The experience of this network, all which in turn gives confidence to the end client that their congress will be supported, their objectives delivered and their delegates will have both an enhanced learning experience and enjoy the city to its full potential.

The support for the client does not end at connecting the client with the talent network and service providers, the PCO and the convention bureaus are also the clients’ connect to what I call the Triple Helix: city and government officials, academia representing the knowledge economy of the city and the corporates of the city who will help fund the congress. It is the successful engagement of all three sectors that entices the client to consider the bid and the eventual awarding of a congress.

The city that brands itself to welcome the delegation, the restaurants who put up welcome signs in their windows, the taxi drivers who are aware of the congress and give a warm welcome at the airport, the policy makers who create a relevant legacy programme from the congress, the educators who showcase the knowledge economy of their academic institutions and finally the corporates and funders who help financially support the congress, is an efficient and experienced destination.

The commitment to collaboration leads to energised engagement, improved vision and opens the eye to opportunity. The collective energy of any industry working in harmony leads to strategies being effectively translated into actionable project plans with clear responsibility. Measurement of success and failure are identified, well-understood, and communicated to all stakeholders. Excitement for the “to be” state easily overcomes the inertia of the status quo.

They represent the destination, they are often the first port of call, and their membership is the talent pool of the destination. It is this network and support mechanism that will ensure the successful delivery of the congress. Like any business, the delivery team must be informed, well trained and experienced and this leads to education.

I believe the city who brings their talent network together, proactively provides an annual education programme with relevant training for each sector of expertise, it’s the city who will convert business at a higher ratio, will build an excellent reputation for supporting clients and in turn will deliver successful congresses. When trust and expertise come into play, that client will continue to come back. It is far less expensive and much more efficient to retain the client than find new clients.

MAXIMISING POTENTIAL

If we put the convention bureau at the core of the support network, it is also critical that they do not “go it alone”. Like any network, it makes sense to maximise the potential of the talent pool, glean from
Hiring members in 41 countries – I am always very mindful of the need to think globally but I do have a special place in my heart for my own region – Asia Pacific. It is an incredibly diverse region where the meetings industry continues to grow in strength rapidly. I am very keen to profile that strength and highlight the great work being done in the region, while also looking to encourage those delivering conference management services to consider IAPCO membership.

IAPCO has always focused on education and you’ve launched new seminars like the EDGE seminar. How successful have they been so far? What are IAPCO’s achievements in the education area?

IAPCO is a pioneer in industry education delivering its week-long, residential training course in the Wolfsberg Centre in Switzerland for 37 consecutive years. Many of today’s seniors in the industry credit their career start to participate in this seminar and have fond memories of the camaraderie which led to ongoing friendships as their career paths crossed.

After a good deal of thought and debate IAPCO decided to move away from one fixed location for education and create programmes which were both accessible and affordable worldwide. That meant not just face-to-face education but also online.

IAPCO now has three educational offerings – EDGE (Experts in Dynamic Global Education) seminars, Web-EDGE and Bespoke seminars. Faculty comprises senior PCO practitioners who are immersed in the business, curious about new technologies and committed to best practice. Content is designed not just for PCOs but for the wider industry, in particular CVBs, venues and convention centres.

The first EDGE seminar was held in Auckland in August last year and was well received. 60% of the participants completed the evaluation and every one of them said that their expectations had been met. 97% of them gave the seminar a score of 8 or more out of 10. Similarly successful seminars have been held in Copenhagen in January and Whistler this May. Plans are already underway for seminars in Seoul in November, Athens in January and Kuala Lumpur next September; a number of expressions of interest have been received from other destinations. The challenge will be fulfilling demand!

Web-EDGE brings a new dimension to IAPCO’s commitment to quality education. It’s online and, as is the case with the EDGE seminars, enables participants to accrue CPB credits. Currently a “Starter Pack” (web-EDGE Level 1) is available via IAPCO’s website and, over time, the library will be expanded to deliver online learning at three levels.

It’s an exciting departure for IAPCO and one that seems to be meeting market needs. André Vietor, who chairs the Training Academy, and his fellow faculty members tell me that they are both challenged and really energised by the change in direction.

As it has done in the past, IAPCO continues to deliver Bespoke seminars for groups or organisations. These programmes are always tailored to suit the host’s needs and are typically very interactive.

IAPCO will celebrate its 50th anniversary within your presidency. How do members look back?

IAPCO’s ability to retain members speaks volumes about its ongoing relevance as it continues to adapt its activities in a volatile meetings world. The Association was founded on camaraderie and principles of sharing and collaborating. Those principles have never changed and I see at our annual conference they are more important than ever. I am always astonished and grateful by the willingness of members, who compete with one another, show to discuss issues frankly and share their know how to help each other deliver a better service.

While planning for the anniversary is in its very early stages, I know that all those attributes of IAPCO’s ongoing success will come to the fore. Also, as PCOs, we know a good deal about celebration events so I’m sure February 2018 will be a special time on our calendar.

As a PCO based in New Zealand, can you explain how different the work culture is in the East and in the West?

I don’t think it’s a comparison that can be easily made in today’s world. We are such a mix of cultures now and my city, Auckland, is no exception. That diversity is definitely reflected in our work culture in the form of openess to various views and the ability to be flexible and accommodating. That approach serves us well in the meetings industry. In New Zealand, as delegates attending international conferences in our country tend to come from all over the globe.

Can you share what you like about New Zealand as an association destination?

Time and time again international associations tell us how much their delegates enjoyed the warmth and hospitality when they held their conference in New Zealand. That, combined with opportunities to enjoy amazing holidays pre- or post-conference the length and breadth of the country mean that delegate numbers are always gratifyingly high.

Professor Bryan Storey of the University of Canterbury in New Zealand who conducted the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research’s Open Science Conference summarised it up perfectly when he said: “Tourism New Zealand’s Business Events team assured me that delegates always like coming to New Zealand because it is a safe destination, it is accessible, it is a beautiful country and it has the reputation for welcoming people. They were correct, our delegate numbers exceeded expectations and the conference was voted the best ever!”

We genuinely enjoy showcasing our country to visitors and making them feel welcome. We like to impart the spirit of manaakitanga which, in the language of the Maori, the indigenous people of New Zealand, refers to hospitality, kindness, generosity, showing respect, caring for others.

Our food and wines are of the highest quality, the proximity of memorable landscapes and activities to key conference destinations mean inspirational experiences can be easily accessed and the range of meeting venues and accommodation offerings is wide. With a small population it is easy to make things happen and establish connections. We can readily create introductions to professionals and academics who can contribute to conference programmes and share their expertise during technical tours. Those of us in the meetings industry know one another well and work as a team on international conferences, complementing one another’s roles, making decisions quickly and always staying focused on making visitors’ time in our country special.