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Food & Lifestyle

Delaware North's new COO leads shift to experiential hospitality



Image: Buffalo Business First

Delaware North COO Jamie Obletz, at the offices in Buffalo
MARK MULVILLE



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See Correction/Clarification at the end of this article.

Story Highlights

- Jamie Oblatz became COO of Delaware North in 2025.
- Delaware North sold its travel hospitality business to Areas USA.
- The company employs 1,500 locally — including 450 at the corporate headquarters — and 45,000 globally.

It tells you something about a company when the top execs are busy watching the women's Olympic hockey finals in the minutes leading up to an interview.

The TV in Jamie Oblatz's office was still playing when he stepped out for our 3 p.m. interview, which ended just in time for Oblatz to catch the U.S. beating Canada 2-1 to win the gold in an overtime win.

It goes without saying that Oblatz is a huge sports fan, having spent nearly three years as president of Delaware North Sportservice and another 21 months overseeing the company's United Kingdom business, leading operations at nearly 50 global professional sports and entertainment venues.

In October, he [moved up to COO](#) at the \$4.4 billion Buffalo-based hospitality and entertainment firm, one of the region's largest private companies, where he now has global responsibility for operations and strategic growth.

The promotion came just nine years after he joined the company as vice president of corporate M&A and investments, bringing a background in real estate investment banking at M&T Bank and JP Morgan.

“My entry point in 2016 was on that part of the business, but early on in that time period I knew I didn’t want it to end there. I didn’t want to be just an M&A expert. I was too enamored of the scale and size and complexity in all areas where the company operates,” he said. “In many ways, (the COO post has) been a role I’ve been wanting for many, many years.”



Delaware North COO Jamie Oblatz, at the offices in Buffalo

MARK MULVILLE

Besides the M&A background, Oblatz worked hard to put all his ducks in a row to be ready if/when the spot opened up. That included spending time overseeing the company’s Patina Group restaurant portfolio and before that, accepting a leadership role with the travel hospitality division just as the pandemic arrived to shut it down.

“I made it my mission back then to wear two hats,” he said, “to do my day job, and not mess that up, but also to learn as much as I humanly possibly could about the rest of the company by asking a thousand questions, raising my hand and volunteering for 100 different projects or committees ... getting on planes,

going to meetings, really trying to soak it all up and learn this business almost from the ground up, under the pretense that it can only make me that much more valuable down the line.”

Obletz was leading the company’s travel hospitality division when the pandemic struck, when all food, beverage and retail business came to a stop at airports across the country, including the 22 operated by Delaware North. When the world reopened, he said, the company took off.

“We became a lot smarter about our company, a lot smarter about our business, about our technology, about our processes, our systems, our people and about our economics,” he said. “It was an enormous learning curve for me and in many ways a bit of a springboard for me within the company.”



The Delaware North offices at 250 Delaware Ave. in Buffalo

MARK MULVILLE

The ability for Obletz to move up to COO coincided with a time of change at Delaware North, which completed the [sale of its \\$500 million U.S. travel](#)

hospitality business line in 2025 to Areas USA.

The sale was part of a larger [strategy to shift](#) away from contract business to allow the company to better control its own destiny, including doubling its Patina Group [restaurant portfolio](#) and [expanded operations](#) with Disney, the PGA of America and F-1 Racing.

Then there's the new deal to operate Monsieur Dior by Dominique Crenn, a new restaurant located within the House of Dior Beverly Hills on Rodeo Drive; as well as Hencraft, a new fast-casual fried chicken concept opening in downtown Buffalo on March 12.

The company used 2025 to pivot, Obletz said, allowing it to reinvest into the businesses that have longer term growth opportunities.

"Those tough decisions in 2025 set us up well for 2026 and beyond," he said.

Shedding the airport business allows for more investments into other experiential areas of hospitality, such as new sports business sites as well as gambling, lodging and parks and resorts.

On the sports side, that means going beyond professional sports to pursue business at colleges and universities, especially as more sites allow alcohol sales.

"A natural extension of that would go into collegiate sports, where we operate collegiate stadiums and venues," Obletz said. "We think that presents a growth opportunity for us with the next five or 10 years."

And when it comes to lodging and parks, the company is looking at how to grow past its existing concessions with the National Parks Service by investing in its own cabin-style lodging and glamping sites under the Waybound moniker.

That could mean opening a business just outside or adjacent to Yellowstone or Yosemite or the Grand Canyon where it can capitalize on existing traffic. He points to the company's Tenaya Lodge at Yosemite, where the first Waybound cabins will open; and existing operations at Yellowstone and outside Vail, where guests can access snowmobiles and summertime ATV and fly fishing excursions.

"Waybound is maybe a baby step to something bigger, where we're looking at our current portfolio and investing," Obletz said. "We're still testing and learning, but it could be very meaningful. ... For a company with our history, we tend to be very disciplined as you can imagine, and to learn these things and make sure to get it right. And then once it's perfected, you know, go big with it."



Image: Miami Freedom Park

Miami Freedom Park signs first tenants for its mixed-use district as the stadium project advances toward opening.

MIAMI FREEDOM PARK

This spring will see the [opening of the new](#) Miami Freedom Park Soccer Stadium, the next Major League Soccer contract for Sportservice and its first major contract in Miami, followed by the World Cup at Metlife Stadium in New Jersey. The

company is also expanding its Australian operations in April with a contract at Victoria Racing Club in Melbourne.

On the casino side, Delaware North will open the first phase of the \$1 billion [Catawba Two Kings Casino](#) in partnership with the Catawba Nation near Charlotte, one of the largest casinos in North America outside of Las Vegas.

The company is also committed to its headquarters in Buffalo, despite the loss of the concessions contract with the [Buffalo Bills](#) at the new stadium. He pointed to ongoing relationships at Niagara Falls State Park, Hamburg Gaming and at the Westin Hotel and Patina 250 downtown.

Instead of a smaller footprint, Obletz said the company is planning to recruit more leaders to work in Buffalo, versus the hybrid model it adopted post-pandemic.

The company employs 1,500 locally – including 450 at the corporate headquarters – and 45,000 globally. Obletz said in the next one to three years he expects the company to hire in Western New York

“There will be growth and assuredly, that is our expectation both in the number of associates that are here and most importantly, the level of employees here that we really want – more of that C-suite and middle management,” he said. “I think you’ll see from us in the next couple of years a renewed focus on ensuring we have the right talent here in Western New York.”

T H E L I S T

Top Private Companies in Buffalo 2025

Revenue 2024

Rank	Prior Rank	Name/ prior (*new or not ranked)/ URL
1	1	Rich Products
2	2	Delaware North
3	4	UNC Dairy
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Correction/Clarification

After this story was published, Delaware North clarified which amenities are offered at Yellowstone and Yosemite.