

MeCo Successfully Launches First Virtual CMP Boot Camp

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The Meetings Community (MeCo) Group successfully launched the first virtual CMP Study Group in Second Life. The 3D virtual platform not only provided the ability to bridge distances making learning accessible to others unable to attend formal study group training nationwide, but provided live chat interaction between instructors and attendees in avatar-to-avatar format. The adjunct benefit from the educational opportunity was the elimination of carbon imprint with attendees participating from the comfort of their homes or offices.

The Meetings Community (MeCo) Group successfully launched the first virtual Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) Boot Camp study group with a three day web-based educational platform in Second Life. The sessions took place on the evenings of Friday, January 18th and Saturday January 19th, concluding with a mid-day session on Sunday, January 20th.

Dan Parks, President/Creative Director of Corporate Planners Unlimited, Inc. built the virtual mansion as a place of learning and networking for meeting and event professionals in April 2007. The new 'Boot Camp' initiative became a reality when Bonnie Wallsh, CMP, CMM of Bonnie Wallsh & Associates, LLC and Marianne McNulty, CMP, CTIE of Clever Concierge, LLC offered to champion industry colleagues through virtual teaching tools in preparation of sitting for the Convention Industry Council (CIC) CMP exam offered in February 2008. The MeCo Virtual CMP Boot Camp serves to complement the independent studies of applicants who will sit for the CMP exam.

An industry first, Parks shares, 'We had the infrastructure in place and it seemed a natural evolution in our reach to provide the MeCo Mansion as a virtual meeting place for industry colleagues sitting for the exam. The cost savings for this educational opportunity, preparing candidates to successfully sit for the CMP exam in February, meant some peers were able to glean meaty content without incurring the expense of having to travel as well as learning from some of our industry's best'!

While other formidable exam preparation classes on a fee-based level are offered over a three day weekend where many candidates must travel by air and be away from home, this boot camp was offered at no charge to the attendees and allowed participants to log in from the comfort of their home or office. Looking toward more corporate social responsibility, MeCo is setting the pace with taking a lean and green approach with the medium of Second Life in reaching other professionals, showing them best practices in minimizing carbon imprints along with the merits of how technology will augment the industry as a whole.

Instructor Bonnie Wallsh, CMP, CMM says, 'This experience opens up the possibilities of scheduling study groups without geographical boundaries and building upon the success of our pilot program. With more than 30 years of meeting management and teaching experience, I am excited to be in the forefront of working with my peers in developing and presenting the CMP study group. It opens up endless educational opportunities'.

Adds Marianne McNulty, CMP, CTIE, 'I am still coming to terms with the events of this weekend. The Virtual CMP Boot Camp was a first and I never felt it was a 'dress rehearsal' - it was the real deal! The Boot Camp is just what it purports to be - a quick, down and dirty intense treatment of the 28 core areas to be covered in the CMP Exam'.

CMP Candidate, Carol Roth, Director of Special Services for Dale Earnhardt, Inc. said, 'Attending MeCo Mansion's first ever CMP Boot Camp was an invaluable experience. Not only did I receive pertinent information presented in a professional environment, I was also able to interact with others from the U.S. to Canada and participate as an active group member. I know this learning experience will definitely assist me with my ultimate goal in achieving CMP status'.

While many are skeptical of stepping into the Second Life platform, Roth adds, 'It was also wonderful to be a part of new technology which is a must in the world of any meeting planner and having the convenience of this educational tool available to me from my own home was of course - priceless'!

McNulty shares, 'The absolute - and almost literal - beauty of having the CMP Boot Camp at the MeCo Mansion in Second Life is the candidate receives focused presentations of the materials in a setting which is soothing and relaxing all while the candidate is physically in the comfort of his/her own surroundings. This is no four square walls experience!'

CMP Candidate, Jessica Levin, Manager of Communications and Member Services of Moore Stephens North America, Inc. comments, 'My experience attending CMP Boot Camp at the MeCo Mansion in Second Life was amazing. With the interactive nature of Second Life, it felt like I was truly in a class learning with other students. The information I learned was valuable and the format really held my attention'.

Attendees enjoyed an outdoor learning center environment with lush grounds and the ocean lapping the walls behind the viewing screens. At any time while still hearing the facilitator's voice, the attendees could navigate their camera controls and take in the serenity of the environment of the MeCo Mansion. Says, McNulty, 'This is what real life wishes it could be - on demand'!

Gloria Nelson, CSEP, Chief Experience Office of Gloria Nelson Event Design, LLC, assisted Parks, Wallsh and McNulty in her support with activating avatars and getting them familiar with their surroundings, ready to troubleshoot if needed as Parks steered the technology behind the virtual educators during the three day Boot Camp. Levin shares, 'It was also a great feeling knowing the presenters were dedicating their time to help me and others prepare for our exam. The nature of volunteerism in

the industry is inspiring. Additionally, I enjoyed being part of such an important step in the industry. This would not have been possible without the hard work done by Dan Parks and Gloria Nelson, CSEP - they are shrinking the world and making a positive impact on the industry'.

Parks intends to repeat the Virtual CMP Boot Camp in tandem with his colleagues during the next round of testing. Parks says, 'We learned much from this program in streamlining content, placing appropriate breaks, testing the platform for reliability and I was thrilled with how Second Life performed. We hope this provocative initiative has pioneered a whole new means of real-time learning and look forward to providing more meaningful content with a cadre of other notable industry professionals in the upcoming year'.

The Meetings Community (MeCo) is a free online destination for meeting planners and suppliers to discuss the issues surrounding the meeting and hospitality industries. After years of experience in the meeting and hospitality industries, James Louis, Loretta Lowe, Dan Parks, Jean Travers, Sue Walton and William Youngs saw a groundbreaking opportunity to connect the planning management community on a global scale. MeCo is a free service, membership is open to all meeting and event planners and suppliers from around the world and encompasses all aspects of the industry. MeCo was launched to educate and foster the sharing on issues that affect meeting and hospitality professionals.

To join the Meetings Community (MeCo) list, visit their website at www.meetingscommunity.org. If you are interested in joining a CMP Study Group or a CMP Boot Camp for the next CMP Exam in August 2008, contact Dan Parks, President/Creative Director of Corporate Planners Unlimited, Inc. @cpudan@mac.com or by phone (800)493-2545 Ext. 201

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