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2010 Cheers Beverage Conference

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More than 500 drinks industry professionals convened in Miami for the *Cheers* conference, held at the Hyatt Regency in Miami Beach from January 25 to 26th. The two-day annual gathering was heralded by many attendees as being more insightful, information-packed and operator focused than ever before thanks a new direction and insight provided by the *Cheers*' editorial advisory board. According to Uno's corporate beverage manager Marc Sachs the event "is truly becoming a national beverage symposium for the interchange of essential ideas and trends for chain operators."

The conference was kicked off by a brainstorming session of the magazine's editorial board and a sneak peak at some surprising research and a few delicious cocktails shaken and stirred by mixologists Kathy Casey and Modern Mixologist Tony Abou-Ganim.

The first day of the conference opened with a set of round robin discussions. Moderated by a handful of top operators, mixologists and consultants, such as Morton's Tylor Field III and Nacional 27's Adam Seger, the intimate discussions addressed a variety of topics. The half hour segments covered topics that ranged from non-alcoholic drink mixology and using consultants effectively to finding value wines. Each segment was repeated three times allowing a wide swath of attendees to share knowledge and ideas in a low-key, interactive setting.

The afternoon continued with an insightful drinks presentation on millennial consumers given by Dennis Lombardi and Michelle Fenstermaker of WD Partners. The duo confirmed that the large and diverse demographic is incredibly web savvy and a solid supporter of the bar and restaurant business. The research was followed by a keynote speech from restaurateur Cameron Mitchell, who shared his philosophy of putting his guests' needs first and discussed the importance of providing different bar experiences within the same restaurant concept.

These speakers were followed by a series of interactive seminars focused on how to optimize relationships in the hospitality industry, drink trends and insight on what may be in store for the hospitality business in the future. The afternoon's highlights included *Cheers*' inaugural hotel panel, which zeroed in on how chain operators can benefit from savvy hotel beverage programs. The seminars also featured interactive beer, bitters and forgotten gin cocktails tastings. One of the final panels of the day focused on the rarely addressed issue of optimizing the operator-wholesaler relationship and featured thought-provoking, interactive question building sessions and segued into a wrap-up panel discussion. The evening's reception fêted the five 2010 Rising Star bartenders and offered attendees ample time to taste their sensational cocktails. This year's all-star bartender lineup included Scott Beattie, Jamie Boudreau, Tad Carucci, Todd Thrasher and Phil Ward.

The second day of the *Cheers* conference was kicked off by keynote speaker Danny Meyer of New York's Union Square Hospitality Group. Meyer eloquently illuminated the essential difference between providing service and genuine hospitality and how he has used the later to build his diverse and beloved New York restaurant group. After Meyer's speech, the Cheers Beverage Excellence Awards were presented to 11 outstanding operators and two dynamic individuals for their unique achievements in the tough economic climate of 2009.

This year's award winners were Ruby Tuesday, The Phoenician, Bellagio Las Vegas, Ram International, Cheeseburger in Paradise, Bar Louie, Loews Hotels, Hard Rock Café, InterContinental Hotels Group, O'Charleys Inc., Hilton, Danny Meyer of the Union Square Hospitality Group and Thomas "Mac" Gregory of The Phoenician. Sponsors of the Beverage Excellent Awards included American Beverage Marketers Inc., Anheuser-Busch Inc., Beam Global Spirits & Wine Inc., Diageo, Island Oasis, Monin Gourmet Flavorings and Pernod Ricard USA.

During lunch some innovative alcoholic-free cocktails were sampled along with products from Diamond Sponsor Coca Cola, after which *Cheers* conference attendees then headed into a second session of panels. Topics included an exclusive data and trend presentation from BIG's Eric Schmidt and Tiziana Mohorovic, a premier on responsible



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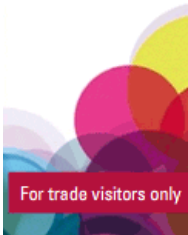
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service from hospitality attorney Stephen Barth and a new look at esoteric wines presented by Master of Wine and Master Sommelier Doug Frost.

The evening wrapped up with gala reception featuring more than 70 cocktails, classified in categories such as Green with Envy and Fruit Bomb. Celebrity mixologists like King Cocktail Dale DeGroof and Francesco LaFranconi from Southern Wine & Spirits were also on hand to shake up their custom-made drink specialties.

Sachs comments that "The conference was more honest, responsive and focused on operators' needs than ever before." And Tammy LaNasa, corporate beverage director at Del Frisco's, adds that she "enjoyed the conference very much. The roundtables were tremendously successful. I learned a lot and felt like I learned more than I contributed. It was much more applicable to operators' needs. Some of the ideas I came away with were very helpful and I got a lot of work done."

Other conference sponsors included Anheuser-Busch, Bacardi, Banfi Vintners, Barsol Pisco, Beam Global Spirits & Wine Inc., Berry Up!, Brown-Forman, Cabana Cachaça, The Charmer-Sunbelt Group, Coco López, Crown Imports, Daily's, DFV Wines, Diageo, Domaine de Canton, Don Sebastiani & Sons, E. & J. Gallo Winery, Finest Call, Foster's Group, Hamilton Beach, Heaven Hill Distilleries Inc., Heineken USA Inc., The Hess Collection, Ice Caters.com, iMi Agency, Imperial Brands, Infinium Spirits, Island Oasis, Jus-Made, Kerry, Layer Cake Wines, MillerCoors, Moët Hennessy USA, Mondovino, Monin Gourmet Flavorings, Ocean Spray, The Patrón Spirits Company, Pernod-Ricard USA, Phillips Distilling Company, Progressive Specialty Glass Company, Inc., Proximo Spirits, Purity Vodka, Red Bull, Rémy Cointreau USA, Republic National Distributing Company, ServSafe Alcohol, Shaw-Ross International Importers, Samuel Adams, Sidney Frank Importing Company, Inc., Skyy Spirits, LLC, Smart Space Products, Ste. Michelle Wine Estates, Steelite International, Sucessbar Systems USA Corporation, Tito's Handmade Vodka, Torani, Total Beverage Solution, Trellis Wine Group, Van Gogh Imports, Wente Vineyards, White Rock Distilleries, William Grant & Sons, Ltd. and Zonin U.S.A. Inc.

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