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Chicago Event Pros Disappointed With Olympic Bid Results, Don't Foresee Long-Term Effects for Local Industry

Since the International Olympic Committee [announced](#) today that Chicago is out of the running to host the 2016 summer games—the bid ultimately went to Rio de Janeiro—local event professionals say the results came as a disappointment, but the setback won't have a negative long-term effect on the city's event and meeting business.

Julie Darling of [Julie Darling Inc.](#) anticipated an immediate blow to some local audiovisual companies, but said that it's pretty much back to normal for her. "Many friends that own audiovisual companies were on deck for weekend festivities that are now canceled," she said. "For me personally, my [event production] company hasn't been greatly affected in the short term, and for the long term, we'll have to focus our efforts elsewhere."

Tony Duffy, principal at event marketing company [Lighting Man Promotions Ltd.](#), echoed Darling's sentiment. "For the events industry in general, I think some companies will take immediate hits. Events that were on the books for this weekend are now off the books, for example," he said. "But those impacts will be pretty short-lived."

With the games so many years away, firms weren't thinking too seriously about the possible economic effect of a winning bid. "I hadn't really considered what course of action I would take to capitalize or grow business if we became the host city, because I didn't have a great deal of faith," Duffy said. "I backed the bid, of course. I just don't think we were ever really, truly in the running. I think there were some preconceived notions about Chicago amongst those that voted. I think there's a cloud of corruption that hangs above our city, and we were missing some key elements in the bid package," such as full financial backing.

Jodi Wolf, president of [Paulette Wolf Events & Entertainment](#), had also planned to wait for the committee's announcement before making any Olympics-related business plans. "My mother [company founder Paulette Wolf] always told me not to count on something until it was contracted. So we hoped that the Olympics would come to Chicago, but we never planned on it," she said.

"Had we gotten the bid, a lot of companies would have picked up additional events as things went along," said Marcy Manley, a partner at destination management company [WPI Event Partners](#). "But I think that the people who were counting on [the Olympics] to make or break their businesses were putting all their eggs in one basket. If you're secure in your client base, you'll be fine. This industry is definitely on an upswing, and I think 2010 and 2011 will be really good for us."

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Although she doesn't see much foreseeable damage to the Chicago meetings and events industry, Manley said she feels "truly sorry" for the local hotel business. "The hotels would have garnered a lot of business because of all the people [visiting Chicago for the games] and the extended stays, and seen a lot of increased dollars up until 2016," she said.

Some planners are holding out hope for hosting the games in 2020. "We are disappointed , of course," said Tina Carlson, president of [Ivan Carlson](#), which produced the luncheon for the evaluation commission at the [Shedd Aquarium](#) in April. "I hope that we bid for the 2020 games. Remember that Salt Lake lost before they won the bid."

In the meantime, event professionals look to other local events. "As a new business, [McGowan Durpetti & Associates](#) was excited with the possibilities and potential opportunities that the bid would have brought to the events industry here in Chicago," said Michelle Durpetti, a partner at the company. "However, as a business person, and as a team, [my partner, Denise McGowan, and I] are proud of our city and its efforts, and look forward to other opportunities coming to the city, like the Burnham Plan Centennial."

—*Jenny Berg*

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