On October 1, 1768, British troops commenced their oppressive occupation of Boston. Seven years later, at the Battles of Lexington and Concord, the “shot heard around the world” ignited the American fight for independence. Over this year’s Columbus Day weekend, 150 Redcoat reenactors “occupied” the city’s streets, restaurants, bars and hotel lobbies before camping overnight on Boston Common.

Also featuring drills and demonstrations, “Boston Occupied: An Insolent Parade” was the launch event of Revolution 250 (https://revolution250.org), a consortium of 30 local organizations commemorating the 250th anniversaries of the actions that catalyzed the American Revolution.

“The 250th anniversary of the Revolution is a critical moment for Boston and its visitor industry,” said Pat Moscaritolo, president and CEO of the Greater Boston CVB, a principal member of the consortium. “Like the Bicentennial, these anniversaries can create a roadmap and momentum for Boston’s visitor economy, generating ideas and partnerships that focus on big-picture concepts as we approach the 250th anniversary of the country’s founding in 2026, and the 400th anniversary of Boston’s founding in 2030.”

Building on this brand bedrock, the continuing expansion of Boston’s business and tourism infrastructure has profoundly transformed the city’s identity. Moscaritolo calls it “a revolution of opportunity,” which for groups is producing a major uprising.

Monumental Moves

Multiple drivers have transformed Boston over the past two decades.

“Hosting FIFA World Cup games in 1994 was key in branding Boston, Cambridge and New England as an international destination,” Moscaritolo said. “Then, we had around 750,000 overseas visitors. Today, it’s 1.65 million, or 2.5 million counting Mexico and Canada.”

Airlift expansion is another key factor.

“We now have nearly 60 international direct flights serving Boston, with nearly 40 million passenger arrivals,” continued Moscaritolo, who was director of Logan Airport before joining the bureau in 1991. “When I left, it was 12 million. And now there’s a $750 million, 10-year plan to transform Terminal E along with other
The year 2017 was a strong one for MCC-Hosted events. What were some prevailing factors?

While we are very happy about today’s success, it follows the good deeds from the BSEC’s (Boston Convention & Exhibition Center) opening 14 years ago. With an average booking window of seven years, that means some associations are meeting here for the first time or second time. With that long horizon, which for some groups can be 15 or even 30 years out, we must be conscious of making the right moves to sustain the cycle; 2019 could be a speed bump, based on what people did in 2011 coming out of the recession.

It’s a different wavelength of thought. With prime time locked up in both the BSEC and Hynes Convention Center for most of the future years, getting into our cycle could be a challenge, especially for emerging industry groups created by today’s accelerated innovation culture.

We are also addressing imbalance in the location of hotel inventory. While smaller than the BSEC, the Hynes has the biggest group of rooms. The new 1,055-room Omni Boston Seaport Hotel now under construction across from the BSEC will help rebalance that room geography and free up more opportunities for concurrent events.

With its diverse and expanding economy centered around technology, medicine and the life sciences, Boston is the think tank for the 21st century. As a corporate magnet and academic stronghold with a strong financial backbone, it’s a destination for the meeting of minds and wallets. This is a favorable time for Boston. Everybody is on the same page, and there’s a fair wind with us.

What steps is the MCC taking to maintain momentum?

We are presently studying master planning ideas for the next decade or so, including growth options for the 30 undeveloped acres on our 70-acre campus. Topping the competition on exhibition space is a driving metric of our industry, but in ‘think tank’ Boston, our higher priority is being able to offer multiple smart meeting rooms for brainstorming, strategy sessions and versatile networking. The rate of acquisition and consolidation in certain industries is also changing exhibition floor dynamics and planner expectations. It’s about wider aisles and pavilions, not booths. They want excitement and experiences. At some shows here, you forget you’re in a convention center.

We expect to report on the study in spring 2019. Meanwhile, we are focused on enhancements including four- and five-star hotel level service training for our employees, improving our F&B offerings and building on the huge success of our outdoor Lawn on D event space.

The innovation and technology industries are big customers, so our people who engage their people must be on the same level. That means ensuring that both our enterprise, and our clients have the best tools available. I am proud of our talented IT department, which we’ve really fine-tuned in the last three years. Another strength not normally associated with Boston is our stagecraft. People don’t want a two-dimensional convention or tradeshow. They want to be entertained. That makes our strong IA (International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees) community, going hand in hand with Boston’s theater revival, another backbone of our service culture. We are good at the show business side, too.

facilities and transit connections, which will only make Boston more desirable for international groups.”

Synergy between Boston’s powerhouse innovation economy and schools creates significant group demand. One example among many is the MIT Sloan Sports Analytics Conference. Hatched in an MIT classroom in 2006, this annual event, presented by ESPN, quickly outgrew the Hynes Convention Center and now resides in the

Boston Convention & Exhibition Center (BSEC).

“The 2018 convention attracted around 4,000 attendees, one-third from around the globe,” Moscaritolo said. “And speaking of the BSEC, I’d say authorization for the building in 1997 was the single most impactful turning point for Boston’s group market image. Then, we were ranked around 35th nationally for meetings. For 2019, looking at future bookings and forward demand, global travel management company Carlson Wagonlit Travel ranked Boston fourth among North American meeting destinations. This year, US News and World Report ranked Boston first in the U.S. and third globally behind Paris and Florence for summer travel. Those designations strongly validate our presence in the group and tourism markets.”

The entire region is benefiting. At its Tourism Summit 2018, the North of Boston CVB reported generating more than $100 million in international travel expenditures. Affirmative, too, are the numbers from the Massachusetts Convention Center Authority (MCCA), which owns and operates the BSEC and Hynes as part of its local and state portfolio. In 2017, the MCCA hosted 325 events with 850,000 attendees at the BSEC and Hynes alone, generating $1,650,000 hotel room nights and $735 million in economic impact.

Moscaritolo also cites the parallel growth in hotels. “In 1991, we had some 12,000 rooms in Boston and Cambridge,” he said. “Today it’s 25,000, with 35-plus new hotels producing a potential 5,000-plus rooms planned for Greater Boston in the next five years.”

Major projects include the two-tower, 1,055-room LEED Silver Omni Boston Hotel at the Seaport. Breaking ground in May 2018 for a scheduled February 2021 opening, highlights include approximately
BY JEFF HEILMAN

Steps from botanical Boston Public Garden and historic Boston Common, the Boston Park Plaza occupies a distinctive place in U.S. hotel history. Originally the Statler Hotel, this 1927 Back Bay hotel set a new standard for the “modern business hotel” as part of E.M. Statler’s pioneering American hotel chain, which introduced concepts including the en suite bathroom and “Do Not Disturb” sign.

Incorporating 16 million pounds of steel, 5 million bricks, 10 acres of carpet and 7,000 doors, its 1,300-room hotel tower was then Boston’s tallest building, and for five decades, the world’s eighth-largest hotel.

In 1954, Hilton Hotels acquired the chain in a landmark deal. The brand eventually faded, but the Boston property, renamed in 1976 and among a handful of surviving former Statlers today, carries on through. Following a $100 million lobby-to-roof renovation unveiled in April 2016, the beloved local treasure, earning “Best of the East” recognition from Meetings Today’s readers in 2018, is timeless and alluring for groups.

Over breakfast in Off the Common, the hotel’s sleek new lobby restaurant and bar, Suzanne Wenz, the hotel’s complex director of marketing communications and PR, filled me in on the makeover.

“Statler created a city within a city where business travelers could stay and conduct their affairs without leaving,” she said. “The renovation upholds that tradition with a range of high-end amenities.”

These include the independent STRIP by Strega steakhouse; secluded library room; full-service Starbucks; 20,000-square-foot Lynx Fitness Club, featuring Boston’s first Topgolf Swing Suite; FedEx Office Business Center; and Leica camera store and gallery.

“Blending historical elements with contemporary lifestyle updates, our repositioning reflects local fondness for the hotel as a place rooted in good memories,” Wenz said.

The neighborhood welcomes groups large and small. With 1,060 newly renovated guest rooms in five styles, including 57 suites, the hotel offers 55,000-plus square feet of space in 36 meeting rooms for up to 1,130 delegates. Highlights include the opulent Grand and Imperial Ballrooms; historic boardrooms; fourth-floor conference level; and Avenue 34, a versatile new self-contained 7,000-square-foot industrial chic event space.

100,000 square feet of flexible space with direct, conditioned access to the BCEC, including Boston’s largest hotel ballroom, at 25,000 square feet.

Barring any licensing hurdles from the Massachusetts Gaming Commission, the renamed 671-room Encore Boston Harbor is slated for a June 2019 debut. Groups will have 50,000 square feet of space, an outdoor event venue and water taxi service to Logan Airport.

Construction is underway on a 346-room Marriott Moxy Hotel in Boston’s Theater District, while openings include the 220-room Courtyard Boston Downtown North Station, part of a $165 million mixed-use development adjacent to the TD Garden and North Station.

Signs of the Times

From this summer’s installation of vintage neon signs on the Rose Kennedy Greenway, the urban downtown park featuring some 400 free public events and the popular Trillum beer garden, to the stirring discoveries in Minute Man National Historical Park running between Lexington and Concord, revival is dominant in the Boston experience.

That includes the resurgent theater scene, once the proving ground for Broadway. Emerson College, nationally preeminent for its arts, theater and communications programs, is giving Moulin Rouge! The Musical its pre-Broadway run at its gilded Emerson Colonial Theatre across from Boston Common. Emerson’s portfolio includes the Cutler Majestic and Paramount Center in the nearby theater district, once the notorious Combat Zone. Other group-capable cultural venues include the 3,500-seat national landmark Wang Theater, featuring one of the five largest stages in the country, and American Repertory Theater in Cambridge.

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