

BIZBASH

2012 Preview: 10 Most Anticipated New Chicago Venues for Events and Meetings

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As we look ahead to the coming year, these are some of the most important new event and meeting venues slated to open, bringing options for everything from cocktail parties and conferences to business dinners and corporate meetings. Here's a preview of the hotels, restaurants, bars, lounges, and other spaces the event industry will be talking about in 2012.

1. In December, the 752-room Westin Michigan Avenue announced a \$7 million renovation to its 37,000 square feet of banquet, ballroom, conference, and meeting areas. Scheduled to wrap up in early March, the renovations will include new lighting and audio systems, **Faster Internet connectivity with the installation of Fatpipe - a bandwidth management network tool and more flexibility in room**

configurations. The new space will also get the new High Performance Meeting Chairs by Starwood. Other upgrades will include new rigging points for staging equipment and insulation in the walls to make the rooms more soundproof. Local architect VOA Associates designed the new space.

2. Chef Curtis Duffy, formerly of Avenues at the Peninsula, will open his own restaurant in mid-2012. Named Grace, the West Loop eatery will have a prix fixe menu—no specific dishes have been named yet—and a private dining room that seats 14. The lofty venue, decked with exposed brick walls and vertical beams, will seat about 75 guests.

3. The Park at Rosemont will host its grand opening in April. One block west of the Rosemont Convention Center, the complex will house several eateries. Included in the mix: Toby Keith's I Love This Bar & Grill, Landsdowne Irish Pub, Taverna Opa Greek Restaurant, Adobe Gilcas Mexican restaurant, a yet-unnamed martini bar, and Hofbräuhaus. Some of the eateries will host private events. There will also be a Zanies comedy club and the 29,000-square-foot King's bowling alley, which will host group outings. Anchored by Muvico Theatres Rosemont 18, the complex surrounds a four-

season courtyard, which will host everything from ice skating to open-air film screenings throughout the year.

4. San Francisco-based Joie de Vivre will open Hotel Lincoln, its first Chicago property, around March. Overlooking the Lincoln Park Zoo—and in the same building as Boka Restaurant Group's Perennial Virant—the hotel will have 184 rooms, a rooftop bar and event space, and a European-style coffee bar and lounge in the lobby. Designer Andrew Alford of Dirty Lines Design said in a press release that the hotel "will have a very residential feel with an eccentric-meets-collegial preppy style." The meeting space will seat 60 in a theater-style configuration, 30 classroom- and conference-style, and 40 for dinner. The hotel will also host receptions for 80 to 100.

5. From the owners of Girl and the Goat and Boka, Balena will take over the former Landmark space early this year. The Lincoln Park restaurant, designed by 555 International, has decor that reps describe as "comfortable with retro-Italian touches." Beyond the vine-covered facade, the main bar area seats 20 and has a saddle-stitched leather bar top and a neon light installation. A neon sign inspired by Spain's Costa Brava region will cover..