

Raising the reality



President of the International Association of Congress Centres, Barbara Maple, introduces us to the AIPIC Academy and says that good professional development benefits all concerned.

Has anyone noticed that it's getting tougher to find well rounded staff these days, particularly at a management level? This is a cry we're hearing increasingly in the congress centre area, and it's one echoed by many other sectors and industries, too, as the population curve in many countries seems to be leading to labour shortages across the board.

Training is a key factor in dealing with these kinds of situations; if the right people and skills are not immediately available, you can always develop education programmes to create new expertise and expand the knowledge of existing staff. But this typically takes time, and often the issue is as much about broadening the capabilities of people who already have knowledge and experience in one area so that they can similarly broaden their role. This is particularly important when the intent is

with over 30 participants, is a comprehensive education programme designed to provide a specialised professional development opportunity for congress centre managers and staff. The whole idea is to provide broad, industry-focused information to help convention centre staff improve performance in their current positions, and prepare them for more responsibilities within their respective facilities.

Academy graduates will have been given a high level overview of the industry which allows them to put their particular job in context. At the same time, they will have participated in an extensive exchange of current issues facing centres around the world, which helps create the kind of networks and international perspective that is so important to potential senior managers.

Over the past year AIPIC worked hard to design a programme that dealt exclusively with the unique issues, opportunities and operational requirements of congress centre management, something that has never before been available on a global basis. Faculty members from around the world, including Germany, France, Singapore, Canada, the US and the UK, delivered courses ranging from building operations and financial management to human resources, event management, sales and marketing, community relations, and security. In all cases, these topics were delivered in a congress centre context using relevant examples from actual centre operations.

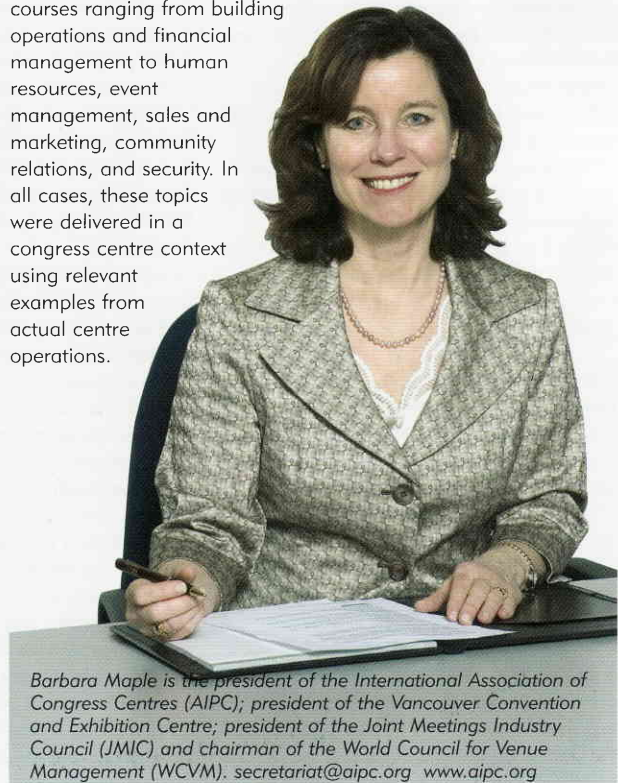


Team photo at the inaugural AIPIC Academy

to move an employee up to a more senior level of management where they will need a better sense of how the overall business operates.

A congress centre has many specialised functions, and these create their own recruitment and training needs. But, often, a centre is looking for the same kinds of skills which are common to many other businesses: from accounting to marketing to technology, and what is unique is how those skills are applied in a congress centre environment.

Enter the AIPIC Academy. This programme, which has just completed its inaugural course at a training facility near Brussels



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By using an approach that concentrates heavily on participation, the Academy ensured it was not just an academic programme, but a living process reflecting current trends and issues based on the exchange of information among participants.

It's pretty obvious why this programme is of use to congress centre managers. But why should other clients and industry colleagues care? There are at least two very good reasons:

First, from a client point of view, the AIPC Academy is a guarantee that the high quality products expected from suppliers these days will continue, at least with respect to congress centres.

This kind of training not only helps deliver better service, but allows individual centres to develop a better 'world view', which helps them put client needs and issues into a broader perspective and draw on the experiences of many other facilities in looking

for solutions.

Second, it raises the overall standard of expertise available in the industry, and encourages everyone to set their sights higher. Today's conferences and congresses are complex affairs, and require as much knowledge and technical understanding as possible. We believe the Academy will make a significant contribution to the overall knowledge pool and, in so doing, help everyone do a better job in the common mission we have to provide a great event experience.

In a time when there's not much hope of avoiding looming labour shortages, programmes like the AIPC Academy can help ease the pain, and ensure both centres and their clients have reason to believe that high quality service will be as much a part of the future of congress centres as it has been in the past.



Six of the best in Brussels, led by AIPC president Barbara Marle, second right