

# NORTH CAROLINA

## BASKING IN BETTER BUSINESS

*By Linda Hayes*



**Asheville, North Carolina, is increasing its ability to host association groups with nearly 2,000 new hotel rooms expected to debut by 2018.**

In its natural state, North Carolina beckons associations with intensely scenic mountain views, ocean-side attractions and modern cityscapes. But the feather in its cap is the business acumen of its local hospitality community, despite the ongoing controversy over the passage of House Bill 2.

Groups are greeted with efficiency, professionalism and preparedness, inevitably reaping the benefits of a meeting that runs smoothly from start to finish.

**GREATER CHARLOTTE:  
MEETING SUPPLY & DEMAND**

North Carolina’s largest metropolitan area, **Charlotte**, offers more options than ever for attendees who intend to work hard but also enjoy themselves. In addition to exploding dining, entertainment and craft-beer scenes, the city is home to several professional sports teams that are fervently supported. Those who prefer fine arts will find the calendar is full of events year-round.

Large venues in the central city area (known as “Uptown”) include the 850,000-square-foot Charlotte Convention Center, featuring 280,000 square feet of contiguous exhibit space and impressive green meeting initiatives; the 25,000-square-foot, open-air Pavilion at EpiCentre (an entertainment complex), which can host up to 2,000 people; the Blumenthal Performing Arts Center, with space for nearly 2,100; and Discovery Place, able to accommodate upwards of 1,800 people. More than 4,500 hotel guest rooms are located within walking distance of the convention center. The Charlotte Marriott City Center has completed a series of renovations and upgrades to its meeting space. The NASCAR Hall of Fame tops the list with 40,000 square feet of exhibit space and a 278-seat theater. The entire venue can be rented out for events of up to 2,400.

At Central Piedmont Community College, groups can meet in the 1,020-seat Halton Theater, and a few miles east, the Park Expo & Conference Center features 224,000 square feet of space.

Northeast of Charlotte is Cabarrus County, whose tagline is “Where Racing Lives.” Fans flock to **Concord** to visit the Charlotte Motor Speedway, which offers two 23,000-square-foot infield event venues and the Champions Pavilion, a two-story building that can host up to 300 people. The Speedway also features Feel

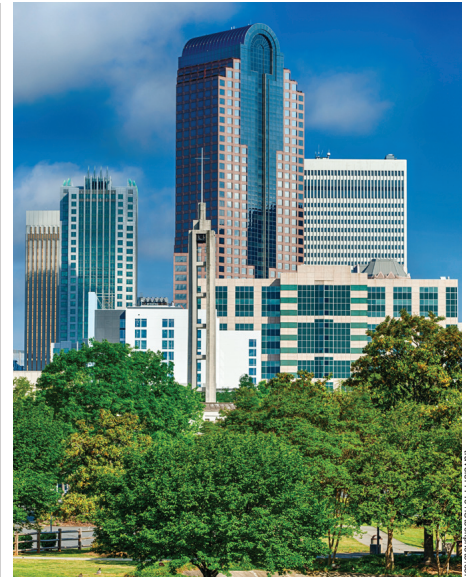
the Thrill Tours and the Dale Jarrett Racing Adventure, perfect for attendees that want to speed around the track in real race cars. The Speedway Club overlooks the track and provides 13,000 square feet of event or banquet space. Other interesting racing-related activities in the area include a behind-the-scenes look at NASCAR race-team headquarters such as Stewart-Haas Racing, Hendrick Motorsports, Roush Fenway Racing and Richard Petty Motorsports.

Spouses or attendees who aren’t captivated by the surge of the speedway can pass the time at Concord Mills Mall, home to Sea Life Aquarium, with more than 5,000 sea creatures and a variety of options for dining and entertainment. Capstone Climbing & Adventure can facilitate team building with camping trips, kayaking, hiking or other outdoor excursions designed to focus on communication, problem solving and more. About 20 miles west, near Lake Norman, the Pearl Wedding & Event Center in Cornelius has more than 4,000 square feet of space and can seat up to 225 people.

Groups that have held meetings in the greater Charlotte area in the last few years include the North Carolina Society for Human Resource Management, the North Carolina Licensed Child Care Association and the North Carolina Strawberry Association.

**ASHEVILLE:  
BREWING GROWTH**

Situated in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains, **Asheville** is gearing up for significant growth with nearly 2,000 new hotel rooms expected by 2018. Recently opened hotels include the Hilton Garden Inn Asheville Downtown, with 140 guest rooms and 2,100 square feet of meeting space plus a rooftop bar and a farm-to-table style restaurant. Hotels expected to open this year include the AC Hotel, with 132 guest rooms and 2,000 square feet of space, and the Cambria Hotel & Suites/Downtown Asheville with 136 guest rooms and 7,440 square feet of



Charlotte’s central city area, or “Uptown,” offers a wide variety of meeting venues.

VENUE	GUEST ROOMS	FUNCTION SPACE
<b>GREATER CHARLOTTE</b>		
Le Meridien/Sheraton	605	55,000
Westin	700	44,000
Hilton/Charlotte Center City	400	30,000
Ballantyne Hotel & Lodge	214	30,000
Charlotte Marriott City Center	446	20,000
Hilton Charlotte University Place	392	20,000
Renaissance Charlotte Suites	275	19,000
Ramada Inn Airport & Conf. Center	425	17,000
Omni	374	16,000
Crowne Plaza Charlotte Executive Park	297	15,500
Sheraton Charlotte Airport	222	14,000
Embassy Suites/Charlotte	274	12,000
DoubleTree Guest Suites/SouthPark	208	12,000
Ritz-Carlton	140	12,000
Holiday Inn/Center City	296	11,000
Fairfield Inn & Suites	193	10,000
Hilton Charlotte Executive Park	181	10,000
Charlotte Marriott SouthPark	192	8,500
DoubleTree Charlotte Airport	173	5,040
Holiday Inn Airport	212	5,000
Holiday Inn Billy Graham	174	4,400
Drury Inn & Suites/Northlake	180	3,400
Aloft Charlotte Uptown	175	2,500
<b>CABARRUS COUNTY</b>		
Embassy Suites/Charlotte-Concord	308	42,000
Great Wolf Lodge	402	18,000
Hilton Garden Inn/Charlotte-Concord	118	5,000
Courtyard by Marriott	123	2,799
<b>HICKORY</b>		
Gateway Hotel & Conference Center	109	15,000
Crowne Plaza Hotel	200	13,400
<b>ASHEVILLE</b>		
Omni Grove Park Inn Resort & Spa	513	55,000
Crowne Plaza Tennis & Golf Resort	302	34,000
Renaissance Asheville Hotel	271	21,000
DoubleTree by Hilton/Biltmore	195	12,000
Inn on Biltmore Estate	201	7,479
Holiday Inn Biltmore West	154	6,000
Grand Bohemian Hotel	104	5,600
Hilton Asheville Biltmore Park	165	4,500
Four Points by Sheraton	150	2,745

FUNCTION SPACE IS SHOWN IN SQUARE FEET



The Durham Performing Arts Center can accommodate groups of up to 2,000.

VENUE	GUEST ROOMS / FUNCTION SPACE	
<b>WINSTON-SALEM</b>		
Embassy Suites/Winston-Salem	146	55,000
Marriott Winston-Salem	315	15,000
Village Inn Event Center (Clemmons)	141	15,000
Winston-Salem Hotel & Spa	190	10,000
Hawthorne Inn & Conference Center	145	10,000
Kimpton Cardinal Hotel	174	6,400
DoubleTree by Hilton	150	6,000
<b>HIGH POINT</b>		
High Point Plaza Hotel & Conf. Center	252	12,500
<b>GREENSBORO</b>		
Sheraton Greensboro Hotel	1,000	250,000
Grandover Resort & Conf. Center	247	45,000
Greensboro Marriott Downtown	281	24,000
Embassy Suites Greensboro Airport	219	13,500
Proximity Hotel	147	7,300
O. Henry Hotel	131	5,000
<b>CHAPEL HILL</b>		
Sheraton Chapel Hill	168	16,000
Carolina Inn	184	13,000
The Siena Hotel	79	3,475
<b>DURHAM</b>		
Durham Marriott/Convention Center	190	119,463
Washington Duke Inn & Golf Club	271	52,415
Sheraton Imperial Hotel	331	48,031
Rizzo Conference Center	120	20,284
Millennium Hotel Durham	316	17,984
Radisson Hotel Research Triangle	198	11,284
Hilton/Raleigh-Durham Airport	249	10,928
21c Museum Hotel	125	10,500
Hilton Durham Near Duke University	194	9,633
DoubleTree Suites by Hilton	203	6,774
Marriott at Research Triangle Park	224	5,174
Hilton Garden Inn/Durham Southpoint	150	4,855
R. David Thomas Executive Conf. Ctr.	113	4,813
<b>RALEIGH</b>		
Hilton/North Raleigh Midtown	338	30,000
Raleigh Marriott Crabtree Valley	375	21,341
Sheraton Raleigh Hotel	353	20,000
Embassy Suites/Research Triangle	273	20,000
DoubleTree by Hilton/Brownstone Univ.	190	15,000
Raleigh Marriott City Center	400	14,900

FUNCTION SPACE IS SHOWN IN SQUARE FEET

space. Biltmore Village continues to grow as well, with the Village Hotel on Biltmore Estate opening a little more than a year ago and two more properties scheduled to open this year that will add 100 more rooms. The Crowne Plaza Tennis & Golf Resort completed a multimillion-dollar renovation last year that transformed the public space, including the Overlook Restaurant.

Large venues for groups include the 80,000-square-foot U.S. Cellular Center and the 10,000-square-foot Asheville Event Center. More unique sites for gatherings include the Highland Brewing Company, which offers bi-level interior event space and a rooftop bar with views of the Blue Ridge Mountains and Catawba Brewing’s 5,400 square feet of space in the South Slope brewing district.

### THE CENTRAL PIEDMONT: CENTERS OF COMMERCE

In downtown **Winston-Salem**, the 100,000-square-foot Benton Convention Center is in the final stages of a multimillion-dollar renovation. Upon its expected completion in May 2017 the center will offer more open, flexible meeting space, windows and skylights; an expanded front façade; and architectural nods to the city’s arts, tobacco and textile roots. The facility has remained open throughout the project. Also downtown is the 17,500-seat Bowman Gray Stadium, NASCAR’s longest-running weekly racetrack, and the Millennium Center, which can host up to 600.

New hotels include the Kimpton Cardinal Hotel, which opened last year with 174 guest rooms and more than 6,300 square feet of meeting space. At the 70-acre Winston-Salem Fairgrounds, venues include the Annex, the Education Building, the Home & Garden Building and a 5,000-seat grandstand. Also nearby is the 15,000-seat Lawrence Joel Veterans Memorial Coliseum, now operated by Wake Forest University.

Other popular options are the historic Graylyn International Conference Center, set on 55 acres, with overnight

accommodations and 25,000 square feet of meeting space, and WinMock at Kinderton, located southwest of town in **Bermuda Run**, with more than a dozen distinct event venues, the largest a former hayloft with arched ceilings and space for up to 450.

Winston-Salem has hosted the annual NC Choices Carolina Meat Conference since 2012, and Sarah Blacklin, its program director, has been very pleased with the partnership. “Working with Visit Winston-Salem made the whole experience so easy,” she said. “We were able to find a beautiful and unique historic venue that perfectly suited our needs at the downtown Millennium Center. Participants could easily walk from the hotel to the conference and hit up many local downtown businesses along the way. Winston-Salem has a lot going on, and is our city of choice anytime we hold a conference.”

And for the annual conference of the North Carolina Music Educators Association, executive director Pat Hall likes the neoclassical, 1,364-seat Stevens Center, which it uses in addition to the convention center and local hotels. “In addition to three and a half days of professional-development clinics and sessions, we present more than 20 concerts,” Hall said. “The proximity of a beautiful, historic performance space—the Stevens Center—is one reason we keep coming back.” The city will host the 2017 Convention of Association Executives of North Carolina this July.

**Chapel Hill** is home to the main campus of the University of North Carolina. Sports are big here and so members might be excited to attend an event within the 21,750-seat Dean Smith Center, where Tar Heels basketball takes place. Other campus options include the 44,640-square-foot Memorial Hall, with 1,434 seats; the Carolina Club, an alumni center with gathering space for up to 1,000; the William & Ida Friday Center for Continuing Education, with 12,000 square feet of space; and, just minutes from campus, the Rizzo Conference Cen-

ter, with 20,000 square feet of space and overnight accommodations. Planners who want to book a green conference can do so at the 29,000-square-foot Education Center at the North Carolina Botanical Garden, the state's first platinum LEED-certified public building.

And in hotel news, the 110-room Southern Village Hyatt Place Hotel is expected to open this spring with 1,700 square feet of meeting space. Groups that have held meetings in Chapel Hill in the past few years include the North Carolina Academy of Sleep Medicine and the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners.

Twelve miles northeast, in **Durham**, the 10,000-seat Durham Bulls Athletic Park has wrapped up a \$19 million renovation and is available for events. The facility is adjacent to the Durham Performing Arts Center, which can accommodate up to 2,000 people, and is less than a mile from the 120,000-square-foot Durham Convention Center Complex. The complex is home to a renovated convention center with more than 33,000 square feet of event space; the Durham Armory, which can host up to 550; the historic Durham Arts Council building, with nine spaces, the largest of which is a 200-seat performance hall; and the 1,032-seat Carolina Theatre. New to downtown is the 125-room 21c Museum Hotel, with 10,500 square feet of exhibition space and more than 100 pieces of artwork. North of downtown, the Museum of Life & Science has varied event space and boasts the largest butterfly house east of the Mississippi River.

In the state capital of **Raleigh**, 10 universities and colleges provide event spaces for meetings, receptions and special events. At North Carolina State, the McKimmon Conference & Training Center hosts an average of 2,000 events annually. The hub for most meetings is the 500,000-square-foot, silver LEED-certified Raleigh Convention Center. A few blocks away, the Duke Energy Center for the Performing Arts has more than a half-dozen venues including the



**The North Carolina State Capitol in Raleigh is a National Historic Landmark that offers educational programs and a range of special events including concerts and exhibitions.**

2,263-seat Memorial Auditorium. The 344-acre North Carolina State Fairgrounds features more than 400,000 square feet of space, the 19,722-seat PNC Arena welcomes groups when it's not hosting the NHL's Carolina Hurricanes, and the Walnut Creek Amphitheatre can accommodate upwards of 20,000.

On the top floors of the downtown Wells Fargo Capitol Center, the City Club completed a \$3 million renovation and now offers 23,000 square feet of gathering space. Down the street, the Marbles Kids Museum offers 39,000 square feet of space for functions as well as an IMAX theater for presentations. Both the North Carolina Museum of History and a nonprofit visual art center called Artspace welcome group events of up to 500, while the North Carolina Museum of Art offers space for up to 275. At the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, which houses the continent's largest cut emerald, planners can organize functions of up to 2,300.

All kinds of new and updated meeting hotels have improved options for groups. The Hilton Garden Inn/Raleigh-Crabtree Valley opened in 2015 next to the Crabtree Valley Mall with 149 guest rooms, a pool and 6,000 square feet of indoor-outdoor event space. Also near the mall, the Holiday

Inn/Raleigh completed an \$8 million guest-room and exterior renovation. And the Raleigh Marriott Crabtree Valley completed a \$37 million renovations and expansion that increased its meeting space to 20,000 square feet.

West of the city, in **Cary**, the five-star Umstead Hotel & Spa has completed renovations on its meeting spaces and conference center. The upgrade included a completely new AV system and a new high-tech meeting space called the Arbor Room.

Avid golfers will need no introduction to the Pinehurst-Southern Pines area, a perfect fit for groups looking to spend time on the links. The state's best-known golf courses with conference facilities are the Pine Needles Lodge & Golf Club and the Mid Pines Inn & Golf Club in **Southern Pines** and the 2,000-acre Pinehurst Resort in the village of **Pinehurst**. The 1920s-style Mid Pines offers 112 guest rooms, whereas the adjacent Pine Needles Lodge has 78 renovated guest rooms. Both share 26,800 square feet of conference space and two 18-hole courses designed by Donald Ross. The Pinehurst has numerous choices for indoor or outdoor events spread across its campus, including the stately Carolina Hotel, which can host functions of up to 1,300 people.



The county courthouse in Wilmington was featured on the TV show “Sleepy Hollow.”

VENUE	GUEST ROOMS / FUNCTION SPACE	
<b>RALEIGH</b>		
Umstead Hotel & Spa	150	10,200
Renaissance/North Hills	229	7,500
Hilton Garden Inn/Crabtree Valley	149	6,000
Clarion Hotel State Capital	202	4,700
Hilton Garden Inn/Cary	132	4,500
Holiday Inn/Raleigh North	128	3,643
<b>FAYETTEVILLE</b>		
Holiday Inn/Bordeaux	289	30,000
Clarion	169	17,000
Holiday Inn/I-95	198	15,000
Embassy Suites Fayetteville/Fort Bragg	165	12,000
<b>CHEROKEE</b>		
Harrah's Cherokee Casino & Hotel	567	15,000
<b>LAKE JUNALUSKA</b>		
Lake Junaluska Center	400	100,000
<b>PINEHURST/SOUTHERN PINES/ABERDEEN</b>		
Pinehurst Resort	416	64,410
Pine Needles Lodge & Golf Club	74	15,448
Little River Golf & Resort	128	8,500
Country Club of Whispering Pines	41	7,342
Days Inn/Southern Pines-Pinehurst	120	5,809
Mid Pines Inn & Golf Club	103	4,955
<b>NEW BERN</b>		
Hilton/New Bern Riverfront	171	11,000
BridgePointe Hotel & Marina	116	5,000
Days Inn/Historic New Bern	109	4,000
<b>ATLANTIC BEACH</b>		
DoubleTree by Hilton/Oceanfront	200	10,000
<b>WILMINGTON &amp; THE BEACHES</b>		
Hilton Wilmington Riverside	260	20,000
Holiday Inn/Wrightsville Beach	184	10,530
Best Western Plus Coastline Inn	47	10,150
Blockade Runner Beach Resort	150	7,200
Shell Island Oceanfront Suites	169	6,000
Graystone Inn	9	6,000
Beau Rivage Resort & Golf Club	27	5,300
Holiday Inn Wilmington	124	5,000
Ramada Inn	99	3,580
<b>GREENVILLE</b>		
Hilton/Greenville	140	25,000
Holiday Inn/Greenville	170	8,300

FUNCTION SPACE IS SHOWN IN SQUARE FEET

The North Carolina Medical Society held successful meetings at the conference center of the Carolina Hotel, said Nancy Lowe, associate director, specialty society and meeting services. “The hotel staff, from sales to convention services to banquets to bell staff, is exceptional and truly focused on every event’s success,” she said. “Most of our groups take advantage of one or more of the resort’s nine golf courses.”

An 89-room TownePlace Suites, Marriott’s newest extended-stay prototype, opened last year in **Aberdeen**, six miles south of Pinehurst. From there it’s 50 miles south to **Lumberton**, where the Carolina Civic Center Historic Theater can seat up to 440 people. In nearby **Pembroke**, the Museum of the Southeast American Indian (formerly called the Native American Resource Center) can host up to 70 in its assembly room.

In the Cumberland County city of **Fayetteville**, the 100,000-square-foot Crown Complex is supported by more than 60 hotels with 6,500 guest rooms. Off-site facilities include the Cape Fear Botanical Garden, Fort Bragg and more than 500 diverse restaurants.

### COASTAL GETAWAYS: MAKING A SPLASH

Along the downtown Riverwalk in **Wilmington**, the silver LEED-certified Wilmington Convention Center offers 107,000 square feet of event space and features artwork reflecting the city’s long maritime history. Under construction in the convention center district is a 186-room Embassy Suites, which is scheduled to open in the spring with 6,600 square feet of meeting space.

Within walking distance of the convention center is the Cape Fear Community College Humanities & Fine Arts Center, which opened in October 2015. The Coastline Conference & Event Center offers 10,150 square feet of space.

Another new property downtown is the Port City Marina, where two restaurants opened last year as well as a 27,000-square-foot cement pier that will

be able to host events. At the University of North Carolina/Wilmington, more than 24,000 square feet of convention and exhibit space is available to planners. The New Hanover County Executive Development Center has more than 6,000 square feet of meeting space. Battleship North Carolina, now permanently berthed in the city, is available for tours or events. Organizations that have held meetings in Wilmington within the past year include the North Carolina Airports Association and the Structural Engineers of North Carolina.

Up the coast, in **Greenville**, the Greenville Convention Center features 87,500 square feet of space. The convention center’s 32-acre campus also includes three on-site hotels—a Hilton, Hampton Inn and Holiday Inn—with more than 400 combined guest rooms and suites. The Rock Springs Center just northwest of downtown offers indoor-outdoor space for up to 1,000. East Carolina University’s Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium seats 50,000, or groups that want to organize an outdoor event or team-building activity can utilize the ECU North Recreational Sports Complex, which has eight multipurpose fields and a fieldhouse, a beach and a lake for boating and a challenge course.

Uptown Greenville is a thriving area with restaurants, boutique shops, public art installations and a thriving craft-brew community. Groups that have enjoyed their time in the city of late include the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners, the North Carolina Recreation & Park Association and the North Carolina Association of Certified Public Accountants.

### SETTING STANDARDS

In North Carolina, there is a time and a place for business and pleasure, and the state’s convention and visitors bureaus make sure visiting associations get the best of both. New options and old favorites help create agendas that all attendees will appreciate and even come to expect on their next trip back. ■