

# Monterey Conference Center celebrates 30 years of service

A city's approach to urban revitalization generates millions in tax dollars and three decades of professional acclaim.



## The opening of the Monterey Conference Center,

on April 30, 1977, was a creative but contentious step taken by a town known for sardine canning—not convention services.

"Monterey's 1970s leaders took a chance, believing that tourism would become a driving force after the fishing industry had diminished," says Monterey Mayor Chuck Della Sala. "We are fortunate that they were so forward-thinking."

In 2007, as the Monterey Conference Center commemorates its 30th anniversary, the city's decision continues to pay dividends. Serving more than 275 conference groups each year, the Center hosts guests that contribute to Monterey's \$14.2 million in annual room tax revenue. The Center has also spurred convention tourism countywide, with an estimated 1.3 million business travelers now heading to Monterey County annually, according to the State of California.

The cumulative financial impact is invaluable, and just part of the payoff, asserts Monterey Conference Center Manager Dan Concepcion.

"The Monterey Conference Center is a catalyst for tax revenue in the city, and the benefits reach throughout this region," he says. "At the same time, the conventions and events held here bring a great cultural vitality to our community."

In conjunction with its 30th anniversary, the Monterey Conference Center redesigned its Web site, [www.montereyconferencecenter.com](http://www.montereyconferencecenter.com). An improved site structure makes information easier to find, and an interactive, real-time calendar lists current meetings and available meeting spaces. Users can also access three-dimensional views of meeting rooms with a new virtual tour feature.

### **Innovative Economic Development**

The city of Monterey first discussed construction of a conference center around 1970, amidst a lengthy downtown urban renewal project, remembers former two-term Monterey mayor and past city council member Peter Coniglio. Previous site options included a collection of waterfront boutiques and a four-story J.C. Penney store. After assorted proposals and broken development deals, however, council members decided a conference center anchored by a major hotel would bring more visitors to the business district. "It was controversial in our little fishing village," says Coniglio, "but the city was struggling, financially, and this was a necessity."

Despite skepticism from local residents and a range of zoning conditions, the plan moved forward. Because the project was located in a National Historic Landmark area, it required approval from state and regional coastal commissions, the California State Historic Preservation Officer and the U.S. Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. The final plans also called for twelve separate contractors to complete the complex.

In January 1975, after five years of preparation, the city broke ground on the Monterey Conference Center. Construction cost \$8 million, financed by a bond issue, general revenue sharing funds and room tax dollars. Innovative solutions kept the project's scope to a minimum while maximizing available space. The adjacent Portola Plaza Hotel (previously the Doubletree Hotel) and the Center share a ballroom.



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## Creative Partnerships

Creativity also figures into promotion of the Monterey Conference Center. To attract larger convention groups to the city, several entities recently formed an inventive informal partnership. The Monterey Meeting Connection links the Monterey Conference Center with its three closest hotels: Monterey Marriott, Portola Plaza Hotel and Hotel Pacific. Together, the Connection partners offer more than 800 guest rooms and some 61,000 feet of meeting space.

"Working together as the Monterey Meeting Connection, we offer the amenities and space of a larger convention complex while retaining the charm and service of smaller properties," says Concepcion. "The concept has been successful, and we feel it could be a model for other centers."

## Three Decades of Success

Three decades after welcoming its first guests, the Monterey Conference Center continues to be recognized for superior service and distinctive facilities. The Center received the MeetingNews Planners' Choice award in both 2005 and 2006, after 50,000 meeting, convention and incentive travel planners listed it among the country's best facilities. In 2002 and 2003, Successful Meetings awarded the Center its esteemed Pinnacle Award, also based on input from professional planners.

Today, more than 320,000 annual guests attend conventions, board retreats and community events at the Monterey Conference Center. Among the most high profile are the invitation-only TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) Conference, which draws 1,000 world leaders, thinkers and celebrities, and the Monterey Sports & Classic Car Auction, an R&M Auctions event held each August. The Leon Panetta Lecture Series has featured former President Bill Clinton, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and a host of senators and congressional members. First Night Monterey, a family-friendly New Year's Eve celebration featuring local artists and musicians, is also held in the Center every year on December 31.

"Events like the State Bar of California convention, TED conference and Panetta Lecture series bring Monterey into the national spotlight," says Mayor Della Sala. "Guests come to the Center from all over the world, bringing perspectives that enrich our residents' lives."



## About the Monterey Conference Center

Since 1977, the Monterey Conference Center has welcomed conventions, meetings and events with exceptional service and facilities. Adjacent to the spectacular Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, the Center's three levels house a 19,600 square foot exhibit hall, grand ballroom, 494-seat theater and executive boardroom. Contemporary galleries, terraces and banquet facilities accommodate small and large groups of up to 1,700. And, from coordination to catering to setup and technical support, the Center's professional staff ensure flawless, memorable events. The Monterey Conference Center is located in historic downtown Monterey, just minutes from the Monterey Peninsula Airport and steps from leading hotels, restaurants and attractions.