

PHOTO: Thurston Howes

*Josée Covington, President and  
CEO of Covington Travel*

Specialists in the Art of  
**TRAVEL**

# Covington Travel sets the industry standard for customer service in travel

by Thomas E. Dougherty

*"Where were you?"* is a question often asked of generations who have lived through the remarkable events dotting the storied history of America. For example, it is not uncommon for someone to recall gathering around a black-and-white television set in their family's suburban living room as the first manned mission to the moon landed in 1969.

Two years prior to that historic mission, a young, entrepreneurial businesswoman and native of Luxembourg, sat down in a 500-square-foot office space with two telephones, two typewriters and a single ambition. She had hopes to build a business coordinating vacation and business travel to worldwide destinations. Little did she know that, 44 years later, she could reflect on the moon landing of 1969 and say confidently to her clientele, "How would you like to travel into space? To see the curvature of the Earth? My company can make that happen." (see inset)

Josée Covington is that entrepreneurial businesswoman. She opened her doors in 1967 and brought to life a company that would become a national leader in the provision of business, vacation, and meetings and events travel services.

But Covington is more than your average travel agency.

The organization is divided into three primary segments: business travel, meetings and events, and vacation travel. Each has a designated staff invested in the well-being of their clients, no matter the size of the corporation, the complexity of the meeting's agenda or the scope of the vacation. Add to this mix a newly developed Suborbital Travel Package, and suddenly every competitor's clichéd promise that "the sky's the limit" is no longer relevant to this trendsetting agency.

Covington Travel's value to businesses can be found in several critical and unique services. A priority of Covington when partnering with corporate clients is to manage their travel expenditures and identify areas of overspending. Covington's

corporate team excels in all areas of corporate travel management including, but not limited to, risk management, cost savings, carbon footprint reporting, supplier negotiations, unused airline ticket tracking and account management. Covington provides real-time cost comparisons on airfares, hotel and car rental accommodations, as well as 24-hour access to trained agents and custom self-service booking solutions.

Josée Covington, President and CEO, attributes her company's success to its staff across the Commonwealth. Sam Keene, Vice President of Business Development, cites one of Covington's strengths as its "team of innovative thinkers." Covington employees have on average more than 20 years of experience in the travel industry. Such unparalleled expertise gives Covington an edge when it comes to anticipating the next big travel trend and the new technological tools required to meet it.

A full team of IT professionals and support staff are pushing Covington to new frontiers. Proprietary reservation booking and registration programs, developed by Covington, are examples of advancements made behind the scenes to improve the client experience from the time of booking to the return home. When it comes to meetings and events, years of hands-on experience is combined with resource-saving registration technologies allowing Covington to deliver the meticulous, creative and personal service clients have come to expect.

Paul Covington, Chief Financial Officer and Chief Information Officer, is proud of his team's success in keeping Covington ahead of the curve. "New technologies continue to emerge and we will implement them wherever possible to meet the needs of our clients."

This "can-do" attitude is infectious at Covington Travel.

*"Nothing is as important as the relationships we build with our clients, our suppliers, and our own colleagues. Not even the bottom line."*

-Josée Covington, President and CEO

[Covington Travel, continued]

Josée Covington exudes this essential attitude as an ambitious dynamo, but she recognizes the fact that ambition cannot exist at the expense of customer-centered business acumen. She makes no apologies for her stance that, "nothing is as important as the relationships we build with our clients, our suppliers, and our own colleagues. Not even the bottom line." For that, Covington Travel is recognized regularly for its tremendous satisfaction and retention ratings among clients – both corporate and individual.

Enhancing Covington's position as a globally trusted travel resource is its membership in Virtuoso, a prestigious consortium of hotels, resorts, tour and cruise companies and a myriad of travel suppliers throughout the world. Virtuoso membership is granted only to stringently accredited travel

management companies with impeccable reputations. Covington Travel and Virtuoso are a natural pairing, as every one of the agency's 85 employees lives up to the Virtuoso standard of being "specialists in the art of travel." They make business, vacation, and meetings and events travel management seamless, with a level of customer service that is remarkable in business today.

Forty-four years ago, when she had little more than two desks at which to work, Josée Covington created what would become a vital and respected member of the business community in Virginia and beyond. Now, Covington Travel sets the standard for its industry in ways some might call, "out of this world." [K]



PHOTO: Courtesy of Covington Travel

## SUBORBITAL SPACE TRAVEL

Once upon a time, the possibility of space travel was only for astronauts. Covington Travel is doing its part to change that. A new program, introduced by Founder and Chairman of Virgin Galactic, Sir Richard Branson and aircraft builder Burt Rutan, is bringing suborbital space travel to the world's most adventurous travelers. Karen Kilyk, a veteran travel advisor with Covington, has been selected to serve as one of 50 Virgin Galactic Accredited Space Agents (ASAs) in the entire country qualified to advise interested clientele on space tourism.

Says Kilyk, "I was so honored to be chosen as one of only 50 ASAs in the United States who can book these unique flights. I always love to hear clients' enthusiastic feedback on their amazing trip experiences and I think the feedback on these flights will be like none before."

*Covington Travel's Karen Kilyk, left, with Sir Richard Branson, Founder and Chairman of Virgin Galactic*