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## Carnival May Roll Out Three Dining Options

Carnival Cruise Lines probably will introduce three dining options on its ships: traditional seatings at 6 p.m. and 8:15 p.m. and a third open seating, Carnival president and CEO Gerry Cahill told travel agents on the America's Vacation Center Travel Executive Forum today.

He and Carnival senior vice president of sales and guest services Lynn Torrent provided agents with an overview on Carnival and the industry and then answered their questions.

Responding to an agent's question about dining, Cahill said that Carnival has been testing the open seating option on the Carnival Legend and if its tests continue to be successful with passengers, the new plan probably will be rolled out fleetwide over the next year.

He said that guests in surveys say they love the traditional dining experience – "Ratings have been extraordinarily high," said Cahill – where they get to know their fellow passengers and waiter and assistant waiter but that the line wanted to test the open dining option to appeal to new customers.

Asked about Carnival's long-term plans, Cahill told agents that "we are not going to change our stripes." Carnival he said, will continue to be focused on providing "fun, quality vacations to middle America. We do it well and we want to do it better."

So the line plans to introduce more onboard options and activities – "more ways for people to have fun" – and will continue to "upgrade the quality and consistency of product." The line is currently working on a number of projects to enhance the Carnival experience

Cahill added that Carnival "wants to be hassle free" for agents to deal with and the line will invest in enhancing its systems to that end. And Torrent noted that the travel agent portal bookccl.com has been enhanced and will introduce new agent tools going forward.

Carnival's own Web videos, said Torrent, who hosts them, are designed to educate agents about the Carnival product and sales and support services. "Thousands and thousands of agents" have watched the Web videos available at bookccl.com, she said, joking with Cahill over who got the larger audience – Cahill or Carnival Corp. & plc chairman and CEO Micky Arison.

In her overview of the cruise industry, Torrent said that whether or not the economy is in a recession, consumers still want to take their vacations – need their vacations – and they are turning to cruise vacations because of the value they provide.

She thanked agents for getting that value message out to the market and noted that the cruise industry in general gets extremely high satisfaction ratings from guests and continually works hard to meet their needs.

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Fuel costs are the biggest challenge the cruise industry faces, said Torrent, noting that Carnival and other lines have cut operating costs by looking for more efficiencies and less waste.

From the consumer side, Carnival's position in homeports that are drive markets is helping to sustain demand, the executives noted. Cahill said that next year Carnival will open its first year-round homeport in the Northeast, in Baltimore, providing consumers in the region with the option of driving to their Caribbean cruise instead of flying to Florida, with the ability to drive to the cruise vacation yet another value proposition that appeals to consumers.