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**September 11, 2020 Contact: Wendy W. Kavanagh, CAE**

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**GSAE SUPPORTS COMMUNITY & SAFETY AT ITS 2020 ANNUAL MEETING**

Savannah, Ga. - Approximately 113 GSAE members, speakers, and guests attended the 2020 Georgia Society of Association Executives Annual Meeting, August 26-28, at the Hyatt Regency Savannah in Savannah, Georgia. The theme of this year’s event was “Connect. Advance. Achieve.” GSAE incorporated several safety and health initiatives to conduct a successful in-person event.

**Safe Meeting Initiatives**

As part of this year’s Annual Meeting, GSAE adopted several “safe meeting” initiatives to provide a model for future in-person meetings in the Southeast.

* Signage throughout the space, outlining Georgia Governor Kemp’s Executive Orders, physical-distancing requirements, and mandatory mask usage. Temperature checks were offered daily.
* Resources provided to attendees and guests included:
	+ COVID-19 self-assessment test for each day of the convention
	+ CDC Guidelines
	+ Executive Orders regarding conventions
	+ Safety procedures from both the Hyatt Regency Savannah and GSAE
	+ Hyatt Regency Savannah’s “Know Before You Go” flyer and hotel staff video, “Safety First, Wellbeing Always,” walking guests through their experience from hotel check in to check out.
	+ Articles on how to wear a mask properly and navigate public spaces
* Numerous safety protocols were communicated to all attendees via email, GSAE’s website, videos, and the event app, including new procedures implemented by the Hyatt Regency Savannah (elevator capacity, cleaning protocols, electronic check in and parking, plus updated food and beverage options).
* Meeting rooms were set to less than 25% capacity with physically distanced space between each attendee and the speakers.
	+ Crescents of four forward-facing chairs or
	+ 6-foot tables with a chair on either end
	+ Thorough room cleaning between each session
* Audio visual equipment was disinfected between each speaker
* Breakout rooms also had microphones to ensure safe presentation delivery.
* Meals: food and beverage service offered cafeteria-style with plastic partitions, masked and gloved attendants, and physically distant line service.
	+ Multiple food and beverage stations provided with the same food options
	+ Service lines were color-coded by corresponding table linens with staff to direct lines
	+ Coffee service manned by hotel staff
* Sessions were released one by one to limit crowding
* All break service was “grab and go” in individually packaged options
* Meeting registration was self-service with volunteers pointing out, but not handling, name badges, one-stop swag bags, and raffle tickets
* Sponsor and exhibitor tables were paperless, as were all breakout sessions
* Silent auction bidding was mobile for the first time. Attendees could also use mobile payments for the Pay the Pig raffle.
* 111 meeting attendees and GSAE members responded to GSAE’s In-Person Meeting Pulse Survey. The 13-page report was distributed September 5.
* GSAE staff distributed a 2020 GSAE Annual Meeting Health & Happiness survey to all meeting attendees. No attendees have reported known symptoms or positive diagnoses as of press time.

**Pay the Pig Raffle**

GSAE attendees, members and the City of Savannah hospitality community raised over $6,500 to benefit the United Way of the Coastal Empire. Thanks to Visit Savannah and the following industry partners, GSAE has contributed over $18,500 to local host communities since the program’s inception in 2015: Perry Lane Hotel, JW Marriott Savannah Plant Riverside District, Hyatt Regency Savannah, The Westin Savannah Harbor Golf Resort & Spa, Savannah Riverfront Marriott, Savannah Riverboat Company, Savannah Convention Center, The DeSoto Savannah, and Above & Beyond Limousine.

**Silent Auction and Other Highlights**

GSAE’s first mobile silent auction, sponsored by Expo Auctions, raised over $8,000 for GSAE’s educational programming. Several GSAE Foundation events raised $5,000 to support internship grants. Receptions included a Visit Savannah-sponsored picnic experience at The Metal Building at the Trustees Garden and a re-creation of a Savannah square in the Harborside Ballroom, sponsored by the Hyatt Regency Savannah. Leadership keynotes were offered by Gabriel Eckert, FASAE, CAE, Jeff Cobb, and Nishant Mehta. Mayor Van Johnson, City of Savannah, and Joseph Marinelli, President, Visit Savannah, welcomed attendees and guests at the opening session.

The 2021 GSAE Annual Meeting, June 2-4, will be held at The Read House in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

GSAE, the second oldest society of association executives in the country, was formed in 1917. GSAE has grown to a thriving organization of over 560 association executives representing national, regional, state, and local associations in Georgia and of suppliers of association products and services. The mission of GSAE is to advance the profession of association management and to enhance the professionalism of association executives.

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