

**FOR THE EXCLUSIVE USE OF MARY@DEATRICKPR.COM**

From the Orlando Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/orlando/news/2020/07/23/south-i-drives-1b-and-growing-convention-problem.html>

## South I-Drive's \$1B – and growing – convention problem

Jul 23, 2020, 5:16pm EDT

Nearly four months after Orlando's theme parks shuttered because of the coronavirus pandemic, screams and laughter can be heard at them once again — albeit from smaller crowds.

But it's a different story for the eerily quiet International Drive tourist corridor due to an absent traveler: the conventioneer.

Many large trade shows began changing course in early March when the coronavirus was declared a pandemic. For example, the region's fourth-largest trade show, Healthcare Information & Management Systems Society's HIMSS20 Global Health Conference & Exhibition, canceled its March 2020 event at the Orange County Convention Center. It would have drawn more than 44,000 attendees and \$113 million in economic impact for Central Florida.

Orlando's I-Drive area depends on the convention market — which contributes at least \$3 billion in local economic impact and attracts more than 1.5 million visitors. While Walt Disney World, Universal Orlando Resort and SeaWorld Orlando in recent weeks reopened local theme parks with



JIM CARCHIDI/OBJ

Orange County Convention Center North  
Concourse entrance

limited capacities and stringent health protocols, the region's convention sector — including the Orange County Convention Center — hasn't recovered, as many events pushed back dates or canceled their shows.

As of July 13, the convention center alone had a loss of more than \$1.01 billion in economic impact from 49 canceled shows. Fortunately, the center rescheduled 34 shows with a total economic impact of \$485 million — salvaging some business.

## **Tough decisions**

While some spending still is on the books, it's happening in the future, not now, when it's really needed for the South I-Drive businesses that tap into that out-of-town visitors market.

In fact, the lack of activity — both at the convention center and ancillary meeting spaces — has wreaked havoc on the companies that rely on corporate events to woo attendees to their nearby hotels, restaurants, attractions and nightclubs. Convention travelers often spend as much as \$1,000 per person per trip as they stay multiple days in the region, local visitation data showed.

That has left many businesses having to make tough decisions — including laying off workers.

Take Orlando-based Rosen Hotels & Resorts, which operates eight lodging properties in and around the I-Drive area. The firm recently announced plans to lay off almost half of its workforce.

"Unless we do something drastic, I don't think tourism in Central Florida will come back the way it was," President and COO Harris Rosen told *Orlando Business Journal*.

Another challenge for these I-Drive businesses: The convention center's \$605 million expansion has been delayed due to a precipitous drop in the funding source, the region's resort tax collections. The planned upgrades were expected to add \$600 million in annual economic impact to the region's \$75.2 billion tourism industry.

But now that the project is on hold, it creates a "tremendous ripple effect" on the businesses that depend on those meetings in and around the convention center, said [Maria Triscari](#), president and CEO of the International Drive Resort Area Chamber of Commerce.

"The economics of the convention market not only affect businesses in the tourism industry. In fact, over 25,000 jobs are derived from the convention center. These vendors and suppliers employ thousands of people and many are high-paying jobs. That is why the Orange Convention Center is so important to our entire region."

In this special report, *Orlando Business Journal* spoke with five business leaders along South I-Drive about how they are adapting to the lack of convention activity, strategies for moving forward and more.

Click on the links below to see more about each of the businesspeople: [Harris Rosen](#) of Rosen Hotels & Resorts; [Joshua Wallack](#) of Mango's Tropical Cafe Orlando; [Katerina Coumbaros](#) of Taverna Opa at Pointe Orlando; [Mark Tester](#) of the Orange County Convention Center; and [Chris Jaskiewicz](#) of Icon Park.

[Rosen Hotels & Resorts](#)

[Mango's Tropical Cafe Orlando](#)

[Taverna Opa at Pointe Orlando](#)

[Orange County Convention Center](#)

[Icon Park](#)

---

***[Sign up here for our free morning and afternoon daily newsletters. And be sure to follow us on \[LinkedIn\]\(#\), \[Facebook\]\(#\), \[Twitter\]\(#\) and \[Instagram\]\(#\).](#)***

**Richard Bilbao**

Digital Producer/Senior Staff

Writer

*Orlando Business Journal*

