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TOURISM FIJI WANTS PITCHES

Fiji is eager to welcome visitors after 20 months of shut-down due to COVID-19 and is looking for communications partners to help restore its tourism sector beyond the pre-pandemic 2019 levels.



The Pacific island opened its border on Dec. 1 to fully vaccinated visitors from travel partner countries.

It is looking for agency partners to elevate Fiji's global brand around the world.

Tourism Fiji invites expressions of interest from firms with a proven track record in brand creative &

advertising, global media buying and global digital expertise.

It plans to issue a contract for three years with options to renew for another two years.

Tourism Fiji is working with a budget of \$1.5M to \$2.5M for creative and \$5M to \$6M for digital and media spend per year.

Interested firms should contact (AgencyEOI@tourismfiji.com.fj) by March 21.

Emma Campbell, CMO at Fiji Tourism, is fielding questions about the search. She is at ecampbell@tourismfiji.com.fj.

[Read Tourism Fiji's Expression of Interest \(PDF\).](#)

CHOBANI PR CHIEF EXITS

Christina Alesci, chief corporate affairs officer at Chobani, is leaving the yogurt company to pursue other ventures.

The departure comes as Chobani has put the brakes on an initial planned public offering that was expected to be valued in the \$7B range.



Christina Alesci

She joined the firm in December 2020 after working as a journalist at CNN and Bloomberg for a decade.

At Chobani, Alesci was in charge of internal/external communications, community relations and philanthropy.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported that Chobani president Peter

McGuinness, chief people officer Grace Zuncic and chief strategy officer Michelle Brooks are also leaving Chobani.

Despite the executive exodus, founder Hamdi Ulukaya says he's never been so excited about the future of his company.

Chobani generated a 14 percent growth in nine-month 2021 revenues to \$1.2B but posted a \$24M loss.

STAGWELL POSTS 'BREAKTHROUGH YEAR'

Stagwell Inc reported Q4 revenues jumped 95.5 percent to \$611.9M while full-year results improved 65.5 percent to \$1.5B as the firm completed the integration of MDC Partners on Aug. 2.

CEO Mark Penn called 2021 a "breakthrough year" for the firm

Stagwell posted pro-forma organic net revenue group growth of 14.5 percent during 2021.

Penn is projecting 18 percent to 22 percent pro-forma revenue growth this year as its advocacy unit expects record spending for the midterm US elections.

Stagwell owns KWT Global, Allison+Partners, SKDK, Hunter and Sloane & Co.

The company's stock trades on the NASDAQ at \$7.40 per share. It traded in the \$11.04 and \$2.82 range during the past 52 weeks.



Mark Penn

FBI ALLEGES RUSSIAN PROMOTER IS SPY

US prosecutors have charged Elena Branson, who chaired the New York-based Russian Community Council of the USA, with acting and conspiring to be an agent of the Russian government and willfully failing to register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act. She also is charged with conspiring to commit visa fraud and making false statements to the FBI.

The 61-year-old Branson, a dual US/Russian citizen, allegedly since at least 2011 advanced the interests of the Russian government and its officials, coordinated meetings to lobby federal officials & businesspeople and operated organizations in the US to promote Russian policies.

Branson's promotional campaign, "I Love Russia," was aimed at American youth and exemplified her efforts to act at the behest of the Russian governments, according to the feds.

The Russian native "received tens of thousands of dollars from the Russian government for the Russian Center" and used it to host events and engage in public direction at the behest of Moscow, according to the Southern District.

The FBI interviewed Branson on September 29, 2020. Following the session, she left for Russia and remains at large.

She could receive a maximum of 35 years in prison.



Elena Branson

DROP IN TRUST SHAPES HEALTHCARE CHOICES

Trust plays a major role in consumer decisions about vaccine compliance and preventive care, according to a [newly released study from Edelman](#).



The study also finds that the level of confidence in the healthcare system has taken a hit in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Edelman's "[Trust Barometer Special Report on Health](#)" found that more than half (52 percent) of respondents said that the pandemic had lowered their confidence level in healthcare. Also, 55 percent said they are concerned about medical science being too politicized or used to support a specific political agenda.

Globally, the study says that trust in the health sector slid from 73 percent in May 2020 to 62 percent in March 2022.

Decreasing trust in the healthcare system impacts consumer healthcare choices in several ways, according to the study.

When it comes to choosing whether or not to be vaccinated against COVID-19, people who have a higher level of trust in the sector also said they were more likely to be fully vaccinated. They were also more likely to have had regular check-ups and to have engaged in preventive care.

A lowered level of trust also results in people being more uncertain of the healthcare decisions they do make. While 61 percent of respondents said they were confident of their ability to make informed decisions for themselves and their families, representing a 10 percent drop from January 2017.

To break through the trust barrier, Edelman's study proposes several solutions. Where trust in information is low, it suggests using direct, localized and more personal sources. If the problem is a lack of trust in government, other more-trusted institutions need to play a larger role.

The report also says employers need to be more involved in influencing health choices and that health organizations need to address such issues as climate, poverty and racial justice.

DEUTSCHE BANK'S HUNTER TAKES FTI POST

Dan Hunter, who was head of corporate communications for the Americas at Deutsche Bank, has joined [FTI Consulting](#)'s strategic communications unit as Americas head of financial services.



Dan Hunter

He also will lead a multidisciplinary team to help clients navigate the rapidly changing financial regulations environment, enforcement actions, litigation and economic challenges.

Hunter also was managing director of [Prosek Partners](#) and did an eight-year stint at Barclays in London. He handled communications for the acquisition and integration of Lehman Brothers into Barclays.

Citing his roles as working for two of the world's biggest banks in London and New York, Brian Kennedy, head of the stratcomm's financial unit, said Hunter will "provide the kind of unique, global and client-centric insights and perspectives that management teams in highly regulated industries truly value."

NEWS OF FIRMS

The [International Association of Risk and Crisis Communication](#), a non-profit organization that brings together risk and crisis communication professionals from around the world, launches. Geneva, Switzerland-based IARCC will provide members with professional development and networking opportunities, as well as resources and support through education, research, and advocacy. It will also offer professional development in risk and crisis communication through the creation of a dedicated academy. The organization is currently running a [fundraising program](#) to support humanitarian efforts geared toward those impacted by the war in Ukraine.

Seven Letter starts up an environmental, social and governance practice. The firm has also expanded its corporate communications offering to support both public and private companies in their efforts to reach existing and prospective investors, sector analysts and the financial media in the form of financial communications and investor relations. As part of the new practice, Seven Letter has added two new partners, Scott Deitz and Meaghan Hohl. They, along with new hires Christian Rodriguez, Macsonny Onyechefule and Jesse Rogers, will be integral to the expansion of the firm's offerings.

Marquette University's Diederich College of Communication is partnering with Kansas City, MO-based **Trozzolo Communication Group** on the launch of the **Carl Collective**, a student-involved public relations, advertising and communications agency. Based near Marquette's Milwaukee campus, the Carl Collective will partner with clients in the region on a range of services across the marketing communication mix. It will be led by Marquette alumnus Erik Brooks, owner of Brooks Communications, which is being acquired by Trozzolo Communications Group as part of the deal.

Mod Op acquires Cleveland-based **AMG Marketing Resources**, parent company of agencies Tenlo and NSRC. The acquisition, which bolsters Mod Op's presence in the Midwest, follows Alterna Equity Partners' recent investment in Mod Op. AMG will serve as Mod Op's Ohio office. AMG Marketing Resources chief executive officer Kip Botirius and vice president, UX & technology strategy Tessa Burg will join the Mod Op senior leadership team as executive vice president and senior vice president of technology, respectively.

Chicago-based **myWHY Agency** and Miami-based **Lebec Consulting** have formed a partnership that will work with clients in the philanthropic; impact investing; and environmental, social, and governance space. The partnership is intended to combine myWHY's integrated marketing; brand strategy; public relations; and diversity, equity and inclusion experience with Lebec's expertise across philanthropy, impact investing and ESG investing.

Ascendant Group Branding opens a Los Angeles office under the brand Reformat Agency. Reformat is a partnership between Ascendant and Brand Designer, a company run by Chris Collins, who will lead Reformat. In addition to Ascendant's traditional CEO and executive branding offerings of PR, social media, literary representation and executive communication strategies, Reformat's services include logo design, web design, videography, photography, brand books, UI/UX Design, brand collateral, and investor decks.



MARKETING FOOD AND BEVERAGE BRANDS

According to a 2021 survey conducted by digital restaurant platform BentoBox and the Infatuation, 84 percent of consumers order delivery/takeout an average of two times per week.



Marc Paulenich

Understandably, the food and beverage industry is turning to digital solutions to reach consumers with online ordering, customer service, marketing strategies and more. As PR and marketing pros in the food and beverage industry, we must adapt our strategy to stay relevant.

But many of us operate on a [tight budget](#). [Gartner's Annual CMO](#)

[Spend Survey](#) found that in 2021, marketing budgets fell to their lowest level in recent history—6.4 percent of company revenue. How can we take advantage of the opportunities in the food and beverage industry in a cost-effective way?

The simplest answer is usually the most overlooked: Go back to the basics. Use budget-friendly solutions—including social media and digital tools—to identify trends, better evaluate your brand, your competitors and your audience as well as find your voice, set your strategy and measure.

Step 1: Identify the trends

The food and beverage industry has shifted considerably in the last few years. Identifying these trends are a key first step in better marketing your brand.

Online food ordering: The global online food-delivery service market is expected to increase at a compound annual growth rate of [10.3 percent](#), as consumers continue to demand instant access to meals and groceries.

Demand for healthy, sustainable and accessible: [The International Food Information Council](#) found that 25 percent of consumers say knowing where their food comes from is very important to them.

Eating local: [Digimind](#) says “buy local” was the seventh-top trending conversation across digital platforms in 2021.

Combatting cooking fatigue: Brands got creative and began offering simple recipes and easy-to-prepare meal kits online, with [six in 10 restaurant operators](#) saying they will continue to offer online take-and-bake options post-pandemic.

Step 2: Evaluate your brand, competitors and audience

Take a good look at three components: your organization, your competitors and your audience.

First, begin with a self-audit. Evaluate your current marketing and messaging practices. Also, look at emerging trends in the industry, such as those mentioned in step one.

Next, select a handful of competitors. Of these, three or four should be organizations comparable to your own, as well as one or two aspirational organizations. Identify their strengths and weaknesses, and compare them to your own.

Finally, dive into your audience. Use social media as a real-time listening tool to learn more about your audience.

Step 3: Find your voice

Now, apply all of those learnings to either create or refresh your brand voice.

Start by establishing your brand’s values and your mission statement. It’s incredibly important your mission statement reflects how you want your organization to be seen by current and prospective employees and customers.

Once your values and mission are solidified, develop three or four supportive messaging pillars.

Step 4: Build a strategy

Start by identifying the channels and outlets that best reach your target audience.

Then, outline content themes that will resonate with your audience and support your brand values and mission. These themes should be set in a consistent cadence, which will guide how often you push messaging across all of your platforms.

Finally, don’t neglect goal-setting as a part of your strategy. Set your benchmarks and then outline a handful of measurable goals and key performance indicators.

Step 5: Measure, evaluate and improve

Using the benchmarks you set in the strategy phase, take advantage of cost-effective measurement tools such as Google Analytics and Sprout Social.

Be flexible and pivot when something isn’t working. Continue to use social media as a real-time listening tool to learn more about your audience, and continue to keep a close pulse on industry trends and best practices.

While keeping up with current industry trends may seem costly and time-consuming, you don’t need a massive budget to create an effective PR strategy. By taking a close look at the trends, your organization, your competitors and your audience, and then creating an actionable, measurable plan, you’ll be able to leverage the major opportunities the food and beverage industry has to offer.

Marc Paulenich is President of [Hart](#).

METS ADD AMEX'S GOLDBERG TO LINEUP

The New York Mets sign up Andy Goldberg as executive vice president and chief marketing officer, effective March 23. Goldberg comes to the Mets from American Express, where he served as senior vice president, global brand content and platforms. He was previously chief creative officer and chief brand officer at GE. Goldberg replaces David Newman, who will move into a consulting role.

“His experience leading creative and marketing teams for two *Fortune* 500 brands will be an instrumental part of helping grow the organization’s image,” said Mets president Sandy Alderson.



Andy Goldberg

SVC DEFENDS BED, BATH & BEYOND

[Sard Verbinen](#) is handling media for Bed Bath & Beyond as the retailer is pressed by billionaire investor Ryan Cohen to revamp its operations and explore strategic alternatives.

Cohen, co-founder of Chewy Inc. online pet products retailer, and chairman of GameStop, owns a 9.8 percent in BB&B via his RC Ventures investment arm.

BB&B says it will “carefully review” RCV’s letter and hopes “to engage constructively around the ideas they have put forth.” It also noted that 2021 marked the first year “our bold, multi-year transformation plan, which we believe will create significant long-term shareholder value.”

Sard Verbinen has Jim Barron and Jared Levy working the BB&B account.

The firm is part of Finsbury Glover Hering.

MINNESOTA SEEKS PR FOR CHILDCARE PUSH

The Minnesota Dept. of Human Services wants proposals for a communications and outreach campaign to raise community awareness of its Family, Friend and Neighbor childcare provider program and the impact that it has on early development and education landscapes.



The effort will publicize available local resources to support FFN providers in an effort to encourage Minnesotans to register to become legally, non-licensed childcare providers (LNLs).

The selected partner will work with the Health Dept. and other partners to develop a central communications hub to serve as a source of information for FFN/LNL providers.

It will produce flyers, PSAs, social media content, TV/radio ads aimed at various cultural, rural communities to communicate the various opportunities available for caregivers.

Minnesota plans to issue a contract for 17 months beginning May 1. It may extend the pact for up to five years.

Proposals are due March 21. Bidders must register at <http://www.mmb.state.mn.us/vendorresources>.

[Read the RFP \(PDF\).](#)

CONGRESS AIMS AT RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION

Congressman Don Beyer has introduced a bill to support online literacy and educate Americans on how to spot disinformation and misinformation.



Don Beyer

The Educating Against Misinformation and Disinformation Act is inspired by a program in Finland that teaches students from K-12 to identify propaganda from neighboring Russia.

The bill would establish a national commission to analyze the status of education and mis/disinformation, report how it is spread and establish a grant program to improve America's

resilience to fake news.

The Dept. of Education would report about the commission's effectiveness three years after the bill is signed into law.

The Virginia Democrat said Russia's misinformation campaign regarding the invasion of Ukraine shines a bright light on America's need to defend itself against the threat posed by these malign influence operations.

MARINA MAHER HIRES WPP'S FARINA

Marina Maher Communications brings on Diana Farina as group senior vice president, client excellence, a newly created role. Farina joins MMC from WPP, where she was a core team lead on its Pfizer business. She previously held positions at Evoke and Digitas Health.



Diana Farina

At MMC, Farina will focus on creating ways to service strategic client relationships and advancing integrated workflow across the agency.

"Her appetite for excellence and strong interpersonal and relationship-building skills are exactly what

we're seeing clients are seeking," said MMC managing director, business strategist Ivette Sanz Osso.

PUTIN NEARS BREAKING POINT

The Ukraine invasion has reached its mosy critical stage, according to a March 11 "Ukraine at War: Week Three" webinar sponsored by *The Economist*.

Vladimir Putin may be nearing his breaking point as his military is bogged down in a country that he claimed didn't exist and his troops are thwarted by a military that was supposed to run away from the mighty Russian army, said Arkady Ostrovsky, Russia/Eastern Europe correspondent of *The Economist*.

Russia's army has suffered 2,000 to 4,000 deaths, including three generals, since it invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24. That compares to 15K deaths incurred by the Soviet Union in a decade of war in Afghanistan.

Russia faces strong opposition from the West and NATO has kept up a steady flow of Javelin anti-tank and Stinger anti-aircraft weapons.

More importantly, the Ukrainian people are united in their belief that their country can defeat the Russian military.

"It's a pretty bad story for Russia, which has been struggling to coordinate its attack," Shashank Joshi, defense editor.

Sons, Brothers Won't Be Coming Home

While sanctions are upending Russia's economy, "people are also beginning to realize their sons and brothers won't be coming home from the war," Ostrovsky said.

Ed Carr, deputy editor, fears dark days ahead as Putin becomes more paranoid and anxious.

Carr noted that the blame game has begun in Moscow as two generals, who were involved in planning the invasion of Ukraine, have been put under house arrest.

Joshi said there'd been a subtle shift in Russian propaganda, which now accuses the Americans of helping the Ukrainians set up chemical weapons sites.

A desperate Putin could use that lie as a "false flag" to launch his own chemical attack on Ukraine. Chemical weapons haven't been used in Europe for more than 100 years.

The Ukraine invasion has literally become a life and death situation for Putin, said Ostrovsky.

But as Russia's economy faces Armageddon and its army becomes more demoralized, who will deliver the message to Putin that his time is up?



Ed Carr

SÁEZ EXITS BIDEN WHITE HOUSE FOR SKDK

SKDK adds Mariel Sáez to the staff of its Washington office as SVP in the public affairs practice.

Sáez was most recently director of broadcast media for president Biden's White House communications team. She was previously deputy communications director for the Presidential Inaugural Committee and women's media director for the Biden-Harris presidential campaign. Before that, Sáez worked for house majority leader Steny H. Hoyer in roles including deputy communications director.

At SKDK, Sáez will work across the firm to support public affairs and corporate clients.



Mariel Sáez

OKADA TO SCHOOL BRUNSWICK GROUP EXECES

Julie Okada will join Brunswick Group as partner/global head of learning and leadership development on March 15.



Julie Okada

Most recently, she was a principal at Triad Consulting Group in charge of communications to bolster organizational performance and team performance.

Earlier, Okada was executive director at Duke Corporate Education and a talent manager at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina.

She began her career at PwC.

Neal Wolin, Brunswick CEO, said the firm understands the critical importance of development to further the career of staffers.

“Julie will be instrumental in pushing these efforts forward further and helping to develop the firm’s next generation of leaders,” he said.

COLLEGE PARK LOOKS FOR COMMS PARTNER

College Park, which is part of metropolitan Atlanta, is looking for a partner to handle its PR and advertising outreach.



The city prides itself on having all of the benefits of a large city, while preserving the neighborliness of a hometown.

College Park is Georgia’s fourth-largest urban historic district

It is located near Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, interstates I-85 and I-285 and the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority.

The selected firm will write press releases, conduct media relations, handle events and create creative, research-based advertising programs.

Proposals are due March 22. They go to: City of College Park; Purchasing Department; 3667 Main Street; College Park, GA 30337

[Read the RFP \(PDF\).](#)

ICR BOOSTS SATIXFY’S PLAN TO GO PUBLIC

[ICR Inc.](#) handles SatixFy, the Israel-based maker of semiconductor chips for the satellite telecom market, as it merges with Endurance Acquisition Corp. in a SPAC deal valued at more than \$800M.

EAC is an affiliate of Antarctica Capital, the New York-based private equity firm with \$2B in assets under management.

SatixFy’s customer base includes Telesat, OneWeb, ST iDirect and Airbus.

Yoel Gat, SatixFy co-founder and CEO, said his company sells the “picks and shovels for the 21st Century’s gold rush in space.”

He said proceeds from the merger will “put us in position to quickly grow in what we see as a \$20B 2029 market opportunity” in segments such as ground terminals, low Earth orbit broadband satellites and business/commercial aircraft.

ICR’s Kevin Hunt and Brian Ruby represent SatixFy.



ACCOUNTS IN TRANSIT

[BPCM](#) signs on as agency of record for **Virgin Hotels** for both the US and UK. The agency will oversee media relations, partnerships and influencers for the lifestyle hospitality brand, which was established by Sir Richard Branson’s Virgin Group in 2010. It currently operates five US locations, with properties in New York, Glasgow and Edinburgh scheduled to open this year. BPCM is also named agency of record for luxury apparel and accessories brand **Vince**, which it has represented in the UK since 2016. It will run media relations and talent relations for the brand.

[ARPR](#) is selected by cybersecurity solutions provider **SonicWall** to help the organization expand its reputation through data-driven strategic storytelling. The agency’s cybersecurity practice group is tasked with elevating the visibility of SonicWall and its executives. SonicWall says it safeguards organizations by offering protection that stops the most evasive cyberattacks across multiple exposure points and increasingly remote, mobile and cloud-enabled workforces.



Beach House adds female-founded hair care brand **Beachwaver** to its roster. The agency will handle Beachwaver’s public relations and influencer marketing efforts. The brand has won over 50 beauty awards and is known for its patented Beachwaver, a professional rotating curling iron created by celebrity hairstylist and company founder Sarah Potempa.

EVENTS

The USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations will address “[The Future of Corporate Activism](#)” at its 32nd Kenneth Owler Smith Symposium, to be held on March 31 at 6 p.m. The event will be presented live on the USC campus, and it will also be available to be livestreamed on Zoom. The symposium will go over the research from the center’s 2022 Global Communication Report, which discusses how to prepare PR departments and professionals to engage with activists, nonprofits and other external influencers. Panelists are set to include Patagonia head of communications and policy K. Corley Kenna; Lyft vice president, communications Dominic Carr; Rare Beauty vice president, social impact and inclusion Elyse Cohen; and Ben & Jerry’s director of PR and communications Sean Greenwood.



A free **Institute for Public Relations** webinar on March 21 will look at how communications pros can effectively combat the effects of workplace burnout. In “[Overcoming Burnout: Effective Strategies to Elevate Your Mental Health](#),” panelists will go over strategies to help both leaders and employees stay motivated in their careers. The panel includes San Diego State University assistant professor Patrick Thelen, University of Alabama assistant professor Laura Lemon and Omnicom chief equity & impact officer Emily Graham.

The New York Financial Writers Association will be presenting the 79th edition of their [Financial Follies](#), a fundraising event that lampoons major newsmakers, on May 20 at the Edison Ballroom in midtown Manhattan. There are still 14 tables available for those who would like to attend the event. Tables at this year’s Follies go for \$6,000 for a table of 10, which includes an open bar for the night. The open bar will start at 6 p.m. with the follies getting underway at 7 p.m.

COMMENTARY



Bob Chapek

Disney CEO Bob Chapek was forced to make a hasty retreat on March 8 from his memo of two days earlier in which the entertainment company explained why it refused to publicly criticize Florida's horrible "Don't Say Gay" bill.

"Corporate statements do very little to change outcomes or minds," wrote Chapek. "Instead, they are often weaponized by one side or the other to

further divide and inflame."

He went on to say the best way to effect change is "through the inspiring content we produce, the welcoming culture we create, and the diverse community organizations we support."

Chapek's wishy-washy statement bombed among Disney employees and the groups that it said it purportedly supported. Disney has 65K workers in Florida.

He was forced to eat the proverbial crow at the March 8 shareholders meeting at which he publicly trashed his original intent of working behind the scenes to defeat the bill.

Chapek, who assumed the helm from Bob Iger last year, told shareholders: "I understand our political approach, no matter how well-intentioned, didn't quite get the job done."

Adding insult to Chapek's PR injury, the Human Rights Campaign, the largest LGBTQ+ advocacy group, turned down a \$5M donation from Disney.

The group did credit Chapek's annual-meeting statement with being "the first step in the right direction."

Chapek's PR co-star Geoff Morrell also didn't come across smelling like a daisy from the "Don't Say Gay" mess.

The former Pentagon spokesperson and BP executive VP-communications & advocacy was a very high-profile hire when he joined Disney on Jan. 1.

The Democrats have a nasty habit of snatching defeat from the jaws of victory, a custom that could trigger a bigger wipeout than the one anticipated in the midterm elections.

The House passed a massive \$1.5T spending bill on March 8, which included funding for Democratic wishlist items like money for childcare, education and climate resilience.

The bill also included \$13.6B funding for Ukraine, split between military hardware and humanitarian aid.

It is a major accomplishment, one that the Democrats should have trumpeted as a sign that they get things done.

Of course, the opposite occurred. There was Democratic sniping and bickering about dropping \$15.6B for COVID-19 response, which postponed the vote and raised the prospect that the \$1.5T package could go down the drain.

That would have been a PR nightmare for the Democrats.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi, playing her role as the "adult in the room," finally stepped in and saved the day for her party.

She wrote a note warning recalcitrant Democrats to get over it and vote for the \$1.5T. There will be other days to fight for the COVID-19 measure.

Pelosi headed off a Democratic disaster. The nation has moved on from COVID-19. DC Democrats should, too.

Workers of the gig economy unite, just don't form a union. DoorDash, Lyft and Uber are among the app-based platforms that established the Flex trade association on March 8.

Flex claims it will advocate on behalf of "common sense solutions" on a range of issues affecting workers, consumers, businesses and other stakeholders.

In the press release announcing its formation, Flex said its first education campaign, called "Independence Works," would tout the wonders of workers setting their own hours.

Flex says the average app-based worker works eight hours per week, letting them earn extra money on their own terms. I don't think my Grub Hub guys are working for "pin money."

Of course, those app-based workers are classified as independent contractors who are not eligible for benefits that union employees received.

Labor unions say some app platforms limit the hours gigsters can work so they don't qualify for healthcare benefits.

Joe Biden and Democrats want to pass the "Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act" that would reclassify some app-based workers to traditional employees.

Flex isn't pro on the PRO Act.

Happy Early Saint Patrick's Day... Quinnipiac University has reversed course and will not shutter Ireland's Great Hunger Museum that is on its Hamden campus, but instead will relocate its contents intact to the Fairfield-based Gaelic-American Club.

The Great Hunger occurred from 1845 to 1852 and led to the starvation deaths of 1M Irish people and the emigration of another 2.1M, which reduced the population of the island by about 25 percent. Ireland is the only western European nation with a smaller population today than in the mid-19th Century.

The Great Hunger was caused by the failure of the potato crop and repressive policies of the British government that favored the absentee English landlords in Ireland.

Quinnipiac's decision to shut down the Museum drew the wrath of the Irish-American community, who feared that pieces of the collection would be sold to private investors.

Connecticut Senator Richard Blumenthal made that point during a November protest at the Museum:

"I'm here to say we need to keep this museum; we need to keep this collection intact... here in Connecticut... it should not be dispersed, divided, split up. That's what happened to the Irish people as a result of the Great Famine. This is a moral imperative...."

The 75-year-old GAC, which has more than 6,000 members, is one of the largest Irish-American organizations in New England. Its Fairfield location is only about 30 minutes from the Museum's current location.

The University received multiple proposals for the Museum and selected the GAC's pitch because of its established infrastructure, cultural and financial resources and location.

"The goals of keeping the Museum collection together in Connecticut and cared for by the Irish-American community were paramount in our decision-making," said Arthur Rice, chairman of Quinnipiac's board of trustees.

Good move, Quinnipiac.

—Kevin McCauley