

## **MUSIC CITY MEETING**

*Plans for this year's NGAUS Conference include plenty of the notes that make the host city famous*

***By Richard Arnold  
March 2009***

The three spacious atriums of Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center in Nashville, Tenn., offer visitors the look and feel of several destinations rolled into one.

Cascades, Delta and the Garden Conservatory are uniquely designed halls all found under one very large roof. Each features lavish indoor gardens and waterways. And they all connect to the resort's extensive meeting areas.

Attendees at the 131st NGAUS General Conference and Exhibition will have a firsthand look at the sprawling facility, the largest non-casino hotel in the United States with nearly 3,000 rooms and plenty of eateries, drinking holes and shops.

"You're going to be amazed," says retired Col. Don Deering, the Tennessee National Guard's conference chairman.

You also might spend days without ever venturing outside.

But the hotel is only the first thing that will amaze when the conference returns to Nashville for the first time since 1986. There's a reason Nashville is known the world over as Music City. This year's conference schedule reflects that reputation, starting off with an opening-ceremony appearance by Charlie Daniels and ending with an evening at the Grand Ole Opry, the show that made country music famous.

Continuing the music theme, the Tennessee Guard will showcase its bands at several events. The 129th Army Band and the Band of the Smoky Mountains (the 572nd Air Force Band) each will perform as full units and break out into jazz, country and Dixieland ensembles.

And downtown is full of clubs that offer a chance to hear established musicians or some of tomorrow's stars. One such place is the Wild Horse Saloon, the site of this year's Company Grade/Warrant Officer Mixer, which welcomes more than 1.5 million patrons a year for live music and dancing.

The city's moniker can be traced back to 1824 when Nashville became home to a vibrant music publishing industry. In 1925, the Grand Ole Opry was established at the Ryman Auditorium. It moved from the Ryman to the Gaylord complex in 1974.

Today, the Music City Walk of Fame honors some of entertainment's most celebrated musicians—Reba McEntire, Emmylou Harris, the Fisk Jubilee Singers, John Hiatt, Jimi Hendrix and many more.

RCA's historic Studio B has hosted both Waylon and Willie, and the city boasts the Grammy-winning Nashville Symphony.

Country music fans can't miss the Country Music Hall of Fame and the Ryman, a National Historic Landmark. Several dinner theaters, cafés and bars also provide live music and shows on "Honky Tonk Highway," the clubs of Lower Broadway.

All of this should put this year's NGAUS conference on the calendar of any music lover.

## **GETTING TO NASHVILLE**

Some NGAUS members will arrive at Nashville International Airport (BNA), which is a 10-minute drive from the convention center and served by 17 airlines. All military aircraft also arrive at the airport, home of the Guard's 118th Airlift Wing.

A 5 percent discount has been established with American Airlines and Enterprise Rent-A-Car. Flight reservations can be booked by calling 1-800-433-1790 using Promotion Code A8799AA. Rental car packages can be reserved by calling 1-800-736-8222 using Promotion Code 56MNE55.

Although ground transportation to the hotels will be provided by the host state (from two days before the conference until the day after), taxis are also an option from the airport. There is a flat-fare triangle between the airport, downtown and Opryland. Between any two points in the triangle, the fare is \$25 for up to four passengers.

But Nashville is only a day's drive from two-thirds of the U.S. population, so many attendees may arrive by car. Three major interstates converge in downtown Nashville, which is 15 minutes from Opryland. Parking at the convention center will be discounted to \$12 a day for conference attendees.

With more than 2,800 rooms available at Opryland, all the attendees and exhibitors will be staying at the same place. In fact, the trade show and just about every business and social event will be held at Opryland.

Conference attendees also won't have to leave the premises to enjoy fine dining, cocktails or shopping. Cascades Seafood Restaurant and the Old Hickory Steakhouse are both award-winning establishments.

Grab a drink at the Jack Daniel's Saloon or Findley's Irish Pub. Take in a game at Rusty's Sports Bar. Fuse is a Vegas-style nightclub great for socializing. Relax at the Relache Spa or enjoy the many shops throughout Opryland.

Across the street from Opryland is Opry Mills, an outlet mall with more than 200 recognized retailers, including Bass Pro Shops and Saks Off 5th. Several chain restaurants, such as Chili's, Dave & Buster's and TGI Friday's, and a large food court are also there.

## **PACKED AGENDA**

A full business schedule, as usual, is planned for the conference, with defense leaders and Guard officials expected to speak at various times.

The Sponsors' Golf Tournament Sept. 9 and the NGAUS tournament the next day are both set for the

Hermitage Golf Course.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony at 4 p.m., Sept. 10 opens the trade show at the Ryman Exhibit Hall in the hotel's convention center. It will be followed by a reception for all attendees.

Other events set for that evening include the Adjutants General Reception in the convention center, followed by the Adjutants General dinner on the *General Jackson*, the nation's largest paddlewheel riverboat. The four-hour dinner excursion cruises the Cumberland River.

Western wear—blue jeans and cowboy hats—is the suggested attire for most social events.

“Leave your combat boots and bring your cowboy boots,” says Deering.

The entire Wild Horse Saloon has been reserved for the Company Grade/Warrant Officer Mixer on Sept. 10, with plenty of food, drink and in-house entertainment. Nashville's ultimate party destination for 15 years, the three-story converted warehouse offers 66,000 square feet for fun, with a 2,500-square-foot dance floor and the largest big-screen TV in town.

The doors open to other conference attendees at 11 p.m. Transportation will be provided. This is the place to be in Nashville and a sure bet to wear out your dancing boots.

Hopefully, runners will save their energy for the 5K Fun Run set for 6:30 a.m., Sept. 11. The flat course will take runners along roads and trails on the sprawling Opryland property.

“We could do it inside of the hotel,” Deering jokes.

The annual area meetings and caucuses will begin promptly at 9 a.m., Sept. 11, followed by brunch and the First Business Session. Daniels will highlight the opening ceremonies with his relentless fiddle play. The Roll Call of States also will take place at this time.

The Governor's Reception is scheduled to take place in the exhibit hall Sept. 11.

“We thought this would be a good way to familiarize our attendees with the exhibits,” says Deering.

Expect the same abundant food, drink and entertainment as previous Governor's Receptions. Only this year the big party will be in the trade show floor and within walking distance of your hotel room.

The popular cyber-café also will be set up in the exhibit hall.

A spouses luncheon is scheduled during the Second Business Session on Sept. 12. Hospitality Night will be held in several suites around Opryland that night. Deering says the states are very enthusiastic about participating this year and he predicts big crowds since attendees won't have to wait for shuttles to hop from hotel to hotel.

Separate worship services for Catholics and Protestants are set for 7 a.m., Sept. 13.

The Army and Air separate sessions are scheduled for 8 a.m., Sept. 13. The last of the three business sessions will follow after lunch in exhibit hall.

As always, the conference will close with its annual States Dinner, but the fun begins earlier this year. The reception kicks off at 5 p.m. and dinner will be served at 6:30 p.m. The party will continue afterwards at the Grand Ole Opry for some of the country's finest entertainment. Performers will be announced at a later date. Western wear is the recommended attire for the entire evening.

Special room rates at Opryland will be extended to three days before and after the conference to encourage longer stays. This gives attendees more time to explore the greater Nashville area.

Whatever you choose, Nashville is sure to keep your feet moving.

"We are planning what we think is going to be the largest conference ever," says Deering.

And remember, in Nashville, the music never stops.

---

## **Registration**

Conference registration is \$165. This covers ground transportation and admission to all business sessions, the exhibition, coffee breaks, the opening reception in the exhibition hall, the Company Grade/Warrant Officer Mixer, brunch in the exhibit hall Sept. 12, the Governor's Reception, lunch in exhibit hall Sept. 13, the States Dinner and the Grand Ole Opry following the dinner. Most other activities are extra. NGAUS members should register through their state associations. Exhibitors and industry reps must register at [www.ngaus-registration.com](http://www.ngaus-registration.com).

## **Flights**

American Airlines is offering a 5 percent discount on airfare to Nashville. The discount can be booked online at [www.aa.com](http://www.aa.com) or by calling (800) 433-1790 using Promotion Code A8799AA. Those wanting to use other airlines should consider [www.ngastravel.com](http://www.ngastravel.com), which shares profits with NGAUS and the state associations.

## **Hotel**

Gaylord Opryland Resort Hotel & Convention Center  
2800 Opryland Drive  
Nashville, TN 37214  
(888) 777-6779  
[www.gaylordopryland.com](http://www.gaylordopryland.com)