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January 26, 2012 2:52 PM

Detroit convention bureau touts the meetings coming to Cobo at its annual meeting

By [Sherri Welch](#)

The **Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau's** sales efforts are paying off.

After an announcement Wednesday that two other major conferences were coming to Detroit's **Cobo Center**, the bureau said it has booked additional events, including a **Church of our Lord Jesus Christ** event in 2013, the 2014 conference of the **Pentecostal Assemblies of the World** and Youmacon, an anime convention, for 2013-15.

News of those groups coming to Detroit follows announcements Wednesday that the **U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs** plans to bring the **National Veterans Small Business Conference and Expo** to Cobo in June, and the 2012 **TEAMS Conference and Expo** for sports event organizers is set for Cobo in early October.

"With Bob (Riney) on board as chairman, we will work very closely with him to book medical meetings" as well, Larry Alexander, president and CEO of the Convention & Visitors Bureau, said today during the organization's annual meeting.

Riney, president and COO of **Henry Ford Health System**, spoke about attending numerous medical conferences in cities like Chicago.

"Chicago is a great city, but it's the same old, same old every time you go for a conference," he said.

"My commitment in this new role ... is to get medical and bio-scientific meetings to Detroit."

Alexander rounded up major accomplishments for the bureau and region in 2011:

- A 10 percent increase in hotel occupancy.
- Positive coverage of Detroit by national media — for a change.
- The start of the \$299 million renovation of Cobo by the **Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority**.
- The bureau's launch of an international sales effort



At its annual meeting today, the Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau announced two more major conferences coming to Cobo Center in 2013-15

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• The bureau's launch of an international sales effort.

"We see incredible opportunity" in attracting international events, Alexander said.

Among international business that is percolating for Detroit is a Moroccan delegation planning a May visit for an auto industry meeting and an invertebrate reproduction conference that a German group plans to bring to **Wayne State University** in 2013, he said.

The bureau is stepping up efforts this year to market suburban hotels so they, too, benefit from events at Cobo Center. It also plans to relaunch visitdetroit.com in May, Alexander said.

"The future of Michigan is tied to metro Detroit and, particularly, to the city of Detroit," Gov. Rick Snyder said during the meeting.

The **North American International Auto Show** was great for Detroit, "but it doesn't stop there," he said, pointing to attractions such as the Rembrandt exhibit at the **Detroit Institute of Arts** and the **Detroit Red Wings**, which are contenders for the Stanley Cup.

Snyder called on attendees of the annual meeting to run their business and government activities well because they are the face of the state, adding, "Get a little attitude and speak up more.

"I need you to be louder; we're not loud enough about how good. ... metro Detroit is."

"Think of what you can do by talking to your team members," all of whom are part of the face Michigan puts on for the rest of the country and world, Snyder said.

That's something **Quicken Loans Inc.** Founder Dan Gilbert said he's taken to heart in his operations.

He has created a positive culture inside his 40-plus companies, he said. And it starts with Quicken, his flagship company, which has moved 3,700 jobs to downtown Detroit since 2010.

Any company that takes that kind of jump worries whether its employees will be upset, Gilbert said.

"But our people have never been more engaged," he said.

Gilbert said he plans to expand the summer intern program his companies launched last summer for 250 college students from colleges around Michigan and the U.S.

This year's program will provide internships for 500 students, he said.

As part of the program, those students will have the opportunity to visit local attractions and cultural destinations so they can see everything happening in Detroit and all the city has to offer, Gilbert said.

He pointed to Groupon's two young founders, Michigan natives and University of Michigan students who left the state roughly 15 years ago for Chicago.

"Had we had the kind of stuff going on in Detroit 15 years ago (that we do now,) maybe these two would have stayed here" with the company's 10,000 jobs, Gilbert said.

"We can't lose the next one."

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