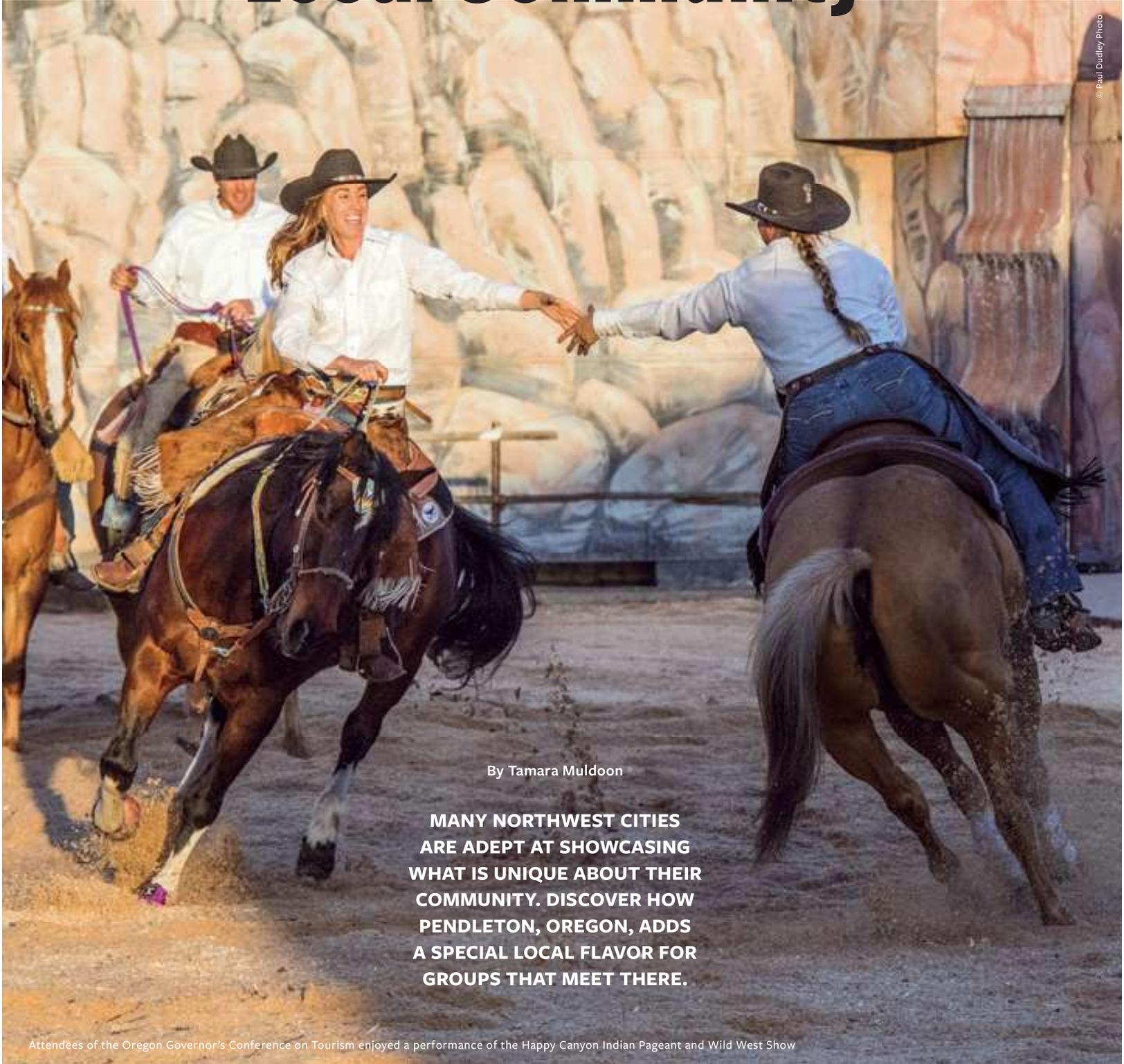


Pendleton Creates Special Events
**Connecting with the
Local Community**



© Paul Dudley Photo

By Tamara Muldoon

MANY NORTHWEST CITIES ARE ADEPT AT SHOWCASING WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT THEIR COMMUNITY. DISCOVER HOW PENDLETON, OREGON, ADDS A SPECIAL LOCAL FLAVOR FOR GROUPS THAT MEET THERE.

Attendees of the Oregon Governor's Conference on Tourism enjoyed a performance of the Happy Canyon Indian Pageant and Wild West Show

It takes more than just event space and hotel rooms for a community to excel at group meeting business. The most successful destinations have something extra—the ability to impart a unique identity to visitors. It is this sense of community, coupled with true hospitality, that attracts groups and keeps them returning again and again.

With deep rural eastern Oregon roots, Pendleton has earned a reputation as an exceptional group host. It's only three and half hours from the Northwest's large urban areas of Portland, Oregon, Seattle, Washington, Boise, Idaho, and Spokane, Washington. For a city of just 16,000 residents, Pendleton boasts a combined total of 1,200 lodging rooms.

Pat Beard, event recruiter for Travel Pendleton, explains, "Fortunately for a small town we have a large number of venues, everything from 10 person meetings and up. We have an incredible asset in the Pendleton Convention Center. There are lots of other towns of similar size that don't have the reputation, the cachet, of Pendleton."

He adds, "That has a lot to do with things like the Pendleton Roundup, the Pendleton Woolen Mills and Pendleton Whiskey—brands that carry Pendleton's reputation farther than it has the ability to do by itself. Our marquee event, one of those things that gives us our identity, is Pendleton Roundup. One hundred and seven years old, it brings somewhere north of 50,000 people to town for a week."

Pendleton's success is also demonstrated by newer events. Pendleton Whiskey Music Fest, in only its second year, features Maroon Five as its 2017 headline act and anticipates a sell-out crowd of 16,500. One of the west's largest motorcycle rallies, Pendleton Bike Week, drew more than 8,000 participants to the city in 2016.

"Atmosphere, facilities and willingness by city leadership to accommodate our needs," is what attracts Pendleton Bike Week organizer Eric Folkestad. "Motorcyclists are keen on local history and discovering America. Pendleton has a strong western history that appeals to riders from urban areas who are trying to escape the city," he adds.

"It's really come together well over the last three years," notes Folkestad. "Travel Pendleton has helped by connecting us with the local attractions that interest our riders, and the Roundup Association, Convention Center, and police department have been very helpful to us. We have grown many-fold because our riders get the VIP experience all the way. From the restaurants and hotels, to the gas stations and shops, our riders feel welcome and appreciated."

In 2016, Pendleton also hosted the Oregon Governor's Conference on Tourism. Kendra Perry of Travel Oregon (the state's destination marketing organization) planned the conference. "From the moment the conference began, attendees knew we were in Pendleton," she said. "The conference opened with a tribal blessing and flag ceremony that welcomed us to Umatilla Indian lands. They brought in tribal drummers. Local craft beer and wine were poured from the bar. Locally produced food was incorporated into every single conference meal whether it was huckleberries or local meats."

"The night-out event at Happy Canyon was all about the history and culture of Pendleton. Local restaurants catered for more than 500 attendees, which included serving specialty cocktails using Pendleton Whiskey. And then, attendees enjoyed a 20-minute version of the Happy Canyon Indian Pageant and Wild West Show, a live performance retelling of the story of the old West," Perry notes. "Because of the authentic experience brought out by the locals of Pendleton, the attendees are still talking about the conference today."

"Pendleton has so much to offer," claims Gail Nelson, executive director of Pendleton Chamber. "We have a beautiful historic downtown, great restaurants, cute boutique stores along with amazing handmade items." Hamley & Co. is the place to go for all things Western, from boots, hats and saddles, to jewelry and art. Other attractions include the Round-Up and Happy Canyon Hall of Fame, Heritage Station, showcasing local Umatilla County history, the original Pendleton Woolen Mills where you can go on



© Doug Coody



© Doug Coody



© Doug Coody

MPI Cascadia Educational Conference attendees enjoyed "campfires," mechanical bull riding and line dancing at this year's conference in Pendleton.

a tour to see how a blanket is made and Pendleton Underground, a guided tour of Pendleton's "Wild West" history.

Pendleton adjoins the Umatilla Indian Reservation, home of two popular visitor facilities: Tamastlikt Cultural Institute and Wildhorse Resort & Casino. Tamastlikt Cultural Institute tells the story of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation—past, present and future. Wildhorse Resort offers more than 14,000 square feet of conference space along with hotel rooms, restaurants, casino and golf course.

The Umatilla Tribe plays a major role in the local tourism industry. In addition to hosting visiting groups and conferences, Bobbie Conner, director of Tamastlikt, works extensively with government agencies and local tourism businesses to ensure that signs, brochures and other visitor information include accurate information about tribal history and culture.

"What I think makes this place unique is that the people who are from this country originally are still in this country. We may be living on a subset of our homeland, but we're still in our country. That makes it an opportunity for us to continue to welcome visitors just like we have for thousands of years," Conner says.

Meeting Professionals International held its regional Cascadia Educational Conference at Wildhorse in March 2017. Organizers selected Pendleton both for its value and for the opportunity to introduce more than 200 of its members to a



The Round-Up is Pendleton's signature annual event

location where the conference had not been held before. A tribal leader from the Umatilla Reservation opened the conference with a Native American prayer and explained its meaning. A panel of key Pendleton Round-up stakeholders shared knowledge gained from managing that iconic event. Menus

featured local fare, and attendees had a unique photo op, sitting atop live Pendleton Longhorn cattle during an evening "hoe-down" social.

Many other Northwest cities successfully showcase what is special about their community. Travel Oregon's Kendra Perry notes, "In Oregon, we

**Tillamook Coast
Oregon**

Meetings will never be boring on the Tillamook Coast
TillamookCoast.com/Meetings



Cascadia Educational Conference attendees also participated in a wine and chocolate tasting featuring local offerings.



do a really good job of capitalizing on community assets and culture. No matter where you go around the state you're going to get a different experience. We work really hard to highlight what that community has been built upon. Groups coming in or visitors that come to town can be immersed in the town's unique culture."

"Pendleton has an amazing volunteer culture that most likely stems from hosting the Round-Up for

over 100 years," adds Nelson. "They are used to 50,000 people showing up in Pendleton for Round-Up. So, when visitors show up for a conference or event, the locals welcome them to town."

Although Pendleton does not hold a monopoly on hospitality, it does serve as an example of what is possible when tourism stakeholders work together. "Be friendly and helpful. It will take a teamwork mentality and approach. Work together, refer each

other—don't look at the other guy as the competition. You all do well together," advises Nelson.

Beard adds, "Don't worry about what you don't have, look at what you do have. Small communities, rural communities, will never be gifted with large amounts of resources. Live on what you do have and live on enthusiasm and passion. Fall in love with your community. Find the things that are great about it, unique about it, that you can share, and sing it. Do not be afraid. Just rear back and run at it." **M**

make your next meeting
stress free

Meet in Juneau, Alaska



**TRAVEL
JUNEAU**

Call today for details on
planning your meeting in Juneau

907.586.1749
1.800.857.2201
traveljuneau.com

PHOTO: ANNA HOKE