

Training, networking focus of IMCEA European Trade Show

By Karl Weisel (Wiesbaden Family and MWR) August 29, 2017



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Visitors to the Trade Show learn about various paper products and their use during a training session. (Photo Credit: Karl Weisel (Wiesbaden Family and MWR))
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WIESBADEN, Germany - MWR and other military and civilian service providers gathered on Ramstein Air Base, Germany, Aug. 23-24 for two days of training, networking and learning about the latest products and trends in the food and beverage industry.

The International Military Community Executives' Association Trade Show brought Army and Air Force professionals and a host of civilian vendors together to enhance services and programs for service members and their families overseas.

"We're here to support the MWR community throughout Europe as far as new ideas, new concepts and new technologies," said Steven Goldstein, GKi vice president.

"I like to take part in events where we can specifically talk to representatives from the various military components to help improve their investments in new products and services. It's important to give them the best value to maintain their operations," Goldstein said.

"I think it's important not just to work with our customers in the United States, but also with those OCONUS (outside the continental United States)," said Leslie Paffe, senior hospitality and food service manager for the National Restaurant Association. "Any opportunity we have to get in front of our customers is great. ... I think these events are great because they bring together a wide range of food and beverage representatives supporting our military communities."

During the two-day event, leaders and business operations managers from MWR, Air Force Services, dining facilities, Child and

Youth Services and the club systems were able to attend a range of training opportunities -- everything from Best Hiring Practices to High Speed Cooking Methods -- while also connecting with both stateside and international manufacturers and vendors.

"A lot of training events and trade shows happen stateside, but there aren't a lot over here in Europe," said Melissa Wells, IMCEA's director of marketing and communications. "This gives people a chance to get to know the products from vendors who serve the military all over the world -- to put faces to names."

"For us, it's all about bringing value to our members -- whether it's an associate member or our MWR members," said Wells, stressing IMCEA's mission to advance the professional development of U.S. military MWR/Services managers around the world while providing collaborative opportunities with the associate member manufacturers and vendors.

"It's been over 15 years that IMCEA has hosted this type of collaboration with MWR," said Casey Malloy, IMCEA president and Wiesbaden Family and MWR Non Appropriated Funds Support Services chief.

Explaining that the non-profit organization was founded some 45 years ago by club managers to enhance professional development and support, Malloy said, the IMCEA Trade Show in Germany was a way of bringing contacts of industry together with MWR/Services professionals overseas.

"We actually had all of our decision makers from all over the Army and Air Force here for this first event in Germany in quite some time," said Jillian Singleton, registered food and beverage specialist for the Installation Management Command-Europe. "It's important for those folks who are making the food and beverage decisions to actually try the products to get the best value."

"I think it was pretty successful," Singleton said, adding that there is always room for improvement at successive trade shows of the like.

Dr. Christian Lutzky, chief executive officer of FSOS-Europe, underscored the value of connecting industry and MWR/Services representatives. "We made a lot of great contacts. ... The real deciders were here -- 90 percent of those who attended; it's about the contacts and building the network."

"We had a lot time for them," said Lutzky, explaining that it was time well spent presenting new products and discussing ongoing branded facilities such as MWR's Java Cafes.

"There are not that many events like this, so this is a great opportunity," said Jens Herbert, president of Food Equipment Marketing GmbH. "The attendance was small, but the quality was high. ... We would love for them to do this again."

"We're thrilled to have the opportunity to do this," said Texana Sonnefeld, president and owner of BABCO International, Inc. "We're known for one-stop shopping, and this is the customer that we choose to serve. We've been serving the military for 48 years. We're thrilled to have the opportunity to do this (come overseas to meet face-to-face with MWR and Services professionals).

Describing the rapid changes in all aspects of the food, beverage, hospitality and entertainment industries, Mark Velligan, president of the Celebrity Systems Corporation, said he appreciated having the opportunity to introduce activity managers to new products.

"I've been working with the military for over 30 years and it's rewarding to have members of the Armed Services using our products," Velligan said, explaining that his company's sound, light and video systems are used by all branches of the Armed Forces -- on base, on ships and downrange. (Editor's note: In addition to supporting MWR professionals around the globe with training and support, the International Military Community Executives' Association also provides scholarships and awards recognition for outstanding achievement in the field. For more information on IMCEA visit <https://imcea.org>.)

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