prepared entrées, and views of Lake Galena.
Breakfast: 7–11 AM | Dinner: 5–9 PM

Woodlands Restaurant

Woodlands Lounge – in Main Lodge
Casual dining, featuring a full bar and a varied menu of sandwiches, fresh salads, and entrées.
Daily: 11 AM–10 PM

Woodlands Lounge

Highlands Restaurant – near General Golf Course
Relaxed restaurant and lounge featuring American fare, cocktails, and panoramic golf course views.
Thursday–Sunday: 11 AM–8 PM

Highlands Restaurant

The Country Store

Need coffee, a quick bite, or a few groceries for your villa? The Eagle Ridge Country Store offers Starbucks coffee, fresh deli sandwiches, baked goods, snacks, beverages, groceries, and everyday essentials!

109 Eagle Ridge Drive

Store Hours
Daily: 8 AM–8 PM

Deli Hours
Sun–Thu: Until 3 PM
Fri–Sat: Until 6 PM

Complimentary Resort Shuttle

Leave the driving to Eagle Ridge! Complimentary shuttle service is available around The Galena Territory, including resort accommodations and the Main Lodge, as well as transportation to downtown Galena for shopping and dining.

Call the front desk at **815-777-5000** for shuttle information and arrangements.



Historic Downtown Galena

Just a short trip from Eagle Ridge, Galena's charming Main Street is filled with historic storefronts, one-of-a-kind shops, cozy cafés, and great places to eat.
Make time to wander – half the fun is seeing what you find!

DINNER FAVORITES

- **Campeche Mexican** – Flavorful Mexican favorites in a casual, colorful setting.
- **Fritz & Frites** – A cozy French–German bistro.
- **Vinny Vanucchi's Little Italy** – Hearty Italian dining in a fun, old-world atmosphere.
- **Galena Taphouse** – Craft beers and creative dishes with a relaxed downtown vibe.

COFFEE & SWEET TREATS

- **The Wired Rabbit** – A whimsical coffeehouse with specialty drinks and pastries.
- **Galena Roasters** – Locally roasted coffee, espresso drinks, and quick bites.
- **Bread & Vine** – A bakery and café offering breads, pastries, and desserts.
- **La Michoacana** – Mexican ice cream and desserts, including paletas (fruit popsicles) and tasty treats.

YOUR REC NET EXPERIENCE

Make The Most of Every Session

Move on up! Fill those front rows and give our speakers an engaged audience.

Silence your phone. Step outside for calls and conversations.

Stretch yourself. Attend a session outside your usual interests. Find something unexpected!

Bring the energy! Laugh, applaud, participate, and cheer each other on. These are your people!

Not your vibe? It's okay to switch sessions. Just slip out quietly and respectfully.

Steal this idea! Leave each session with at least one idea you can use or share.

Evaluate, evaluate, evaluate! Every good recreation programmer knows evaluation matters.
Help us practice what we preach – evaluate every session!

First REC Net Conference?

Need a hand? Stop by the Registration Table and ask Peggy or any REC Net board member.

Name badge check! Adjust that lanyard length so people can actually read your name.

Don't wait for an invitation. Join a table, introduce yourself, and jump into conversations.

Mix it up. Sit with someone new at meals and socials.

Keep the conversation going! Introduce yourself to a presenter after their session.

Meet every vendor! You never know where you'll work next summer – or five years from now!

Shuttle Etiquette 101: Called for a shuttle and then got a ride or changed your mind? Please be sure to call back and cancel! Otherwise, the shuttle driver may come looking for you.

REC Net Socials

Come for the Ideas. Stay for the FUN!

SATURDAY EVENING

Opening Reception

Don't miss this kickoff! Reconnect with old friends, make new ones, and enjoy an evening of laughs and surprises with The Cosmic Romantics. The fun starts here!

SUNDAY EVENING

President's Social

Heroes & Villains take over! Dress as your favorite hero or villain for a themed evening of music, laughter, and fun with Adam Bohanan & Jackie Verna.

MONDAY

Andy Holdnak Awards Gala

Let's celebrate! Enjoy an elegant gala dinner, honor our outstanding members, join the excitement of the live auction, and rock out with RAGS AND RICHES!

See the daily schedule for times, locations, and more details.

Vendor Showcase

Our vendors are more than exhibitors – they're an important part of the REC Net community! Their involvement and support help make this conference possible. Be sure to take time to connect with them, discover what they bring to our industry, and show your appreciation for their partnership!

Opening Day Vendors

Saturday, 2:00–6:00 PM

MAIN LODGE LOBBY

Two of our vendors will be joining us only on Saturday! Meet them alongside the REC Net Registration Table when you check in and give them a warm welcome.

Vendor Spotlight

Sunday, Following Awards Luncheon

EAGLE BALLROOM 2 & 3

Meet the people behind the businesses! Right after the awards, our vendors will take the stage for brief introductions and a chance to share how they can help take your recreation programs and experiences to the next level!

Main Vendor Showcase

Monday, 9:00 AM–4:00 PM

GALENA ROOMS FOYER

Between sessions, stop by to chat with our vendors, ask questions, and explore the products and services they have to offer!

Vendor Mixer

Monday, 5:00–6:00 PM

EAGLE BALLROOM FOYER

Why wait until the gala to start the fun? Come early, grab a drink, and mingle with our vendors and fellow attendees before the evening's big celebration!

Vendor setup is 8:00 AM-12:00 PM on Sunday

Job Fair

Sunday, 3:00–5:00 PM **EAGLE BALLROOM 1**

Launch your career! Meet employers from resorts, private clubs, and recreation organizations across the country. Explore internships, seasonal positions, and career opportunities!

MEET THE EMPLOYERS

Carnival Cruise Line – Carnival Entertainment

Ocean Reef Club
Evermore Resort
Mohonk Mountain House
Omni Amelia Island Resort
Chatham Bars Inn
The Quechee Club
Salamander Resort and Spa
Chappaquiddick Beach Club

Job Fair setup is 8:00 AM-12:00 PM on Sunday

Job Fair Preview!

Sunday, 2:20–2:45 PM

EAGLE BALLROOM 2 & 3

Get a sneak peek at the incredible properties and career opportunities represented at our Job Fair! Hear directly from participating employers about their organizations and what makes them unique before meeting them at the Job Fair.

WAYS & MEANS

REC Net is a nonprofit professional association led by an all-volunteer Board of Directors. Our mission is to promote professional development, creative resources, and networking for professionals, students, educators, vendors, and others dedicated to the recreation industry. Membership dues and fundraising help sustain our association and the opportunities we provide.

Lucky Logo prizes and live auction packages are generously donated by REC Net members and member properties. Thank you for supporting the association that supports you!

New to our conference fundraising traditions?

Here's how to join the fun!

HEADS OR TAILS



Purchase necklaces to play. Choose heads or tails each round by placing your hands on your head or your "tail". You stay in the game when your guess is correct.

Last one standing wins!

$5 for 5 | $10 for 15 | $20 for 25

Cash preferred; cards accepted.

LUCKY LOGO



Purchase raffle tickets, browse the donated prizes, and place your tickets in the containers for the prizes you'd like to win.

Bring cash to the President's Social!
Cash preferred; cards accepted.

LIVE AUCTION



Bid on vacation packages and experiences during Monday's Andy Holdnak Awards Gala. The highest bidder for each package wins!

Special packages reserved for students only to bid on!

GET YOUR REC NET SWAG!

Show your REC Net pride with new apparel and accessories, including polos, hoodies, hats, and more! And don't miss the official **2026 Conference T-shirt** – just $18.99!

Shop online through Bleu Bear Designs or check out the select merchandise available at the conference registration table.

SCAN TO SHOP!



SATURDAY NOVEMBER 14, 2026

Dress Code: Daytime – *Casual*; Evening – *Property Pride or College Colors*

2:00 pm – 6:00 pm

Conference Registration Table is Open

Location: Main Lodge Lobby

The conference is underway! Haven't checked in yet? Stop by for your badge and conference materials, ask a question, or just say hello. You'll find our Registration Table near the resort's front desk today, and we're happy to help!

3:00 pm – 5:00 pm

Chair Massages

Location: Stonedrift Spa

Traveling can take a toll! Take a few minutes to relax, recharge, and enjoy a complimentary chair massage before the conference festivities get underway. A little relaxation is a great way to start your REC Net experience!

3:00 pm, 4:00 pm & 5:00 pm

Scenic Hayrides at Eagle Ridge!

Departs from: Stonedrift Spa

It doesn't get much more Midwestern than this! Climb aboard for a classic fall hayride and enjoy the rolling hills, beautiful countryside, and fresh autumn air. Share some laughs, build camaraderie, and make a few new REC Net memories along the way!

5:00 pm – 7:00 pm

Dinner on Your Own / REC Net Meet-Up

Location: Woodlands Lounge

Head over to the Main Lodge and grab an appetizer or dinner while connecting with fellow REC Net attendees. Come on your own or bring a friend, pull up a chair, meet someone new, and catch up with familiar faces.

For more dining options, restaurant hours, and QR codes to menus, check out the Eagle Ridge dining guide on page 4!

7:30 pm – 9:00 pm

Opening Reception

Location: Galena Rooms

Let's get REC Net 2026 started! Join REC Net President Gary Bleil and the REC Net Board as we officially kick off the conference. Reconnect with old friends, meet new faces, and settle in for a great few days of learning, networking, and fun at Eagle Ridge.

9:00 pm

Entertainment: The Cosmic Romantics

Location: Galena Rooms

This vaudeville-inspired duo blends mentalism, illusion, and comedy. Expect audience participation, surprises, and a fun finish to the first night of REC Net 2026!

YOUR REC NET. YOUR VOICE. YOUR VOTE.

Meet the candidates running for five positions on the REC Net Board of Directors. Your vote helps shape the future of our association!

VOTING IS OPEN NOW!

Get to know the candidates during the conference and cast your ballot before the deadline.

Voting closes Monday, November 16, at 12:15 p.m. Central Time.

President-Elect
- Brian Bevacqua – Pendry Park City
- Shannon Hodges – TradeWinds Resort

Secretary
- Dr. Phileshia Dombroski – Winona State University

Director of Vendor Recruitment
- Joseph O'Reilly – Mohonk Mountain House

Director of Marketing & Communication
- Ashley Miller – Marriott's Crystal Shores

Director of Professional Recruitment
- Abby Shackett – Omni Hilton Head Oceanfront Resort
- Alicia Sides – Wythe County Parks and Recreation

SCAN TO VOTE!

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 15, 2026

Dress Code: Daytime – *Business Casual;* Evening – *Themed Attire:* **HEROES & VILLAINS!**

8:00 am – 5:00 pm

Conference Registration Table is Open

Location: Galena Rooms Foyer

Still need to check in? Have a question? Stop by for conference information, assistance, or just to say hello. We're here to help you make the most of your REC Net experience!

8:00 am – 12:00 pm

Vendor Setup

Location: Galena Rooms Foyer

9:00 am – 9:45 am

Student Spotlight: Internships and What They Can Do for You!

Presenter: Iliana Batista

Location: Galena 1–2

What does it take to stand out in luxury hospitality? Get an inside look at a summer internship experience as a Spa Consultant at The Breakers Palm Beach through the L.E.A.D. Program. Hear about the responsibilities, challenges, and skills gained along the way, plus practical advice for building professional connections, applying classroom knowledge in the workplace, and making the most of an internship.

Excellence in Programming Presentations for Ongoing and Large-Scale Events

Facilitated by: Annie Pilek

Location: Galena 3

Come listen to fellow members showcase the programs they're most proud of – creative, impactful, and inspiring examples of excellence in action. Vote for your favorite, and join us at Monday evening's Awards Gala when the Excellence in Programming Award winners are announced!

There's No Way to Practice This

Producing Group Events

Presenter: Joey O'Reilly

Location: Galena 4–5

Some events can't be practiced, so how do we make sure it goes right the first time? Custom teambuilding, larger groups, new ideas, and last-minute pivots all present their own challenges. Join us as we talk through case examples and practical tips for successful teambuilding events when you only get one shot.

10:00 am – 10:45 am

Beyond the Long Weekend: How to Transform Holidays into Unforgettable Experiences

Presenter: Melissa Skarbek

Location: Galena 1–2

Holidays offer a great opportunity to bring families together and create memorable resort experiences. But how do you turn a typical holiday weekend into something guests can't wait to experience again? Explore creative approaches to seasonal programming, fresh twists on traditional activities, and ways to make holiday weekends stand out long after the decorations come down.

Special Thanks to Our Session Sponsor

CREATIVE Recommendations, LLC

Turning Attention Into Attendance

Use Social Media to Build Community, Credibility & Business

Presenter: Garrett Horrell

Location: Galena 3

This high-energy, practical session is designed to show recreation and event professionals how to turn social media from a digital bulletin board into a true engagement engine. Through real-world case studies, branding examples, and actionable strategies, attendees will learn how to create content that builds trust, drives attendance, grows revenue, and fosters authentic community – without needing a massive budget or full marketing team.

Dive Deeper: Innovative Aquatics Programming

Presenter: Alexandra Khodan

Location: Galena 4–5

Aquatics Programming in Parks and Recreation creates opportunities for recreation, education, fitness, and life-saving skill development for people of all ages. From swim lessons and lifeguard training to special events and water fitness, aquatics programs play a critical role in promoting safety, inclusion, and community engagement. Behind every successful operation is a dedicated team committed to creating safe, memorable, and impactful experiences.

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 15, 2026

Dress Code: Daytime – *Business Casual;* Evening – *Themed Attire:* **HEROES & VILLAINS!**

11:00 am – 11:45 am

Beyond the Hunt: Creative Scavenger Hunts for Recreation and Hospitality

Presenter: Lisa Jennings

Location: Galena 1–2

When you hear the words "scavenger hunt," a picture comes to mind, from a simple list of items to find to a high-tech hunt using GPS, AI, and media. Which is right for you and your objectives? Lisa Jennings, Queen of Clever for Masters of the Hunt and Chief Experience Officer for Wildly Different, will cover the types of hunts you can offer and their many uses. Beyond programming, hunts can serve as orientation tours for employees and guests, marketing promotions, team building activities, and more. Lisa will wrap with tips and tricks to create the perfect scavenger hunt to meet your goals, whether that's increased revenue, a boutique guest experience, or getting the word out about your offerings.

Programming with Purpose for Youth & Families

Presenter: Leah Hall

Location: Galena 3

From nonprofit recreation to luxury community programming, this session explores the journey of building meaningful youth and family experiences in different recreational settings. Learn how to design adaptable programs, navigate logistics, and use child development principles to meet the needs of various age groups and populations. Whether you're a student or seasoned professional, you'll gain practical insights that can be applied across a wide range of recreation environments

The Power of Play: Why Fun Is Serious Business

Presenter: Miranda Allison

Location: Galena 4–5

Play might look like the fun part of the guest experience, but there's serious psychology behind what makes it meaningful. Experience Designer Miranda Allison explores how our emotional needs shape participation, why guests connect with experiences in different ways, and how taking part can turn a simple moment into something worth remembering. Through relatable stories, psychology, and practical frameworks, attendees will discover new ways to invite participation, create connection, and design experiences guests genuinely want to be part of.

Early Afternoon Program

Location: Eagle Ballroom 1–2

12:00 pm – 2:45 pm



KEYNOTE SPEAKER: Hoan Do

Unshakable Resilience

Get ready for an unforgettable keynote! American Ninja Warrior competitor and nationally recognized speaker Hoan Do knows what it takes to perform under pressure, push through challenges, and keep moving forward when things get tough. With his signature energy, humor, and powerful storytelling, Hoan will bring Unshakable Resilience to life with practical strategies attendees can use in their teams, careers, and everyday lives. Come ready to be energized, challenged, and inspired!



Awards Lunch Buffet

We do amazing work, and we need to tell our stories! Join us to celebrate the people and programs demonstrating the power of recreation, tourism, and hospitality to connect communities and create meaningful experiences. Enjoy lunch, celebrate this year's honorees, and leave proud of the work we do and the difference we make.

Vendor Spotlight

Great conferences are built with great partners!
Meet the businesses that help make REC Net possible and hear what they bring to our profession. You may just discover a new product, service, resource, or connection that can make a difference in your work.

Employer Profiles: Job Fair Preview

Get to know the employers before the Job Fair begins! Each participating organization will take the spotlight for a quick introduction to who they are, what they do, and the internships, seasonal positions, and career opportunities they offer. Discover who's hiring, what opportunities might be right for you, and who you'll want to connect with when the Job Fair opens.

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 15, 2026

Dress Code: Daytime – *Business Casual;* Evening – *Themed Attire:* ***HEROES & VILLAINS!***

3:00 pm – 3:45 pm

Vendor Networking
Location: Woodlands Lounge

A time just for our vendors to connect with fellow businesses, exchange ideas, share experiences, and explore opportunities for collaboration. Enjoy informal conversation and make some new connections!

Bird's Eye View – What Senior Leaders See
Moderator: Andrew Mintun
Panelists: Gary Bleil, Steve Geisz, Alicia Sides, and Belynda Tharpe
Location: Galena 1–2

Take a bird's-eye view of leadership with seasoned professionals who have earned their wings! Hear how recreation and outdoor programs fit into the bigger organizational picture, from where to invest (and where to cut) to measuring success beyond revenue. Discover how leaders bridge the gap between the C-suite and front line, communicate recreation's value to ownership and boards, and develop future leaders. Bring your questions and hear candid insights from professionals who have weathered a few storms and learned a thing or two along the way!

3:00 pm – 5:00 pm

Job & Career Fair
Location: Eagle Ballroom 1

This is where REC Net connections turn into opportunities! Meet employers looking for interns, seasonal staff, and future professionals. Explore career possibilities, ask questions, share your résumé, and make connections with people who could become your next supervisor, mentor, or employer. Your next opportunity could start right here.

3:00 pm – 6:00 pm

Chair Massages
Location: Stonedrift Spa

Need a break from networking? Stop by Stonedrift Spa for a complimentary chair massage! Whether you're easing those pre-Job Fair jitters, unwinding after, or treating yourself to a little downtime, take a few minutes to relax and recharge.

Ice Cream Sampling
Location: The Country Store

We are in the Midwest – so a little November chill isn't going to stop us from enjoying a frozen treat! Swing by the Eagle Ridge Country Store for some complimentary samples. Who says ice cream has to be a summer thing?

4:00 pm – 4:45 pm

Managing Risk IRL – No Cap, Real Talk
Moderator: Andrew Mintun
Panelists: Brian Bevacqua, Dr. Joel Blanco, and Alex Khodan
Location: Galena 1–2

When things don't go according to plan, how do we respond? Join a panel of experienced operators for candid conversation about managing real world risks. From adventurous guest experiences and unexpected emergencies to near misses and lessons learned, hear how professionals balance safety, liability, and guest expectations. Explore how they prepare their teams, evaluate outside providers, and create a culture where staff feel comfortable speaking up about potential risks. Leave with practical ideas for strengthening incident reporting, vendor oversight, and staff training, plus a clearer understanding of risks recreation professionals face today.

5:00 pm – 7:00 pm

Dinner on Your Own
Stay on property or head into Galena to explore the scene. Grab dinner with old friends, invite someone new to join you, or enjoy some downtime before the evening festivities. See page 4 for dining suggestions.

7:30 pm – 10:00 pm

President's Social: *HEROES & VILLAINS!*
Location: Eagle Ballroom 1–2
Entertainment: Majesric Circus, Jackie Verna & Adam Bohanan, with MD on sax

Heroes, villains, and everything in between… it's time for one of REC Net's favorite conference traditions – everyone goes to **THE PRESIDENT'S SOCIAL!** Come dressed as an iconic hero, memorable villain, or put your own creative spin on the theme. After a full day of learning, we'll have an unforgettable night as Houla Entertainment brings high energy, plenty of excitement, and incredible music!

And the fun doesn't stop there! Majestic Circus is bringing interactive games that are taking cruise ships around the world by storm! You won't just be watching – you'll become part of the game! Expect friendly competition, plenty of laughs, and chances to win prizes. Come ready to play!

Want to win some prizes? *Well, you gotta play to win, right?* Bring your cash and grab your tickets tonight for our **LEGENDARY LUCKY LOGO!** We've got some fantastic prizes donated by REC Net members, and the more tickets you buy, the better your chances of winning! Best of all, every dollar raised supports REC Net and helps us continue creating memorable opportunities for professionals and the next generation of industry leaders.

Cash is king tonight! Refreshments will be available and the bar is keeping it old school – bring those dolla dolla bills!

MONDAY NOVEMBER 16, 2026

Dress Code: Daytime – *Business Casual;* Evening – *Formal*

8:00 am – 8:45 am

Annual Membership Meeting

Location: Galena 1–2

Your voice matters in shaping the future of REC Net! As a member-driven nonprofit professional association, REC Net is guided by a volunteer Board of Directors dedicated to serving its members. Join us for our Annual Membership Meeting to hear what we've accomplished, what's on the horizon, and how you can help shape REC Net's future. Bring your ideas, questions, and enthusiasm!

8:30 am – 4:00 pm

Conference Registration Table is Open

Location: Galena Rooms Foyer

Another great day of REC Net awaits! Stop by the Registration Table with any questions – we're here to help keep your conference experience running smoothly!

9:00 am – 9:45 am

MIDNOTE SPEAKER:

Sally Evans

Speaking in Stories: Leadership Reimagined Through Children's Books

Location: Eagle Ballroom 2–3

Sally M. Evans, author of the Once Upon A Leader® series, uses the children's stories we grew up on to teach leadership that sticks. Through a talking box of crayons, an empty flowerpot, and stories from cruise ships and resorts, she introduces the Once Upon A Leader® Compass: four directions for leading through change. Attendees will apply it to a real challenge before they leave the room and walk out with the 60-Second Compass, a quick check for every decision.

10:00 am – 10:45 am

Energize, Engage & Inspire Your Team

Presenter: Jessie Decker

Location: Galena 1–2

Turn your pre-shift meetings into powerful moments that energize, engage, and inspire your team. This interactive session is packed with creative activities, service-focused games, and confidence-building exercises designed to strengthen guest interactions and elevate the employee experience. Attendees will leave with practical ideas to personalize guest service, boost team morale, and create memorable pre-shift routines that drive exceptional hospitality. Get ready to participate, laugh, learn, and take home tools you can implement immediately.

From Intern to Leader – Turning Experience into Opportunity

Presenter: Cassie Sessler

Location: Galena 3

How do you turn an internship into a successful career? Join Cassie, a recent Florida State graduate, as she shares her journey from intern to young professional. Students will gain practical advice for transitioning from classroom to career, while professionals will hear a fresh perspective on supporting the next generation of recreation leaders.

After the Emergency: Investigating the Incident, Establishing the Facts, and Communicating with Confidence

Presenter: Dr. Joel Blanco

Location: Galena 4–5

The emergency may be over, but the work is far from finished. What happens next can have a lasting impact on your organization, your staff, and your community. This highly interactive session will guide you through the critical steps of post-emergency response, including interviewing witnesses, gathering and documenting evidence, developing clear and accurate fact sheets, and preparing effective media talking points. Through practical exercises and realistic scenarios, participants will have the opportunity to put these skills into action and build confidence in managing the aftermath of an emergency.

11:00 am – 11:45 am

Market Pop-Ups That Work

Presenter: Jean Baer

Location: Galena 1–2

From application to profitability, learn the process of setting up a market that will work simultaneously for three groups: the vendors, the host site, and the customers. The goal isn't to create an event where vendors simply show up and sell – it's to create an environment where customers stay, vendors return, and the host wants to do it again!

MONDAY NOVEMBER 16, 2026

Dress Code: Daytime – *Business Casual;* Evening – *Formal*

11:00 am – 11:45 am *(cont'd)*

Behind the Curtain with Entertainment
Moderator: Lee Mayer, Houla Entertainment
Location: Galena 4–5

What does it take to bring great entertainment to life? Lee Mayer, co-owner of Houla Entertainment, takes you behind the scenes of memorable guest experiences. From booking performers to coordinating with resort teams, discover what recreation and hospitality professionals should know about working with entertainers. Bring your questions and hear stories from the other side of the spotlight!

12:00 pm – 1:00 pm

ENDNOTE SPEAKER:
Sarah Beth Reno
Charting Your Course

Location: Eagle Ballroom 2–3

Leadership, resilience, and the ability to embrace opportunity can shape a career in unexpected ways. Join Sarah Beth Reno, Chief Operations Officer of Carnival Cruise Line, for an inspiring Endnote exploring leadership and professional growth in the recreation and hospitality industries. Drawing on decades of experience, from working aboard cruise ships to leading operations across a global fleet, Sarah brings a unique perspective on navigating challenges, adapting to change, and leading with confidence. Gain fresh inspiration, valuable insights, and a renewed perspective on the opportunities ahead!

1:00 pm – 2:00 pm

Lunch Buffet
Location: Eagle Ballroom 2–3

Gather for good food, great company, and even better connections! Catch up with familiar faces, join a table of people you haven't met yet, and build your network.

2:00 pm – 3:00 pm

Excellence in Programming Presentations for Small- and Medium-Scale Events
Facilitated by: Annie Pilek
Location: Galena 4–5

Come listen to fellow members showcase the programs they're most proud of – creative, impactful, and inspiring examples of excellence in action. Vote for your favorite, and join us at Monday evening's Awards Gala when the winners of the Excellence in Programming Awards are announced!

2:15 pm – 3:00 pm

From Spooky to Spectacular – Turning Seasonal Events into Lasting Traditions
Presenter: Arica Haro
Location: Galena 1–2

Discover how to turn imaginative ideas into engaging events that keep guests coming back, build community connections, and create lasting traditions. Arica will share practical DIY tips, creative shortcuts, and behind-the-scenes tricks for producing a spectacular show without a spectacular budget.

The Process – Classroom to Operation
Panelists: Leah Hall, Shane Schwarzenbach, and Dr. Jieun Song
Location: Galena 3

Explore where classroom learning meets the realities of the recreation industry. Join a student, an educator, and an industry professional for a candid conversation. Hear what employers expect, what students experience, and where gaps exist. Discover practical ways to improve internships, strengthen school-industry partnerships, and better prepare students for successful careers.

3:15 pm – 4:00 pm

Remembering to Connect: Public Speaking in the Tour World
Presenter: River Repinski
Location: Galena 1–2

What makes a great story stick with an audience long after the speaker has finished? Captain River Repinski knows a thing or two about keeping people entertained. As a Mississippi River tour boat captain and public speaking coach, he knows the power of storytelling to connect with audiences and create memorable experiences. Join River for this session where he'll guide you through advanced speaking techniques and strategies that blend humor and stories to keep your audience feeling involved and engaged.

MONDAY NOVEMBER 16, 2026

Dress Code: Daytime – *Business Casual;* Evening – *Formal*

3:15 pm – 4:00 pm *(cont'd)*

Student Spotlight: Campus to Clubhouse

Presenter: Belinda Bova
Location: Galena 4–5

From college classrooms to resort recreation, Belinda shares her experiences as a Recreation Coordinator Intern at Ocean Reef Club in Florida. Hear about her work, lessons learned, and perspective on the recreation industry.

3:00 pm & 4:00 pm

Guided Nature Hike

Departs from: Stonedrift Spa

Enjoy some fresh air and beautiful scenery! Join us for an easy-paced guided hike through the natural surroundings of Eagle Ridge Resort & Spa. Stretch your legs, take in the sights, and enjoy a refreshing break outdoors with fellow REC Net attendees. Suitable for all fitness levels.

5:00 pm – 6:00 pm

Vendor Mixer

Location: Eagle Ballroom Foyer

Why wait until the gala to start the fun? Come early, grab a drink, and mingle with our vendors and fellow attendees before the evening's big celebration!

6:00 pm – 9:00 pm

Andy Holdnak Awards Gala, Dinner and Live Auction

Location: Eagle Ballroom 2–3

Join us for the Andy Holdnak Awards Gala, an evening of celebration, recognition, and camaraderie! Enjoy a formal dinner as we honor individuals and programs making a difference in the recreation industry. From creating exceptional recreation experiences and making meaningful contributions to our profession to mentoring others and generously sharing their time and talents with REC Net, our award recipients represent the very best of our industry. See page 3 for a complete list of awards.

We'll also welcome our newly inducted Board members into their roles as they help guide REC Net into the future.

Then get ready to bid on some incredible vacation experiences at REC Net properties during our live auction! Every winning bid helps support REC Net and the future of our association. Don't hesitate to call a friend and team up on a getaway! See page 7 for auction details.

9:00 pm – 10:30 pm

After-Party with RAGS AND RICHES

Location: Eagle Ballroom 2–3

Get ready for live music from RAGS AND RICHES! Hit the dance floor, enjoy the show, or just hang out with your REC Net friends as we keep the fun going into the night. Whether you're ready to dance or just want to enjoy great music and good company, this is one party you won't want to miss!

TUESDAY NOVEMBER 17, 2026

Dress Code: Daytime – *Business Casual*

9:00 am – 12:30 pm

Conference Registration Table is Open

Location: Galena Rooms Foyer

Last chance to stop by the REC Net Registration Table! Pick out some REC Net logo gear, ask any last-minute questions, or just stop by to say goodbye before heading home!

9:00 am – 9:45 am

Town Hall

Location: Galena 1–5

Wrap up the conference with purpose! Join the REC Net Board of Directors and fellow members for an interactive Town Hall where your voice matters. Share your feedback, offer fresh ideas, and help shape the future of REC Net. This is your opportunity to tell us what's working, what could be better, and where you'd like to see our organization go next!

10:00 am – 11:45 am

Wildcard Games

Creator: Lisa Linden
Presenter: Wesley Christy
Location: Eagle Ballroom 3

The cards are dealt, the clock is ticking, and only one team will be crowned Wildcard Games Champion! In this amazing game created by REC Net's own Lisa Linden, teams of recreation professionals are dealt a Theme, a Supply, and a secret Wildcard, then race to invent an original recreation game and pitch it to the judges. From lightning-fast Speed Rounds to elimination and championship rounds, the competition heats up with every new twist! Come for the creativity, the laughs, and plenty of ready-to-use game ideas for your next event.

FEATURED SPEAKERS



OPENING KEYNOTE

Hoan Do

Hoan Do is an award-winning international keynote speaker, author, and former contestant on NBC's American Ninja Warrior. The son of Vietnamese refugees, Hoan grew up understanding the sacrifices his family made to build a better life in America. His own experiences overcoming challenges helped shape his passion for empowering others to develop resilience, lead with confidence, and thrive through uncertainty.

Throughout his career, Hoan has partnered with companies, universities, and professional organizations around the world, reaching more than 250,000 people across 13 countries. His clients include Lockheed Martin, the Young Presidents' Organization, Stanford University, Purdue University, and numerous national professional associations. His work has been featured on Good Morning America, Yahoo Finance, and Lay's nationwide Smile with Lay's campaign benefiting Operation Smile.

Hoan has received the Verizon Wireless Motivator Award and was recognized by Seattle Magazine as one of Seattle's 25 Most Influential People. Whether delivering a keynote, facilitating an interactive leadership retreat, or working with teams navigating change, he combines personal experiences, practical strategies, and audience engagement to help people perform at their best.

For REC Net members, Hoan's message connects directly to the challenges of leading teams, creating memorable experiences, and adapting to the ever-changing demands of recreation and hospitality. His opening keynote, Unshakable Resilience, will explore how professionals can approach uncertainty with confidence, support the people they lead, and turn obstacles into opportunities for growth.



MIDNOTE

Sally M. Evans

Sally M. Evans has been part of REC Net since 1987. She served on its board and has received both the Debbie Regnone Service Award and the Howard Uibel Lifetime Achievement Award.

Sally started as a camp counselor and coach. On Kiawah Island, she led the teen programs and worked in the bike shop and tennis operations. From there, she joined cruise ships sailing the world and later helped Disney Cruise Line launch its first ships. At Give Kids The World, she created memories for children with critical illnesses and their families. She went on to lead recreation teams with Marriott Vacations Worldwide and other resort companies, including a role as Lifestyle Ambassador of Fun at Latitude Margaritaville, a 55-and-better community. In every role, she worked to grow frontline staff into leaders.

Two REC Net mentors, Lisa Jennings and Jane Schuliger, encouraged Sally to bring a slightly crazy idea to life: teaching leadership through children's stories. They suggested she present it at a REC Net conference, and she ended up writing the books first. Her series, Once Upon A Leader®, now includes two books and a companion workbook, all published through Anchor Arts Publishing, the company she founded.

This year she gives the presentation they first suggested. In her midnote, Speaking in Stories: Leadership Reimagined Through Children's Books, Sally introduces the Once Upon A Leader® Compass, which pairs four classic children's stories with four leadership directions: Vision, Integrity, Adaptability, and Influence.

A University of Illinois graduate with Champaign roots, Sally now lives in Kissimmee, Florida, with her puppy, Sunshine.



ENDNOTE

Sarah Beth Reno

Sarah Beth Reno is Chief Operations Officer for Carnival Cruise Line, overseeing guest-facing operations across its global fleet of 29 ships. Her responsibilities include hotel operations, guest services, entertainment, food and beverage, security, and port operations. With decades of experience in the cruise and hospitality industries, Sarah has built a career focused on leadership, innovation, operational excellence, and creating exceptional guest experiences.

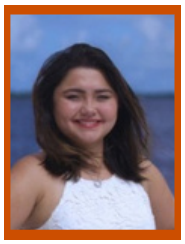
Sarah joined Carnival in 2014 as Vice President of Entertainment, where she led the transformation of onboard entertainment experiences. In 2019, she was promoted to Vice President of Guest Operations and advanced to Senior Vice President in 2022. Her leadership and contributions to the organization led to her promotion to Chief Operations Officer in 2025.

Before joining Carnival, Sarah spent 19 years at Onboard Media, an LVMH company and leading provider of integrated media solutions to the global cruise and travel industries. During her tenure, she held several leadership positions, including serving as President for her final three years.

Sarah began her career working aboard cruise ships as a youth coordinator, entertainment staff member, and assistant cruise director. These early experiences provided a foundation for her leadership journey and a firsthand understanding of the guest experience. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Recreation Management from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, connecting her professional accomplishments to the recreation field where her career began.

SPEAKER BIOS

Miranda Allison



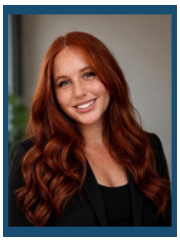
Miranda Allison is the founder of Pretty Darn Delightful, an experience design company dedicated to creating more meaningful, memorable moments through elevated hospitality and applied psychology. Her career spans luxury hospitality, VIP guest experience, resort marketing, and recreation leadership, including directing a large-scale ice skating program. As a U.S. Figure Skating Gold Medalist, Miranda brings a unique perspective shaped by creative expression, technical precision, and operational discipline. Her approach to experience design reflects that same balance of art and science, blending an understanding of human behavior with the creativity to make the ordinary extraordinary. She is also the author of the forthcoming book The Delightful Method, which explores the psychology behind building experiences and how thoughtful design can transform everyday moments into lasting memories.

Jean Baer



Jean Baer is a long-time REC Net member who served as the association's President in 1987. With a degree in Recreation Administration from the University of WI-LaCrosse, she has been in the industry for over 40 years. Baer moved to Sanibel Island, FL to be the Recreation Director for South Seas Resort on Captiva. After years at the Resort Baer and her business partner started Local Roots Farmers Markets. For the past 19 years they have been operating in Lee County and currently have 9 seasonal and full-time farmers markets.

Iliana Batista



Standing out in luxury hospitality starts with real-world experience. This speaker gives an inside look at her summer internship as a Spa Consultant at The Breakers Palm Beach through the L.E.A.D. Program. She'll walk through the responsibilities, challenges, and skills she built along the way, along with tips on building connections and bringing classroom learning into the workplace.

Brian Bevacqua



Brian Bevacqua is the Director of Resort Activities at Pendry Park City in Utah and served as REC Net President in 2024. With extensive experience in recreation, hospitality, and outdoor adventure programming, Brian began his career by opening his own adventure business in 2010. He later held leadership positions at The Quechee Club, Tenaya Lodge at Yosemite, and Montage Deer Valley before joining Pendry Park City. His background includes resort operations, guest experiences, outdoor education, and program development. Brian became an active member of RCRA in 2015, attending his first conference that year. He joined the Board of Directors in 2018, initially focusing on vendor relations and recruitment. Throughout his years of service, he has contributed to website redesigns, the organization's official rebranding from RCRA to REC Net in 2023–2024, and its continued growth and development.

Dr. Joel Blanco



Dr. Joel Blanco is an Associate Professor and Director of the School of Exercise Science and Sport at Millikin University. He holds a Ph.D. in Recreation, Sport and Tourism from the University of Illinois. His professional background includes work in municipal parks and the National Park Service, as well as experience in aquatics, rock climbing, and high ropes courses.

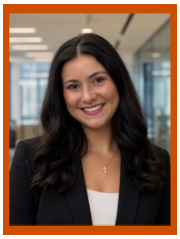
Gary Bleil



Currently serving as President of REC Net, Gary Bleil has been involved with the organization for more than 23 years, first as a student and later as a recreation professional. Currently, he is the Director of Resort Experiences and Wellness at Omni Amelia Island Resort in North Florida, where he oversees nine departments and up to 95 team members. A graduate of Slippery Rock University with a degree in Resort Recreation Management/Tourism and a minor in Business, Gary has held various positions throughout his career, including Activities and Group Recreation Intern, Pool Technician, Assistant Club Manager, and Manager of Amelia's Wheels. During his tenure as Director, Omni Amelia Island Resort has received eight Premier Operation Awards and two Excellence in Programming Awards from REC Net.

SPEAKER BIOS

Belinda Bova



Belinda Bova is a junior at Slippery Rock University pursuing a BSBA in Human Resource Management, with minors in Hospitality and Tourism Management and Strategic Communication and Media. She expects to graduate in May 2028. She interned at Ocean Reef Club as a Recreation Coordinator, where she gained experience in recreation operations, event coordination, and guest relations. On campus, she is President of Club Softball, Vice President of the Hospitality and Tourism Student Society, and Secretary and Event Coordinator for Delight Ministries. She also belongs to the Fastenal AMA Sales Team and Women in Business, and is a member of Beta Gamma Sigma, the international business honor society for the top 10% of undergraduate business students.

Wesley Christy



Wesley Christy is an Activities Entertainment Supervisor at Nemacolin, where he hosts resort game shows — including Love & Marriage, Blind Bartender, and President of The Peak Throwdown — and leads social events including trivia, bingo, kids games, and tournaments. He also runs large-scale team building events and leads a team of coordinators in daily adventure activities. He specializes in turning passive audiences into active participants. He graduated from West Virginia University in 2024 with a degree in hospitality and tourism management, and is currently a graduate student at Fitchburg State University.

Jessie Decker



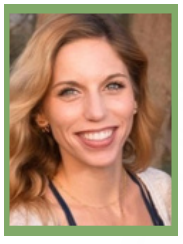
Jessie Decker is a Human Resources specialist with the heart of a Recreation professional. She is the Director of Training & Employee Engagement at Chatham Bars Inn, a Forbes Five-Star luxury Cape Cod resort. Jessie holds a degree in Recreation Management from the University of New Hampshire and has worked with the luxury resort since 2000. In addition to leading the resort's training and development initiatives, Jessie has held several positions throughout the Recreation, Spa, and Human Resources departments.

Steve Geisz



Steve Geisz has been a member of REC Net (formerly RCRA) for 38 years, serving on the Board of Directors for 12 years, including two terms as President and six years as Treasurer. His involvement has also included serving as Ways and Means Chairman and on the Bylaws Committee. Steve graduated from Western Illinois University with a Bachelor of Science in Biology/Chemistry and a minor in Recreation, Park and Tourism with an emphasis in resort management. Throughout his career, he has worked at several resorts, including Lake Carroll Resort in Northern Illinois, Sapphire Valley Resort in the mountains of North Carolina, and Doral Golf Resort and Spa in Miami, Florida, holding positions ranging from Director of Recreation to Director of Resort Operations. After leaving Miami, Steve returned to the Midwest and served as General Manager of Grand Harbor Resort and Waterpark along the Mississippi River in Dubuque, Iowa, for almost 20 years. He currently serves as General Manager of Eagle Ridge Resort & Spa in Galena, Illinois.

Leah Hall



Leah Hall is Director of Outdoor Pursuits and Youth & Family Programming at Troubadour Golf and Field Club in Tennessee. She holds a degree in Development and Family Studies from the University of North Texas. Her career in recreation began in nonprofit youth development, where she worked as an Adventure Instructor at YMCA Camp Moody and rose to Day Camp Site Director, leading day camps, retreats, rentals, and events. Now she brings that experience to luxury club programming for children and families. Her session, Building Meaningful Youth & Family Programming, draws on her move from nonprofit to luxury recreation and what translates between the two.

Arica Haro



Arica Haro is the co-founder of Asheville Plays, a family-run recreation and events business in Western North Carolina dedicated to creating memorable experiences that bring people together. Asheville Plays engages different groups of people by using play as a platform to create positive bonding experiences and lasting memories. With a passion for creativity, community, and out-of-the-box thinking, Arica has transformed imaginative ideas into signature seasonal events, including the 14th Annual Haunted Trail and the 6th Annual Winter Wonder Walk, an immersive, storybook-inspired holiday experience.

SPEAKER BIOS

Garrett Horrell



Garrett Horrell is an event professional, entrepreneur, and entertainer with over a decade of experience creating memorable experiences that bring people together. As the founder of Serious Fun, a nationwide team-building and entertainment company, Garrett specializes in interactive game shows, corporate events, and creative experiences. He also is the Co-Founder of Clink '92 Mobile Bar and the top 50 leisure podcast Absolutely Knot Another Podcast. A graduate of Slippery Rock University, Garrett combines his passion for entertainment, entrepreneurship, and social media to inspire creativity, connection, and fun.

Lisa Jennings



As the Chief Experience Officer for Wildly Different and Queen of Clever for Masters of the Hunt, Lisa delivers unique interactive events. Primarily serving the corporate market, Wildly Different implements in-person and remote team building activities, charitable events, networking mixers, tradeshow enhancement and more. Masters of the Hunt creates bespoke scavenger hunts and escape experiences to drive engagement with employees and your target market to enhance and elevate your brand.

Alex Khodan



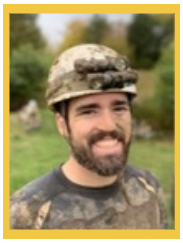
Alexandra (Alex) Khodan currently serves as the Manager of Aquatics and Safety at Schaumburg Park District. She has an extensive background in aquatics operations, programming, recreation management, and risk and safety management. Throughout her career, Alex has also worked with Jeff Ellis Management at facilities across the country, including Disney's Aulani Resort in Hawaii and Gaylord Marriott resorts. In addition, she currently serves as Co-Chair of the Illinois Parks and Recreation Association (IPRA) Aquatics Committee and was recently elected by her peers to the IPRA Facility Management Board of Directors. Alex is passionate about developing future leaders, creating innovative and exciting new programs, and advancing the parks and recreation industry.

Andrew Mintun



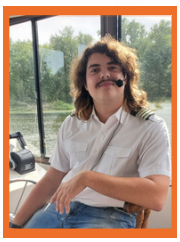
Andrew Mintun is a passionate hospitality and recreation professional with over thirteen years of experience in the field. His diverse background has enabled him to lead teams worldwide and make significant contributions to local communities. Andrew has developed innovative programming on cruise ships, within local communities, and at large-scale resorts, and he currently leads the Outdoor Pursuits department at Atlantic Fields Club in Hobe Sound, Florida. His mission is to empower young professionals by equipping them with the tools, knowledge, and pathways they need to thrive in the recreation industry.

Joey O'Reilly



Serving as the Group Recreation Sales Manager at Mohonk Mountain House in New Paltz, NY since 2022, Joey O'Reilly oversees team-building events and the logistics that bring them to life. With a background in the sciences, holding a B.S. in Environmental Science and an M.S. in Lake Management, he brings analytical insight to creative program design. His extensive experience includes guiding outdoor trips, leading high and low ropes courses, and managing climbing gyms. Joey's greatest passion lies in creating and facilitating meaningful team-building programs at our resort.

River Repinski



Making his first splash in the tourism industry at just 10 years old, River Repinski has spent many of his summer days and weekends working aboard the Winona Tour Boat, his family's business on the Mississippi River. Today, he serves as a riverboat captain and tour guide, leading passengers on 90-minute narrated cruises that combine local history, storytelling, and quite a bit of guest engagement. Beyond his work on the river, he coaches a high school team in competitive public speaking and debate, while also leading the debate team he founded at Winona State University. With over a decade of immersion in communication and communication theory, River plans to pursue his master's degree in Strategic Communication.

SPEAKER BIOS

Shane Schwarzenbach



Shane Schwarzenbach is a student at Florida State University pursuing a double major in Recreation & Tourism Management and Psychology. He recently completed an internship in the Activities Department at Mohonk Mountain House, in New York State, where he gained hands-on experience in recreation programming, guest services, and resort operations. His responsibilities included leading kids club activities, guided hikes, and tennis pro shop operations, as well as assisting with group recreation events for large corporate groups. An active REC Net member, Shane credits the organization with helping him secure his internship opportunity. He looks forward to applying his experience and education to a career in the hospitality and recreation industry.

Cassie Sessler



Cassie Sessler is the Recreation Camps Coordinator at The Quechee Club, where she channels her lifelong passion for the summer camp experience into creating impactful seasonal programs. Beyond camp, Cassie plays a central role in planning and facilitating diverse events and activities designed to engage club members of all ages. She graduated from Florida State University with a degree in Recreation and Tourism Management and holds a specialized Certificate in Special Events. At REC Net, Cassie looks forward to connecting with fellow professionals and students to share insights on multi-generational member engagement and innovative event design.

Alicia Sides



Alicia Sides brings 26 years of experience in the recreation industry, with a diverse background spanning nonprofit organizations, parks and recreation, hospitality, and tourism. With more than 10 years of leadership experience in Director-level positions, she has developed a strong track record of building successful programs, strengthening community engagement, and managing dynamic recreational operations. Alicia has overseen staff leadership and mentorship, program development, festivals and special events, sports programming, budgeting, and daily operations. Her leadership approach focuses on creating meaningful recreational opportunities, enhancing visitor experiences, and fostering community connections. Alicia currently serves as the Director of Parks and Recreation for Wythe County, Virginia.

Melissa Skarbek



Melissa Skarbek is a Recreation Supervisor at Omni Amelia Island Resort & Spa and a graduate of the University of North Florida. Working across the resort pool and beach operations, she enjoys the variety that recreation brings and the opportunity to create experiences that guests of all ages can enjoy. With a background in education and a passion for hospitality, Melissa loves the creative process of developing new programs, bringing events to life, and finding ways to make ordinary moments feel special. For her, one of the most rewarding parts of recreation is seeing how something as simple as a well-planned activity or shared experience can become a lasting memory for a family.

Dr Jieun Song



At Florida State University, Dr. Song serves as teaching faculty as well as the Director of Recreation and Tourism Management. Her teaching areas include programming recreation experiences, leadership, and commercial and public recreation. Dr. Song is a passionate advocate for spending time outdoors and for the conservation of natural and cultural resources. In her free time, she enjoys traveling, hiking, camping, and visiting national parks—having explored over 40 so far. Dr. Song holds a Ph.D. in Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences from Texas A&M University and an M.B.A. from Bowling Green State University.

Belynda Tharpe



With over 35 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Belynda Tharpe has served with FirstService Residential in both Charlotte, NC, and St. Augustine, FL, overseeing operations that include aquatics, landscaping, golf, tennis, lifestyle programming, health and fitness, food and beverage services, and community development districts. Prior to joining FirstService Residential, Belynda owned and operated The Catering Connection in Greenville, SC, and held leadership roles including Athletic Director at Carmel Country Club in Charlotte, NC, and Catering and Sales Director at Larkins On the River in Greenville, SC, Sawgrass Country Club in Ponte Vedra Beach, FL, Jacksonville Golf & Country Club in Jacksonville, FL, and Eagle Harbor Community in Fleming Island, FL. As a long-standing REC Net member, Belynda has proudly served as Board Director-at-Large, President, and currently serves as Treasurer.

ENTERTAINER BIOS

Adam Bohanan



Adam Bohanan is a Black and Jewish Twin Cities based musician and songwriter who tours nationwide. His music draws from soul, jazz, funk, and R&B. His influences include Stevie Wonder, Donny Hathaway, Sam Cooke, and Marvin Gaye. A life-long nerd, Adam also loves to incorporate playful wordplay and nerdy references into his songwriting. In 2024, he was a semifinalist on Season 26 of The Voice. On Team Reba, he was known for his "dirty soul" style and fun-loving attitude.

The Cosmic Romantics



The Cosmic Romantics are a married magic duo known for fooling Penn & Teller on national television. Their performances blend mindreading with sleight of hand, designed to spark conversation and create fun, memorable moments for even the most discerning audiences. They have performed residencies at the Magic Castle and Hilton Palmer House, aboard Princess Cruises and Virgin Voyages, for private clients such as Google and Prada, and their work has been featured on Netflix, Dropout, The CW, and Disney Channel.

Jackie Verna



Jackie Verna is a country artist from West Chester, PA who now lives out of Nashville, TN. New to the performing scene, she got her first big break on Season 14 of NBC's "The Voice," where she was on team Adam. Jackie climbed her way to being a top 10 finalist on the show with her performances landing spots on Apple Music country charts. She draws influence from artists like Carrie Underwood, Miranda Lambert, and Dolly Parton just to name a few. She is working on new projects to be released soon!

HOULA ENTERTAINMENT

RAGS AND RICHES



RAGS AND RICHES is a Lexington, Kentucky-based pop duo with over 15 million career streams, 400+ live shows across 45 states, and a reputation for high-energy performances. The duo has opened for artists including Smash Mouth, Judah & the Lion, and Fitz and the Tantrums, performed on the main stage at Lovin' Life Festival, and earned four Lexington Music Awards, including three-time Pop Artist of the Year.

Chase Harter



You may have already incidentally seen this man, as he's a regular opener for legends like Amber Autry, Fiona Cauley, and Heather Shaw, or just heard him on Netflix is a Joke Sirius XM radio. Regardless, Chase has made a name for himself by showcasing at multiple festivals and competitions. Chase has showcased in the Big Diamond, Big Pine, West End, and was a finalist in the Big Sky Comedy Festival all sparking his competitive spirit. He now holds the titles of "Funny Phoenix 2026" and "Funniest Comedian in the Universe 2025," along with three different Best of Fest awards from the Big Pine Festival.

Medearis "MD" Dixson



Medearis "MD" Dixson is a Grammy Award-winning and Polaris Music Prize-winning multi-instrumentalist whose artistry blends the soul of jazz with the depth of lived experience and soulful interpretation. Known for his rich tone and expressive improvisation, Dixson performs with the maturity and sophistication of a seasoned musical veteran—despite being years ahead of his time.

A powerful presence in Seattle's thriving Jazz and R&B scenes, MD has shared the stage with an impressive roster of musical greats, including Roy Hargrove, David Sanborn, Branford Marsalis Quartet, Andrew Gouché, Jerry "Kokane" Long, Tendai Maraire (Shabazz Palaces), Daren Motamedy, Owuor Arunga, Liv Warfield, and Digable Planets, among others.

His performances have graced some of the world's most iconic stages, including Carnegie Hall and The Kennedy Center. Yet, despite his accolades and accomplishments, MD remains grounded—dedicating every note and achievement to his faith and giving all glory to God.

Our Vendor Partners

Thank you for supporting REC Net and the recreation profession!

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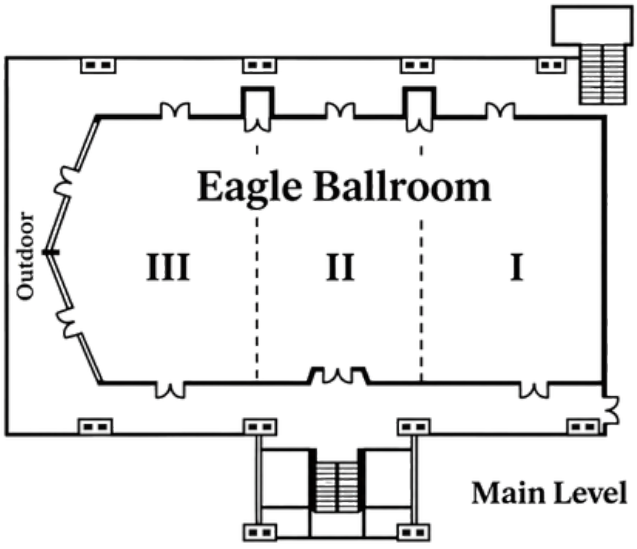
Digital Scavenger Hunts

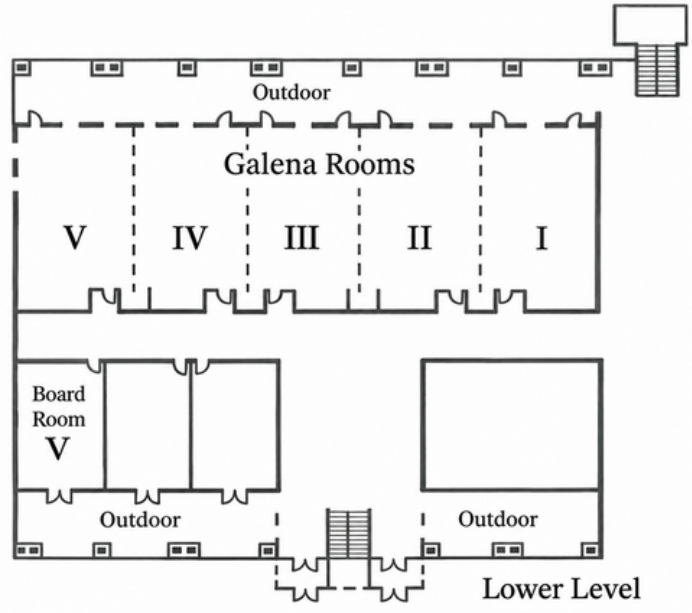
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CONFERENCE FLOOR PLANS





THE GALENA TERRITORY – MORE THAN A RESORT







The Galena Territory is a semiprivate, residential, recreational and resort community located in the northwest corner of Illinois, near the historic city of Galena. Designed to maximize the rugged terrain of the surrounding area, The Territory's 6,800 acres boast spectacular vistas, valleys, prairies and woodlands that harbor rare plant and bird species found nowhere else in Illinois.

Property owners collectively own 1,900 acres of common recreational amenities in addition to their own properties. These include 24 miles of walking/hiking trails, Lake Galena for boating and outstanding fishing, a Marina Complex, Shenandoah Riding Center, and a Recreation Complex featuring pools, a fitness center and a gym.

Who owns The Galena Territory?

61%
Individual Property Owners
More than 4,000 acres

28%
The Galena Territory Association
1,900 acres of common property

11%
Eagle Ridge Resort & Spa
775 acres for guests

SEE YOU IN 2027!

REC NET NATIONAL CONFERENCE

NOVEMBER 6-9, 2027

recnet®
Recreation Experience Community Network



Hammock Beach Golf Resort & Spa
Palm Coast, Florida