

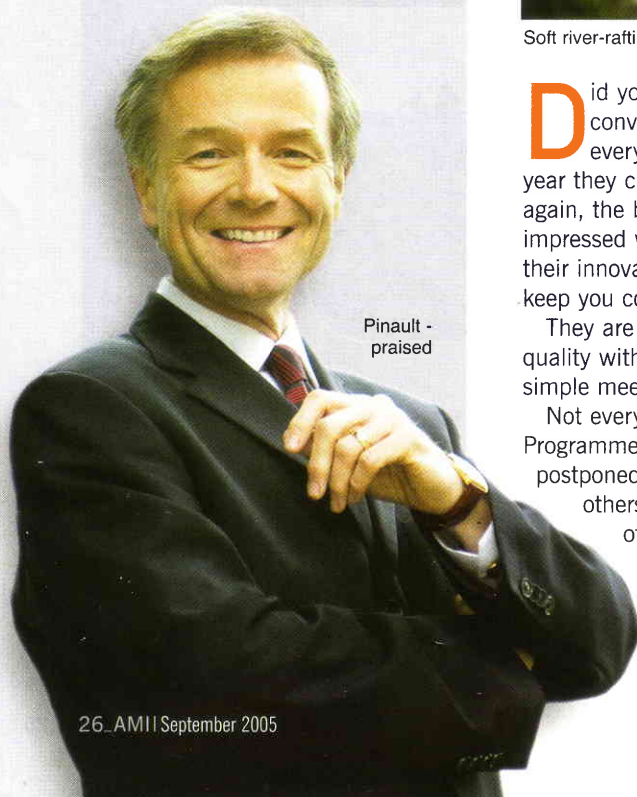
- ▶ AIPC now has 142 members in 50 countries.
- ▶ Québec will be 400 years old in 2008, making it the oldest city north of the Rio Grande.
- ▶ With 74 facilities from 30 countries attending, it was the biggest AIPC ever held.

Quote of the conference:

'You should under promise and over deliver'

[from left to right] ▶

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| <p>1 The flag of the province of Québec
<i>Picture by SCCQ</i></p> <p>2 Saxophone serenade at the Garrison Club
<i>Picture by SCCQ</i></p> <p>3 Could you do that? Acrobats demonstrate teamwork at closing ceremony
<i>Picture by Louise Leblanc</i></p> | <p>4 A musical moment at the Musée des beaux-arts
<i>Picture by SCCQ</i></p> <p>5 Penny Raeva, (left) Congress Centre Sofia, Bulgaria, receives the APEX award from president Barbara Maple
<i>Picture by SCCQ</i></p> <p>6 'All my own work!' Boatbuilding at CAT night
<i>Picture by SCCQ</i></p> |
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Pinault - praised

QUÉBEC

AND **OVER**-DELIVERED **UNDER-PROMISED**

THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CONGRESS CENTRES, AIPC, HELD ITS ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND 47TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN QUÉBEC CITY, CANADA, IN JULY



Soft river-rafting in the Jacques-Cartier Valley - *Picture by SCCQ*

Did you know that the association of convention centres get together every year to talk about you? This year they chose Québec to work out, once again, the best things to do to keep you impressed with their quality, surprised by their innovation and intrigued enough to keep you coming back for more.

They are set on a course to deliver quality within an experience rather than a simple meeting.

Not everything went according to plan. Programme and presenter glitches postponed some sessions, transposed others. There is the indelible memory of American centre veteran John Christison of the Washington State Convention and Trade Center warning his colleagues that times were tough and about to get tougher, vying

"We like to reach out to people who are passionate - about culture, about art and the good things in life." — Claude Pinault

against comparative newcomer Edgar Gnanou, of the Paris Palais de Congrès, baffling a long-suffering audience with charts and graphs measuring the gap between expectation and delivery.

Both were agreed on one thing.

You are all getting far too demanding, driving impossible bargains and expecting five-star service for four-star prices.

So what have convention centre managers decided to do? Well, as much as anything, work smarter, tread lightly and carry a big stick.

They are, after all, facing a double whammy. On the one hand they never know who their bosses are from one end of a financial year to the next; and now their promised subsidies are being pared to the bone. Accordingly, it's car parks and ancillary sales that are keeping the dedicated meeting houses afloat. And only barely.

If you care about that, best be

transformed Quebec Convention Center.

Great thought was given to the theme of the conference. Quality and performance came out on top. "It is about raising the bar to the next level," quoted president Barbara Maple, shortly to be re-elected for a further term. "A convention centre is not just a building," she needlessly reminded her audience, "or a big black box. So our meeting will be about how we operate in the future and how we respond to challenges."

Québec itself is responding to new challenges. "We like to reach out to people who are passionate - about culture, about art and the good things in life," enthused an emotional Claude Pinault of the Québec Convention Centre. "So we decided to invite your minds in order to reach your hearts."

Warren Buckley, who runs the Suntec Singapore centre, took up the theme. "We have to remind ourselves that we are not running a facility, we are an experience

word with him: 'commoditisation'. Like it?

"Planners budgets are on the increase and packaging or 'commoditisation' as the Americans would put it, is on the increase. Planners are now using standardised purchasing policies and procedures. Suppliers are investing in web site enhancements. Planners want to work with suppliers as partners, not as vendors, and purchasing and procurement is going to grow."

Having experienced 'core' PCOs, the industry must now brace itself for 'core' destinations. Associations negotiate with four or five destinations and that's it. These core destinations are willing to give better prices for regular work.

Smoothest talker of the whole conference had to be John Parke, about whom delegates had mixed reactions. "Someone I could listen to all day", was how one put it. As against: "typical Americanese and slick Harvard gobbledegook."

The one-time Marriott marketing wunderkind is now president and CEO of Leadership Synergies, based north of Washington. "The customer in the meetings business is changing," he warned.

He asked his audience to adopt a simple strategy. "Instead of an order taker, become a trusted advisor."

It took Jean-Paul de Lavison of JPdL, a PCO/DMC based in Montréal, to get the subject back to the all-important delegate. In a session titled 'How to shape the delegate experience', de Lavison suggested: "First you have to decide whether your delegate is paying out of his own pocket, or spending other people's money."

Why do delegates attend meetings? For entertainment, education and networking, that's why.

AIPC is planning to introduce its own intensive one-week residential course for potential and existing convention centre directors.

Through another alliance of other meetings associations - the Joint Meetings Industry Council - AIPC is trying to bring more influence to bear on politicians and the public at large to show that meetings are a vital part of the economy. Meetings mean progress, seems to be the motto.

Tributes were paid to Claude Pinault for the organisation, imagination and innovation his team introduced to the programme, culminating in the APEX award night dinner, in a blacked-out hall with an Indian-theme cultural show. Always ready with a surprise or two, next day he used two acrobats to provide a jaw-dropping display of weight balancing. Moral? Work as a team.

Next year AIPC will be meeting in Montpellier, France, which has the oldest medical school in the world.



reasonable with pricing, rein in corporate purchasing departments and eschew third party negotiators.

At least AIPC was not stinted on entertainment and cuisine provided by any number of 'partners' and sponsors. It began with golf, moved on to a walking city tour (Québec is such a city and the weather was outstanding), progressed through a visit to Montmorency Falls to tests of basic carpentry, history and sea shanty singing at the by-now famous CAT Publications night, this time on the Île d'Orléans.

Québec is a living museum of fortifications against the British and the Garrison Club is a frozen time capsule in that museum. A barbecue evening was staged there, amidst the gleaming cutlery and chandeliers. A similarly splendid lunch was served in the Parliament building, a musical fun night at the Palais des Beaux-Arts and an awards evening in the specially

provider. The shelf life of our solutions is becoming shorter and shorter."

Rod Pilbeam, who commercially develops centres, told the Québec conference: "Clients' (that's you) expectations of a convention centre are changing. They (you) are looking for value for money and a wow factor, a five-star hotel without beds and first class food and beverage."

Predicting the future, he alerted his listeners: "Expect to see more and more conference facilities incorporated into extensive city developments, or linked with casinos; and the whole country concept: where the government owns the airline, the hotels, the convention centre and the golf course."

Didier Scaillet warned of packaging in the meetings industry. He is director of global development for MPI, Meeting Professionals International, so knew what he was talking about. He brought a new