MEETINGSROI
ACHIEVING BUSINESS OBJECTIVES THROUGH MEETINGS

## Bloomington, Minnesota

# Accessible on All Levels

Easy airport access and cooperation have brought Closing the Gap to Bloomington for more than a quarter of a century.

Facilitating meetings has become second nature for Bloomington CVB. The city boasts more guest rooms than either Minneapolis or St. Paul.

Once a year, for the past 26 years, anywhere from 2,000 to 3,000 attendees have been meeting in Bloomington, MN, for the Closing the Gap conference. Parents, teachers, occupational therapists, corporate reps from exhibiting companies, and experts in various fields come from all over the world to share information, techniques, and training about assistive technology for children with disabilities.

"It's a truly international conference," said Connie Kneip, vice president and general manager of Closing the Gap, based in Henderson, MN. "We draw attendees and presenters from destinations as close as Minneapolis and as far-flung as the Netherlands and Iceland. Our company is located in the Midwest, and Bloomington is a nice midway point for many of our attendees."

Sometimes called the "third twin city," Bloomington, right outside of Minneapolis and St. Paul, is home of the Minneapolis/St. Paul International Airport, making air access easy into the city, with over 400 daily flights, on carriers such as Delta (and its newly acquired Northwest), which has a hub there, and Southwest, which just added eight flights from Chicago in March. Bloomington offers light rail access to and from the airport, in addition to hotel shuttles, plus free parking at the hotels for those who drive in.

Of course, 26 years ago, when Closing the Gap held its first conference in Bloomington, they didn't know it would attract international attendees or grow to its present size of thousands of attendees. Throughout the years, the group has consistently stayed at the Sheraton in Bloomington—still the main convention hotel for the group, along with the Sofitel, which is just across the street.

Kneip said the hotels and the Bloomington Convention & Visitors Bureau have helped the event grow. "When we needed more space, they found it for us," she said. "Sometimes we've had to use as many as six other hotels for sleeping rooms and the CVB has helped us with that, as well as arranging shuttles to the conference hotels. Whenever I've gone to the CVB for any kind of guidance or support, they've been there with open arms ready to help."

The city offers 36 hotels, from budget to luxury, with over 7,500 guest rooms—more than either Minneapolis or St. Paul.

Because the conference itself is intense, typically running from 8 am to 6 pm, with sessions in as many as 17 meeting rooms and an exhibit hall for a trade show, Closing the Gap doesn't host any evening activities or meals. But Kneip notes that Bloomington's famed Mall of America, an easy free shuttle ride away, is a draw for many attendees. The nation's largest retail and entertainment complex features more than 520 shops, more than 50 restaurants and specialty food stores, a 1.2 million gallon walk-through aquarium, miniature golf, and more.

For more information about meeting in **Bloomington**, contact **Dan O'Neill, Vice President of Strategy and Sales for the Bloomington Convention & Visitors Bureau** at **(952) 858-8500** or **sales@bloomingtonmn.org**, or visit **http://www.bloomingtonmn.org/**.