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2018 National Restaurant Association Restaurant, Hotel-Motel Show® Makes History Posting Record Exhibit Space for 4th Year in a Row

National Restaurant Association® also launches first-ever Restaurant Revenue Growth Conference



Energized industry leaders and newsmakers attended this year's Show

The 99th annual National Restaurant Association Restaurant, Hotel-Motel Show® was held at Chicago's McCormick Place from May 19-22. As the foodservice industry's largest and most comprehensive annual event worldwide, the Show brought together a wide range of industry sectors in one space.

At more than 715,000 square feet it was the largest Show ever, and once again welcomed more than 65,000 total registrants. Over 110 countries were represented at this year's Show as were all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

"This year's National Restaurant Association Show represented a dynamic portrayal of today's foodservice industry," said 2018 Show Convention Chair Dickie Brennan, owner and managing partner of Dickie Brennan & Company. "Exhibitors showcased innovative products and services aimed at solving the challenges facing operators today. With Fortune 500 exhibitors and those as small as a four-person startup all delivering critical solutions, the excitement was palpable throughout all four days."

"The Show added a number of features to educate and inspire attendees this year," said Brennan. "From opportunities for crowdsourced discussion, sessions on personal wellness, an insightful examination of the future of the restaurant industry, to a stadium-sized concert, the Association demonstrated its commitment to perpetual evolution."

“We have seen growth from key regions, both domestically and internationally,” said Mary Pat Heftman, National Restaurant Association Executive Vice President. “This year we had strong growth from some of the largest international attendee groups including a 16% increase from Mexico, 15% increase from Brazil, and 19% from Australia. Growth also came from all corners of the U.S., including 6% growth from Texas, 4% from New York, 5% from Florida, 2% from California, and a huge 17% jump from Massachusetts. That growth is a clear result of the quality we deliver year after year—the quality of the content, the quality of the exhibitors, and the quality of attendees—that all contribute to solutions and ideas that move their business ahead.

In addition, the Show boasted a robust international exhibitor presence, offering 24 international pavilions this year, with new exhibits added from Japan, France, Thailand, Scotland, Spain, and Greece to go along with stalwarts from Italy’s Bellavita Pavilion, China, Germany, Ecuador, and others. “No other Show delivers such a diverse set of products and exhibitors,” said Heftman.

“This year’s Show had a fantastic energy and vibrancy to it,” said Caitlin Rodgers, VP Marketing Communications and Services for Welbilt. “We were very pleased with our lead count, the high-quality of attendees, and the level of engagement we had with buyers across our 12 brands.”

“One of the main reasons that I always come to the National Restaurant Association Show is to get inspired by the people that come in from all over the world,” said Carrie Britton, owner of the Funky Door in Lubbock, Texas. “The Show always offers some new idea, some twist. Every time I come home I’ve got a huge list of all the new things that I learned. We’re about to build our second store. It’s awesome to hear about the people that have been in similar situations that have, you know, grown from one to now twenty stores.”

Thousands of chain restaurateurs and large independents, along with representatives from the top dealer/distributor, retail, and contract management organizations, filled this year’s Show. The Show’s attendance included:

- 94 of the top 100 restaurant brands
- Contract management representation from Compass, Sodexo, Aramark, Delaware North, Elior, Centerplate, and Legends
- Dealer/Distributor representation from Sysco, US Foods, Clark Associates, Boelter, TriMark, Wasserstrom, and Edward Don
- Representation from the world’s largest retail chains including Walmart, Amazon, Kroger, Ahold, Publix, Target, and H-E-B

Taking on the challenges facing today’s restaurateurs in an all-new, inspiring format, the National Restaurant Association introduced its first-ever [Restaurant Revenue Growth Conference](#). Business leaders **Billy Beane**, **Scott Svenson**, and **Jon Taffer** headlined the conference. The conferees enjoyed hearing Beane’s stories about having Brad Pitt play him in a major motion picture but were equally enthralled with Beane’s discussion about how he transformed an industry with the application of data insights and discipline, and how restaurateurs can do that to their businesses. Svenson talked with the audience about how his MOD Pizza chain has grown rapidly not only because of a great concept and great food, but because of their people-first corporate culture that MOD terms “Pizza with a Purpose.” Taffer wrapped up the two-day conference with an inspirational talk that encouraged conferees to go back and put the lessons they learned over the previous two days into immediate action.

In addition to a full schedule of business-building activity, attendees loosened their ties and put on their party clothes for two new Show events. On Saturday night, the Show's annual Restaurants Rock event took on a new format—a private concert by four-time Grammy winner Keith Urban at the new Wintrust Arena. Urban brought the house down in a fantastic celebration of the restaurant industry.

On Sunday night, the Show partnered with Choose Chicago and the Illinois Restaurant Association to host the Chicago STARS Mixology Competition, sponsored by Beam Suntory, at Lettuce Entertain You's all-new The Dalcy event space in Fulton Market. Jarmel Doss, Assistant Beverage Director from the Aviary, bested the competition from 10 of Chicago's top bars, restaurants and hotels.

Photos from this year's Restaurant Show and Conference can be downloaded [here](#).

National Restaurant Association Show Highlights:

- [Signature '18](#) welcomed 66th Secretary of State **Dr. Condoleezza Rice** for a discussion with President and CEO of the National Restaurant Association **Dawn Sweeney**. Their lively conversation touched on U.S. foreign policy, international relations, and national security. Dr. Rice shared global insights into current issues and events during her address, followed by a question and answer session with Sweeney. Dr. Rice talked about the importance of building a more confident country at home. She said the application of technology and innovation, if done right, could help us achieve that goal. "We have assets now ... technology and innovation ... that are truly remarkable," said Dr. Rice. "But, technology is neutral. It can be good or bad depending on how it is applied. It can be the answer to a lot of our problems. But if it is not applied correctly, it could increase the gap between those who have and those who do not." She called upon the audience to join together in a recommitment to human potential.
- [SuperSession: The Future of Restaurants](#) covered the future of the industry—both from technological and non-tech perspectives. This session featured global futurist and innovation expert **Daniel Burrus**. Additional participating experts included **John Miller (Cali Group)**, **Sarah Lockyer (Winsight Media)**, and **John Ha (Bear Robotics)**. Panelists discussed that facial recognition, robotics, voice-assistants, and autonomous delivery vehicles are all coming soon to a restaurant near you. Yet, despite the coming advances in robotics and automation, "we cannot eliminate the human touch" in restaurants, said John Ha, CEO of Bear Robotics. No one wants to "dine in a factory." Lockyer added that not every technology is right for every restaurant. It must be brand-appropriate and additive to the experience.
- [World Culinary Showcase](#) featured celebrity chefs from across the country. Attendees had the opportunity to learn the latest cooking practices and trends from acclaimed chefs such as *Worst Cooks in America* host **Anne Burrell**, James Beard Award-winner **Sarah Grueneberg**, and this season's *Top Chef* winner **Joe Flamm**.
- [Foodamental Studio](#) featured hands-on workshops that provided guests with the opportunity to be a part of the action with demonstrations from top chefs. These interactive classes showcased the latest culinary techniques and trends. At [From Preservation to Delicacy](#), DMK Restaurants' Chef **Michael Kornick** talked about different varieties of charcuterie; at [Exotic, the New Familiar](#), Fat Rice Chef & Founder **Abe Conlon** explained how exotic fruits can be used in familiar food and beverages; and at [Beyond the Chicken Tender](#), Chef **Rosalyn Darling** led an exploration of healthy and approachable menu items to feed younger guests and attract loyal parent patrons.

- The recipients of the 2018 [FABI \(Food and Beverage\) Awards](#) were honored for showcasing the year's most delicious, unique, and exciting food and beverage products benefiting restaurant operators and consumers.
- Honoring equipment that benefits restaurant operators, the [Kitchen Innovations® Awards](#) recipients put forward their products that specifically address issues to improve and increase productivity for back-of-house operations.

Show attendees visited [Specialty Pavilions](#) throughout the Show floor including:

- **American Food Fair:** Organized by the National Association of the State Departments of Agriculture, the American Food Fair pavilion showcased U.S. products for export.
- **Balancing Act:** Show attendees learned how to not only take care of their businesses, but of their selves, with ideas and demonstrations on wellness and personal health.
- **BAR at the Show:** The bar scene is ever-changing and BAR exhibitors featured the top mixologists, suppliers, ingredients, and products to keep beverage programs on the cutting edge.
- **Bellavita Italian Pavilion:** This pavilion brought Italy to the Show with artisan products and demos by Italian chefs for four days of amazing food, extraordinary wine, and superb dishes.
- **Innovation Hub:** To help attendees stay ahead of the competition, the Innovation Hub showcased the latest industry innovations and insights.
- **Organic & Natural Pavilion:** An oasis of wholesomeness, the Organic & Natural Pavilion put forward the products and vendors leading the charge in the growing organic and natural food industry.
- **Startup Alley:** Attendees learned ways to unlock huge potential while exploring innovative products for improving restaurant operations and getting a sneak peek at the foodservice industry of the future.
- **TECH Pavilion:** The leading products, tools, and processes to help increase efficiency, guest satisfaction, and transaction speed were on display.
- **Water Cooler:** A top reason Restaurant Show attendees come annually is the opportunity to meet with peers and discuss topics critical to their business success. This year, the Show created the Water Cooler, a specific location for crowdsourced discussions, industry meetups, and informal exchanges.

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Founded in 1919, the National Restaurant Association is the leading business association for the restaurant industry, which comprises one million restaurant and foodservice outlets and a workforce of more than 15 million employees. We represent the industry in Washington, D.C., and advocate on its behalf. We operate the industry's largest annual trade show ([National Restaurant Association Show](#)); leading food safety training and certification program ([ServSafe](#)); and a unique career-building high school program (the NRAEF's [ProStart](#)). For more information, visit [Restaurant.org](#) and find us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [YouTube](#).