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Columnist Repps Hudson discusses ways to honor the multitude of celebrations that take place this time of year without risk of offending anyone.

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Everybody has had to deal with a bully. But what do you do if the bully happens to be your boss? There are ways to put bullies in their place.

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Columnist Jack Naudi wraps up a three-part series and says investors should take a look at Series I bonds because they are guaranteed to earn 1 percent more than the inflation rate.

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After increasing audits by 20 percent last year, the Internal Revenue Service is vowing to track down tax dodgers even more aggressively this year.

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## ONLINE

**MOST-READ STORIES**

Here are the most-read business headlines on STLtoday.com from Dec. 2 through Dec. 8:

1. Developer Donald Breckenridge dies
2. Wal-Mart critics' season of unity
3. Missouri makes deal with Chrysler
4. There's always something brewing 'down the tracks'
5. Report: Ford likely to close plants in Hazelwood, elsewhere
6. New Southwest flights beat American by 26%
7. Developers plan to revive dormant corner of Lafayette Square
8. Young insurance firm beats malpractice rivals
9. Ford Explorer sales run out of gas in 2005
10. Web sites offer a way to compare stores, prices: Net savings

Get a daily list of most-read stories online at [STLtoday.com/mostread](http://STLtoday.com/mostread).

## LAST WEEK'S MARKETS

|                                  |                    |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>DOW JONES INDUSTRIALS</b>     | -98.93   10,778.58 |
| <b>NASDAQ COMPOSITE</b>          | -16.64   2,256.73  |
| <b>STANDARD &amp; POOR'S 500</b> | -5.71   1,259.37   |
| <b>BLOOMBERG ST. LOUIS</b>       | +4.39   544.60     |

**Convention centers**

## Collinsville, St. Charles fill a meetings niche

### Drawing smaller groups, the regional centers here are thriving.

By Tavia Evans  
ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

While America's Center struggles to boost its meeting business, regional convention centers in St. Charles and Collinsville are thriving with traffic from smaller trade and consumer shows and corporate meetings.

This weekend, the St. Charles Convention Center was to be the site of a Boeing Co. reception and dinner for 500 attendees. The St. Louis Home

Builders Association trade show this year brought 14,000 people over a single weekend into the venue. And 6,000 Moolah Shriners will hold their regional convention there in 2006.

The St. Charles center is still considered in the small category for convention centers, with 154,000 square feet of convention and meeting space.

By comparison, America's Center offers 502,000 square feet of space as well as the 70,000-seat Edward Jones Dome stadium. But in its own league, St. Charles' center has become a regional competitor since it opened in April.

St. Louis must focus on getting "heads on beds" — booking rooms and filling hotels — but that leaves St. Charles room to attract the smaller

meeting business, said Donna Costella, interim director of the Greater St. Charles Convention & Visitors Bureau.

"Our market is associations and corporate meetings, the government groups and military reunion groups," she said. "Our location speaks a lot for what meeting planners are looking for: just 10 minutes from an international airport with a historic area and all nestled along the Missouri River."

The St. Charles bureau also books rooms through the Embassy Suites-St. Charles, which is connected to the new convention center. And the bureau works in partnership with the Family Arena, which seats 10,000, to book

PLEASE SEE **CONVENTIONS** | E6**Three facilities attract meeting business to the area:****AMERICA'S CENTER**

701 Convention Plaza, St. Louis  
**Features:** 502,000 square feet; 83 meeting rooms; 70,000-seat stadium  
**Headquarters hotel:** Renaissance Grand St. Louis and the Renaissance St. Louis Suites

**ST. CHARLES CONVENTION CENTER**

One Convention Center Plaza, St. Charles  
**Features:** 154,000 square feet; six meeting rooms; access to 10,000-seat arena  
**Headquarters hotel:** Embassy Suites-St. Charles

**GATEWAY CENTER**

One Gateway Drive, Collinsville  
**Features:** 70,000 square feet; 11 meeting rooms  
**Headquarters hotel:** None, but 900 rooms are within walking distance



"I like the mind and body connection," says Angel Colon, of St. Louis, about Bikram Yoga. Colon takes his class at Bikram Yoga in Richmond Heights, one of many businesses patronized by "metrospirituals," people interested in tapping into spiritual practices. Laurie Skrivan | Post-Dispatch

## Metrospiritual consumers

These people seek hip, holistic goods and services that reflect their lifestyle. They also represent an emerging consumer trend.

By Shera Dalin  
ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

When spirituality meets style, the end result is a new consumer, the "metrospiritual."

Or so says Beliefnet.com, a Web site that describes itself as "a multi-faith e-community." The site, which focuses on spirituality and religion, recently wrote about the emerging consumer trend.

Metrospirituals — a play on the hot marketing demographic of "metrosexuals" — are people

with fat wallets and a desire to fill their lives, homes and garages with hip, holistic goods and services.

"They are quite different from those people who came out of the '60s and lived off the grid and were disdainful of consumption," said Alice Chasan, senior editor of Beliefnet in New York City.

"Metrospirituals seemed to arise in the urban centers of the country: Los Angeles, New York and the coasts," she said. "They have a good bit of disposable in-

come, living their spiritual quest through goods and services that enhance their spiritual growth."

Some of the goods and services they seek are yoga, spa treatments, home décor and organic food. They shop at stores such as Whole Foods and Anthropologie, trek to Machu Picchu in Peru, and surf instead of golf.

For the metrospiritual, being trendy isn't enough — being ahead of the wave is what's important.

PLEASE SEE **SPIRITUAL** | E6**What's in, what's out**

A metrospiritual cheat sheet

| IN                  | OUT                |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| Wu wei              | Feng shui          |
| Indian yogi         | Personal trainer   |
| Angelina Jolie      | Demi Moore         |
| Lexus or hybrid     | Hummer             |
| Regional cuisine    | Nouvelle cuisine   |
| Machu Picchu        | Prague             |
| Organic wine        | Beaujolais Nouveau |
| Home altar          | Sweat lodge        |
| Surfing             | Golf               |
| Wellbutrin          | Prozac             |
| Whole Foods         | Ben & Jerry's      |
| Anthropologie       | Pottery Barn       |
| Tea salons          | Espresso bars      |
| Ayurvedic therapies | Shiatsu massage    |

Source: Beliefnet.com

**DAVID NICKLAUS**

### Imperial CEOs are coming under more scrutiny for their high pay

Watch out, imperial CEOs: Your biggest shareholders are getting restless.

Pension funds, mutual funds and other big investors traditionally have been passive owners. They figured little good could come of second-guessing decisions made by management and the board. If they didn't like the way a company was run, they could sell their shares.

That system gave us rubber-stamp boards, often hand-picked by the chief executive. Directors became friends, who would make sure the CEO was paid handsomely.

Oh, the board would bring in consultants to tell them how stock options and big bonuses were important, because those represented pay for performance. But the directors would add a generous pension and severance package to make sure the boss did well, even if the company didn't.

Now, frustrated by scandals and emboldened by a more shareholder-friendly regulatory climate, big investors are rethinking their passivity. The Council of Institutional Investors, representing 130 pension funds with more than \$3 trillion in assets, has declared executive pay its No. 1 governance issue.

Patrick McGurn is

vice president of Institutional Shareholder Services, which advises pension funds on corporate ballot issues. He thinks pay will be the hot topic at annual meetings next spring.

"In past years, pay was always an issue but it was one of several. Now many of the more activist shareholder groups have made it a priority," McGurn said.

The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFSCME, is submitting proposals at five big companies — Bank of America, Merrill Lynch, US Bancorp, Home Depot and Countrywide Financial — seeking an annual up-or-down vote on the executive pay package.

Such non-binding votes are standard practice in Britain. And they work, argues Richard Ferlauto, AFSCME's director of pension

and benefit policy. Bosses earn 431 times as much as the average worker in this country, he says, but just 25 times as much in Britain.

"A couple of companies tried to import U.S.-style pay to the U.K., and there was a shareholder revolt," Ferlauto said.

At Emerson and Raytheon, AFSCME has submitted proposals that would limit the amount of severance that can be paid to an executive who is fired or who leaves after a merger. The limit would be 2.99 times the executive's base salary and bonus. At four other companies, the union wants to change the way restricted stock is awarded.

Often, Ferlauto says, excessive executive pay is the most visible sign of a company that's not properly governed.

"Boards will be held accountable for bad packages," he said. "We've got nothing against

CEOs making money. We're just against CEOs making money at shareholders' expense when shareholders are losing money."

Increased activism by shareholders such as AFSCME comes as the Securities and Exchange Commission also is focusing on executive pay. The SEC's concern is with the way pay packages are disclosed. Some types of pay, such as salary and bonus, are disclosed in dollars; stock options and others aren't. The SEC might require a single dollar figure, and it might tighten rules that allow certain prerequisites to go undisclosed.

We're bound to hear, of course, that the regulators and meddlesome shareholders are making it harder to actually run a business. But for the money today's CEOs are making, they should be able to stand the heat.

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"They are looking for the next new thing as opposed to the mainstream. These are so cutting-edge that even most New Yorkers aren't aware of them," Chasan said.

In St. Louis, metrospirituals patronize places such as metaphysical bookstores, organic grocers and tea salons.

The trend has changed some of the focus of clothing and home furnishings retailer MacroSun on Washington Avenue downtown, said owner Gil Williams. He has seen a concentrated uptick in demand for spiritually influenced décor.

"We've certainly seen a big increase in some of the items we sell for over \$500, particularly in home décor. It's been an exponential increase," Williams said.

As a result, MacroSun is changing its strategic marketing, Williams said. "We are working more with interior designers, especially for loft owners downtown and corporate clients."

Metrospirituals with an exercise bent are

gravitating toward yoga, which is one of the hot workouts now. In the case of Bikram Yoga, a franchise in Richmond Heights, the trend is literally for "hot yoga." Yogis work out in a room heated to 105 degrees, said co-owner Erin Stack.

"The premise is the true meditative (state) comes after physical exhaustion," she said.

Part of the reason people are flocking to yoga studios is that the practice has caught on in Hollywood.

"When the celebrities are doing something, everybody wants to do it," Stack said.

A trend can take up to 10 years to hit St. Louis, said Cynde Meyer, a Reiki (healing) master teacher, breath-work coach and feng shui consultant in Chesterfield.

While Beliefnet suggests that feng shui is passé, another ancient Asian art of placement, wu wei, is on the cutting edge. Meyer said she doesn't get requests here yet for wu wei, but clients often ask her to clear their houses or businesses of "negative energy." She uses

pendulums, dowsing rods and a rare Tibetan bell to do so.

"There have been seekers throughout all time," she noted. "There is just a lot more now."

The Rev. Gilda Hamilton capitalized on the metrospiritual trend two years ago when she opened the Ayurveda Temple of Knowledge in Richmond Heights. The center offers classes on the 9,000-year-old Hindu practice of ayurveda. The center also offers ayurveda massage, which uses two masseurs to mirror each other's motions during the massage, and a place for consultations with an ayurvedic doctor, who uses natural remedies and herbs for prevention and healing.

More and more customers have been seeking the temple's offerings, Hamilton said.

"They have tried everything else, and they are still unhappy," she said. "They have the realization that they are not going to find answers outside themselves."