

SOUND OFF

Hospitality leaders discuss the industry's challenges and potential for growth



Robert S. Cole

Title, company: President and CEO, Hospitality Ventures Management Inc.

No. 1 challenge: The economy.

Major impediments: Atlanta's growing infrastructure and transportation is an issue, but no more so than in older cities such as Boston, Washington and New York.

Looking forward: In 2008 there are three major events we feel will have positive impact: "The Atlanta International Gift and Home Furnishings Market" (estimated direct economic impact of \$94,970,000); "International Woodworking and Furniture Supply Fair" (estimated direct economic impact of \$45,130,000); and "American Academy of Ophthalmology Annual National Convention" (estimated direct economic impact of \$26,860,000).



Annette Cone-Skelton

Title, company: Co-founder and CEO, Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia (MOCA GA)

No. 1 challenge: Because of the abundant number of institutions that do exist, publicizing information ... regarding upcoming events and activities that are culturally unique to Atlanta can be challenging.

Major impediments: Atlanta lacks an arts district where multiple destinations are concentrated. This fact, compounded with the lack of an efficient public transportation system, can leave local residents and visitors unaware of or unable to locate and get to our exciting venues.

Looking forward: The King Tut exhibit in November 2008 ... will bring more people and from further distances.



Gary Froeba

Title, company: Regional vice president, Omni Hotel at CNN Center

No. 1 challenge: General economic conditions and rising fuel costs are presenting serious challenges for Atlanta's hospitality community.

Major impediments: Metro Atlanta's current population of 5.3 million residents is projected to almost double by 2030. Both the public and private sectors must continue to give water and public transportation issues serious attention ... without compromising the experience for our leisure travelers and convention attendees.

Looking forward: The inaugural Chick-fil-A Bowl Kickoff Classic, scheduled for Aug. 30, is certain to bring thousands of new visitors to Atlanta.



Stanford G. Wilson

Title, company: Managing partner and member of the Hospitality Law Practice Group, Earbee, Thompson, Sapp & Wilson LLP

No. 1 challenge: Aside from issues such as heightened enforcement of immigration and disability access laws, the recession poses the greatest challenge to Atlanta's hospitality industry.

Major impediments: Atlanta has many unique neighborhoods and interesting venues, but the lack of an extensive public transportation system creates enduring problems.

Looking forward: The recession. Fuel prices impact both air and automobile travel, which reduces hotel patronage. Rising fuel costs also translate into higher food costs, which are passed to restaurant patrons.

1. What's the No. 1 challenge facing Atlanta's hospitality industry?
2. To what degree do Atlanta's growing infrastructure and transportation issues serve as major impediments to the continued growth of the hospitality sector here?
3. Looking forward, what major event the rest of this year do you anticipate having the most impact — positive or negative — on Atlanta's hospitality industry? How?