

# Corporate College Helps Nonprofit Find Success With Its Hallmark Event



The Milestones National Autism Conference is Milestones Autism Resources' premier event, and it's a big one.

"It's the opportunity for an individual with autism to connect with other individuals with autism," says Vanetta Perry, the development director at Milestones Autism Resources. "It's the opportunity for parents to find out that they're not alone in this journey. It's the opportunity for educators and medical professionals to learn about new and emerging sciences because autism doesn't look the same to everyone."

Prior to COVID-19, the event could bring in as many as 1,600 attendees over two days. This year's event — the first since the pandemic — attracted 600 attendees, surpassing the expected 400.

"We ended up turning away late registrants because we were at capacity," Perry says. "We know there's a need for what we do because we're a national autism conference. We're not just local."

Similarly, with a goal of landing 20 exhibitors for the event, Milestones

welcomed 42. There were also 60 breakout sessions with 38 speakers. Including self-advocates and keynote speakers, that number was closer to 48.

"It's a big conference," says George Toma, the executive director of Conference and Facility Sales &

Operations at Corporate College®. "It's a lot of moving parts. It's a lot of breakout sessions and things moving at the same time."

That size and complexity required a venue capable of meeting the nonprofit's unique needs. Corporate College was up to the challenge.

## Flexible, Friendly Environment

Perry says Milestones chose Corporate College East in part because the nonprofit needed a friendly environment for those who may need unique support.

"Corporate College exceeded that need," Perry says. "We needed to be able to support individuals who are having a moment that is not their finest so that we could remove them from that high-paced aspect of the day. We needed

a venue that had lots of classroom space. And technology is important. We needed to simulcast in different rooms and tape our sessions. And we needed rooms where we could change the setup from session to session."

Finding a place for everyone was easy with Corporate College's range of options. For example, Toma says they decided to space exhibitors throughout the central area of the building and along the main walkways for the greatest visibility, rather than packing them into a single room.



"One of the most important things as an exhibitor is to get traffic to your booth," Toma says. "To be able to spread the group out from the main meeting room and then down the hallways of the Corporate College building into several different breakouts — Milestones had about seven or eight different breakouts going at any given time — to get foot traffic past all those exhibitors and utilize the building to all of its capacity was a great advantage."

Corporate College also has direct access to the freeway, free parking for as many as 600 vehicles and is located in a metropolitan area where guests can shop and eat.

Working with in-house caterer A Taste of Excellence, Corporate College provided a menu at the event with options for vegetarian and other dietary preferences. Grab-and-go lunches were placed around the building for attendees as they moved throughout the conference. About 500 lunches were prepared each day.

Milestones also wanted to record some sessions. Corporate College was able to accommodate that request with the many on-site rooms with cameras mounted to the walls. This built-in advantage helped Milestones get what it needed from the venue. The College's audiovisual services are included in many meeting room rental rates. That's often helpful because A/V can add a lot to the bottom line of a conference like Milestones.

"When you can help them cost-save their program and their bottom line, you can really add a lot there, just by including some of the services such as projectors, screens and technicians," Toma says.

But as much as the amenities and location made Corporate College the right choice for Milestones, it was the people that set the venue apart.

## A Team That Cares

Perry says she was excited to work with the team at Corporate College.



**You have to get that face-to-face time to take care of their worries, take care of their concerns. Once you can do that, everyone can rest easy knowing that everything's going to be taken care of.**

"George was excited about us," she says. "And it made it feel really good. I felt like the whole staff was happy to see us. I knew it was a new experience. We were big for them, and they really wanted us to know what they could do. I encountered people who seemed to be like, 'I'm happy to help you.'"

Toma says seeing Perry throughout the day, even if it was from across the room, meant that if she needed something, he could run over and take care of it.

"They know you're going to take care of it really quickly. It's going to be done, and they don't have to worry about it anymore," Toma says. "That's one of the things that I enjoy about getting to know our clients and

working with our clients. I enjoy the camaraderie that's built through the site visits."

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