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DESTINATION NORTH CAROLINA .....

# A BROADER APPEAL

Destinations raise their game and offer amenities to appeal to new audiences.

Art, wellness and special amenities that appeal to frequent business and leisure travelers — and local residents — are the leading trends in destination marketing, designed to attract a new range of clientele for high-end hotels, resorts and popular areas in North Carolina.

Wilmington and Beaches Convention and Visitors Bureau knows its region's success depends on cultivating visitors of the future while serving existing customers.

PROVIDED BY BLOCKADE RUNNER

Banking on the power of local influencers, the CVB has launched a digital Locals' Guide to showcase the best the area has to offer.

Through feature articles, blogs, videos, photos and interviews, dozens of notable local chefs, musicians, artists, brewers, surfers, entrepreneurs and others share what they love most about Wilmington and the area beaches.

In Cary, The Umstead Hotel and Spa, a luxury property nestled on 18 acres of forestland, has long been a favorite destination.

Inside its sumptuous interior, it is hard to imagine the 12-year-old hotel is just yards from Interstate 40 and a 20-minute ride into the hearts of both Raleigh and Durham.

The Umstead had been open for business for just two years when general manager Jim Beley arrived in 2009. He began rebranding the property as a haven for art, nature and wellness, evoking the vision of owners Jim and

Ann Goodnight, who built the hotel and spa just a stone's throw from SAS Institute, the software corporation Jim Goodnight co-founded.

Most of the art featured throughout the hotel's public areas is part of Ann Goodnight's personal collection, hand-picked for the hotel.

In a comfortable sitting room just off the hotel lobby, Beley points to a large work depicting a wooded scene, with trees showing off their skeleton branches, the ground dusted with snow. The painting is by Lynn Boggess, an impressionist painter from West Virginia and one of Goodnight's favorite artists.

In that same room, sitting front and center on a mound of brilliant green, live moss, is The Umstead's showpiece — a glorious blown-glass sculpture commissioned from artist Dale Chihuly.

The Umstead hosts artist receptions and arranges tours for the public, either self-guided or led by the hotel's art and design coordinator,

who also helps guests procure any art that is for sale in the gallery.

Art is also front and center at the newly renovated Grandover Resort, featuring a spa, 36 holes of golf, and 45,000 square feet of meeting space, which has made it a prime destination for conferences and conventions since it was built in 1999 by Joseph S. Koury. The Greensboro developer died a year before the Grandover opened for business.

"We have always focused on promoting our property and facilities to business and professional associations throughout the mid-Atlantic," says Christina York, director of sales and marketing.

When the recession of 2008 impacted conference business, the Grandover management team set its sights on leisure and business travelers, along with locals.

Last fall, the Koury Corp. invested \$10 million to renovate and re-brand the Grandover as a haven for local art,

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installing artifacts and museum pieces showcasing Greensboro's textile and furniture manufacturing.

"We have been very successful in impacting our new market," York says. "It was just a matter of re-branding ourselves."

The Grandover has repurposed its former business center into an art gallery off the lobby, complete with its own manager and a devoted clientele.

Over the last decade, the conference business has rebounded along with the economy. Still, The Grandover enjoys bustling commerce from independent travelers who visit on business and for weekend getaways. Local residents also have embraced The Grandover, often gathering in the gallery for cocktails, art and live music.

In addition to art, themes of wellness and physical fitness are parlayed into

incentives to hit the road and travel.

At The Umstead, an award-winning spa attracts pleasure seekers from near and far.

"Our spa has been highly successful from Day 1," Beley says. "But we also promote wellness outdoors on our grounds."

A four-acre natural lake is a focal point for The Umstead, visible from the patio and encircled by a quarter-mile walking path. The hotel also makes bicycles available to guests for riding on the grounds or to take a two-wheeled tour of William B. Umstead State Park, situated about a half-mile from the hotel.

The Umstead hired Alyssa Campo, a full-time farmer, to operate its One Oak Farm, a two-acre plot of land that grows produce for use in Herons, the hotel's five-star, five-diamond restaurant. Campo also works closely with spa director Carolyn Doe to grow herbs for use in treatment oils, creams and elixirs.

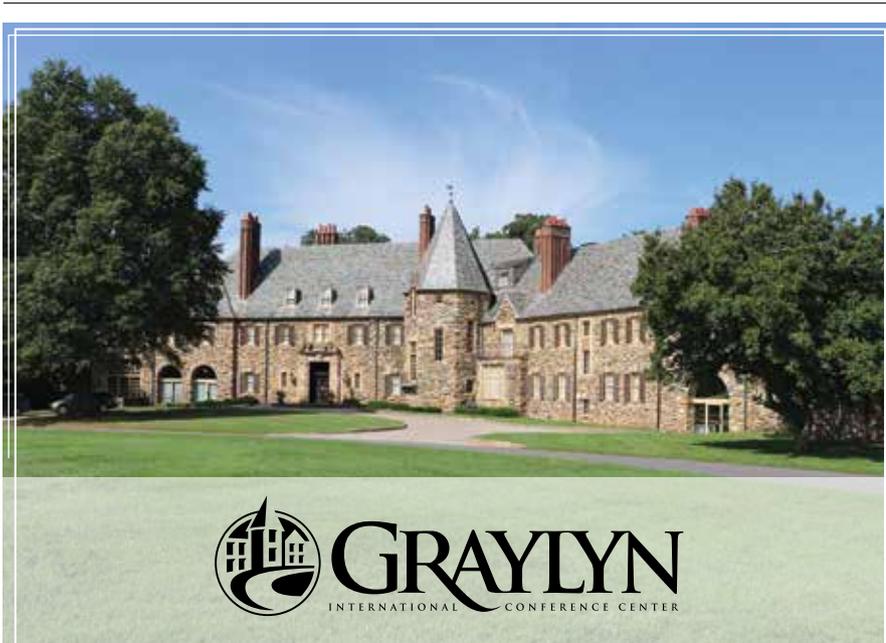
When it comes to staying fit while traveling, not all hotels and resorts are as well-equipped as The Umstead.

Ian Phillips of Chapel Hill discovered many hotel workout rooms did not meet his needs when he traveled two or three days a week in a previous career as director of development and acquisition for a real-estate development firm in Greensboro.

"I tried to work out in the hotel fitness facilities, but there was often not enough variety in the equipment," he says. "Many local, independent gyms offer day rates, but they can cost as much as \$30 per visit, and even if you have a particular gym membership, that gym might not have a facility in every location."

In 2017, he teamed up with his friend and college roommate Rob Gilliam and formed Localfit, a unique fitness club that caters exclusively to road warriors who want to maintain their health and fitness goals when traveling.

For a fee of \$15 a month, Localfit provides access to more than 5,000 health clubs and gyms across the nation. In just over a year since it launched, the program has gained about 1,000



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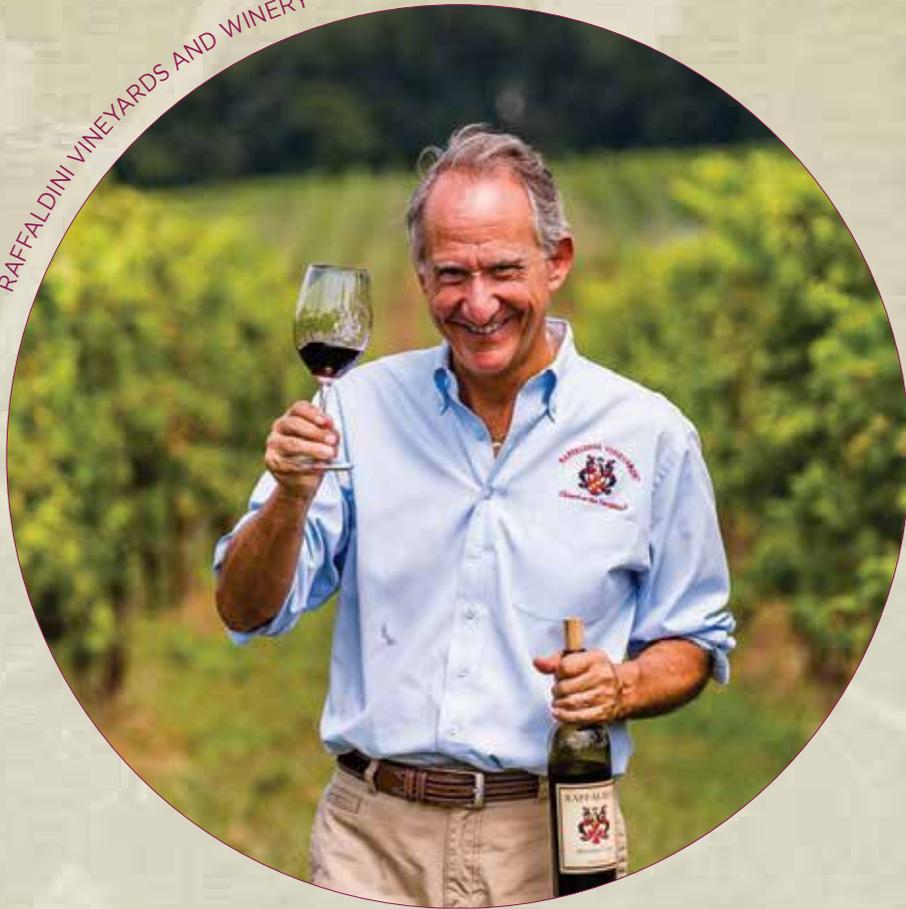
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members and is growing quickly.

Just as The Grandover's renovations pay homage to Greensboro's past, Pinehurst is fulfilling a multiyear plan to add throwback features to its famous golf courses and amenities to the resort itself.

Last fall, Pinehurst Resort opened a microbrewery in the long-abandoned Village Power House, a vintage steam plant used to power homes, hotels and cottages in the Village of Pinehurst until it closed in the 1990s. The bones of the structure remained standing, but most of the building had fallen into disrepair.

"The microbrewery is a concept we brought to life. We had been kicking the tires on the idea for several years," says Eric Kuester, vice president for sales and business development. "The property was for sale and we were trying to find a buyer for it, but nobody came to the table so we did it ourselves."

On Sept. 30, 2017, almost 120 years after golf first came to Pinehurst, the re-

sort opened The Cradle, a nine-hole, par three short course, just a few steps outside the clubhouse and near the exact spot where those first nine holes were carved into the sandy terrain in 1898. Its name pays homage to Pinehurst's longstanding recognition as "The Cradle of American Golf."

"We borrowed from our reputation as golf's birthplace," Kuester says. "It's fun to play, and even nongolfers enjoy trying it out."

The Graylyn International Conference Center in Winston-Salem is also banking on blending a rich history with modern amenities. Graylyn offers a modern boutique hotel with 85 unique guest rooms, 25,000 square feet of meeting space, beautiful backdrops for special events and 55 acres.

Graylyn, the historic residence of generous visionaries Bowman and Nathalie Lyons Gray, is now owned and operated by Wake Forest University and carries on the Gray family's dedication

to education, historic preservation and community service. Proceeds from the estate benefit local schools by giving students with developmental needs opportunities to explore careers in food and banquet services. Part of the estate is dedicated to the Children's Center of Winston-Salem, serving children with long-term chronic health impairments.

The annual Graylyn Scholarship provides an outstanding student with financial needs an opportunity to earn a degree from Wake Forest University.

From strolls down memory lane, to immersion in art and culture and opportunities to enjoy the great outdoors, destinations and resorts across North Carolina are going the extra mile to provide a variety of new experiences for clientele who have a hankering for something different, in far-flung places or right in their own backyard.

— Teri Saylor is a freelance writer from Raleigh.



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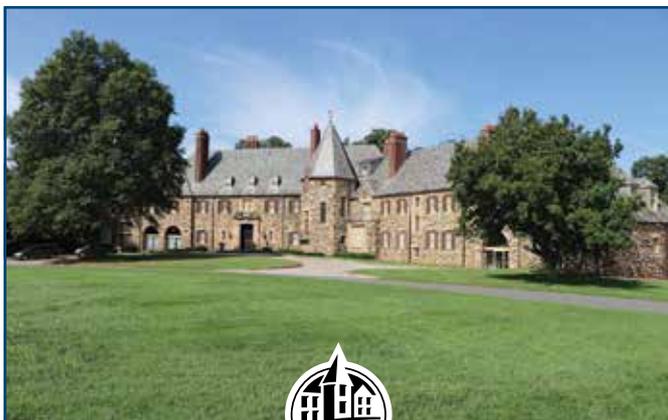
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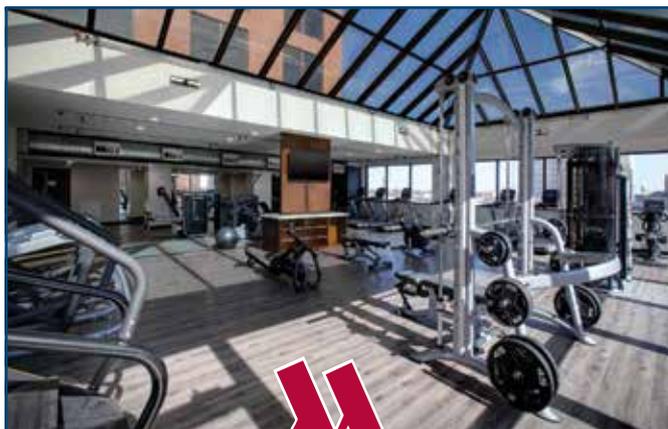
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