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This Southern California city is more than ready for meetings

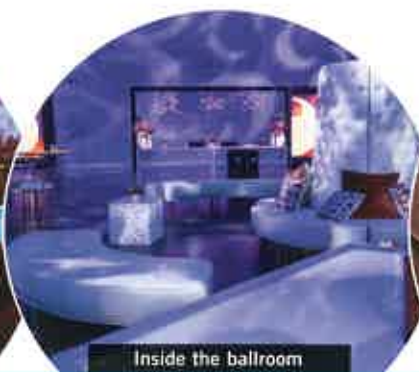
By Deanna Ting



Bogart & Co.



The Pacific Ballroom



Inside the ballroom



The "loft-style" grid

FUTURE FORWARD

THE LONG BEACH ARENA IS REINVENTED FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Having grown up not far from Long Beach, CA, it's always felt like an extension of home. Today, the Long Beach that I see is still more or less the same — a big city that feels like a small town — but one that's in an ongoing transformation.

The \$140-million airport renovation, completed in December 2012, was just the beginning. In November, Long Beach welcomed the new 46,000-square-foot Pacific Ballroom at the Long Beach Arena. The \$7-million project has transformed the arena into an event venue that can be fully customized for nearly any meeting or event for up to 5,500.

Originally built in the 1960s as a sports and concert venue, the Long Beach Arena now has one of the most unusual "loft-style" ballrooms in the U.S. Soaring above the ceiling is a state-of-the-art, floating tension grid with movable floor-to-ceiling walls that can go up or down with just a touch on an iPad. That grid, and the entire ballroom itself, is outfitted with \$1.6-million worth of LED lighting and sound and video equipment.

I saw it in full effect during the grand opening party for the new ballroom, held on

Nov. 20. That night, Steve Goodling, president and CEO of the Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau, welcomed nearly 1,300 people to the ballroom where a variety of "reveals" took place, each one showcasing the ballroom's one-of-a-kind flexibility and special effects.

Long Beach is no stranger to special events. This is, after all, where the TED conference has been held for the past five years. "We saw how TED was using our space and doing this type of reinvention just made sense," says Goodling.

"Having this ballroom gives us a competitive edge to attract more groups," adds Charles Beirne, general manager of the Long Beach Convention Center. "[It's] an ideal turnkey solution for any group — everything's there for them to create whatever space they want. It's so cost-effective, too."

The arena is just one part of the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center (LBCEC), which consists of the Long Beach Convention Center and the Long Beach Center for the Performing Arts, offering more than 400,000 square feet of meeting

space. In the past two years, the LBCEC has undergone \$40-million worth of improvements that include an updated arena lobby, free public Wi-Fi, upgraded VIP rooms, and the addition of a new intimate lounge venue, the 6,425-square-foot Bogart & Co. Says Beirne: "We're never going to stop making this center the best it can possibly be."

That same thinking could apply to the city itself. Soon, a new bike-sharing program from Bike Nation, will place 250 kiosks and 2,500 bicycles in downtown Long Beach, making it even easier for meeting attendees to get around the already pedestrian- and bike-friendly downtown corridor, which is home to the LBCEC.

As a local who's seen Long Beach transform over the years, the newest developments couldn't be more welcome, and I can't wait to see what's next. *SM Questions or comments? Email dting@ntmlc.com*

MORE ONLINE

For a list of where to meet, stay, and play in Long Beach, please visit bit.ly/smLongBeachReinvented

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