



TeleGRAM

Great American Hotel Group Newsletter

Around the Block

Wishing a "Happy Anniversary" to our Great American Hotel Group office and property GMs:

*Dave Akridge - 27 years
Gabrielle Smith - 20 years*

A Little Bit Wiser

Wishing a "Happy Birthday" to our Great American Hotel Group office and property GMs:

Suzanne Baele - November 18

Social Butterflies

GRAM recently opened a Twitter account. While we are newbie tweeters - we'd love you to follow us! @GreatAmerHG.

If you haven't already - "Like" us on Facebook too.

Share any information for posting with Linda.



A Laugh A Day



Celebrating Service

As the year draws to a close, and the season of thankfulness and celebration is upon us, it is appropriate for us to not only thank our loyal owners and customers for their business, but to also recognize all our associates for their hard work, loyalty and dedication.

Pictured above and below are just a few of the many associates that have been recognized at GRAM properties over the months as Employee's of the Month/Year. Their outstanding work is a tribute to their property's leadership, training and focusing on doing things right and we thank all of you for your tireless efforts, attention to detail, and focus on the bottom line.

Happy Holidays to all and we look forward to continued success in the New Year!



New Kids In Town

HOMEWOOD SUITES GATEWAY HILLS

Welcome to our new Sales Manager Tanya Preston. Tanya is a synonym with "service" and she brings a plethora of experience to her new position. Most recently, Tanya served as Sales Coordinator for the Radisson Hotel here in Nashua, and has held several front desk/manager positions with two Westin hotels in Portland, ME.



"I am devoted to creating outrageously pleasing guest experiences and making sure every guest feels appreciated. My persona is to exude only positive energy into everything I do - from ensuring perfect stays to each company and organization we work with, to my joy for the outdoors, tennis and spending time with my four sons. I look forward to meeting you all and working with you towards our mutual success. Let's talk.... iamsales... I am At Your Service!"

FAIRFIELD INN & SUITES MILLVILLE

Join us in welcoming Margie Williams to the Fairfield Inn & Suites Millville team! Margie assumes the role of Sales Manager at the hotel.



Margie's most recent experience has been as a Real Estate Agent with Caldwell Banker in Vineland, NJ, but her background includes more than 20 years in hotel sales and

customer service - working for Comfort Suites, Wingate, and Country Inn & Suites brands.

"She is a go-getter and has already made a tremendous impact on our hotel sales" noted GM Jeff Webb. "Since she started here in August she has already converted many new groups, shifted business to the hotel, and brought 29 new LNR accounts to the table!"

Watch out Millville... here she comes and she's looking for customers!

I Am Human, I Am A Resource Suzanne Baele, Corporate Director of Human Resources

Avoiding the Bed Bug Lawsuit

Excerpted in part from an article written by Jeffrey M. Lipman - Hotel Business - 10/17/17

There is nothing magical about avoiding a bed bug lawsuit. Lawsuits are the same as war in the sense that they represent the parties' failures in diplomacy or dispute resolution. Lawsuits, like war, are for the most part, avoidable.

The starting point in avoiding lawsuits is recognizing that liability from bed bugs is not an immediate consequence due to the mere presence of this pest in a hotel's property. Every hotel property, regardless of its customer base demographics, has bed bugs routinely introduced. Liability, however, does ensue due to inadequate inspection, repair (remediation) or warning. While a high level of bed bugs in a room may reflect inadequate inspection or training on behalf of housekeeping, detecting one or two bed bugs in a room, with no bed bugs found in surrounding rooms, may, in fact, demonstrate vigilance.

Understanding when a hotel may be found liable should assist in developing strategies for both preventative protocols and dispute resolution. For instance, a hotel may reduce its potential exposure to bed bug-related lawsuits by: 1. Hiring a pest management professional (PMP) to train maintenance and housekeeping staff to perform frequent room and common area inspections 2. The judicious use of perimeter insecticidal dusts in hallways and rooms 3. Using active mattress liners such as ActiveGuard Mattress Liners 4. Considering the use of mattress encasements to protect the capital asset against fluids and stains 5. Implementing a documentation system with response protocols 6. The strategic use of interceptors, and 7. Periodic inspections by a PMP. Implementing these measures demonstrate to the consumer and plaintiff's attorney that the hotel is doing what it can to protect guests from bed bugs.

The next step in avoiding a lawsuit is to recognize when a hotel has exposure and assessing an appropriate and proportional response. Hotels need to understand that a lawsuit is a long-term process. Litigation involves prolonged hours of lawyer meetings, answering written discovery, preparing for and submitting depositions by management and staff and, if need be, preparation and participating at trial.

The time commitment for this endeavor is huge and the financial costs are expensive. In fact, a confirmed "one-night bite" case may well involve a substantially higher cost for legal fees, expert witnesses, and court costs than the actual value of the case. It is therefore essential that a hotel develop an empathetic and sincere response strategy while their legal team assess their degree of exposure. This strategy may begin by offering to both waive the affected client's hotel charge and offer a future free stay at any one of the hotel's properties. It may also involve a financial settlement. If a lawyer becomes involved, there is no reason the case cannot be settled at that time, and before a lawsuit is filed.

The plaintiff's attorney must also appreciate the costs it will take to prosecute a case to trial. However, a hotel must also consider the potential attorney fee-shifting provisions under the state's consumer protection statutes. Simply, this is where a plaintiff's attorney may be entitled to prevailing party attorney fees if they obtain a recovery in court. The obvious question is why not settle before the lawsuit is filed and these costs begin to accrue? Especially if a hotel has already assessed its liability and exposure.

The cheapest time to deal with bed bugs is before they are discovered by a guest; hopefully the anticipated outcome when proactive preventive measures have been implemented. The next cheapest time is when they are discovered and subsequently addressed with an appropriate and timely response. In contrast, the most expensive time to deal with bed bugs is after a lawsuit is filed and litigation ensues. This is not to say that all bed bug claims must be settled or paid out. There are times that a hotel needs to dig in and fight— especially if the guest is being unreasonable. However, kicking the can down the road and allowing the claim to progress through litigation is an unnecessary expenditure of money and employee time, in most instances.

Property Happenings

HAMPTON INN & SUITES EAST HARTFORD

Exciting news about two of our associates!



Bethzabeth Santiago was married on 9/27/17 and is now Mrs. Acevedo. She is pictured here with several of her fellow associates from the hotel.

Sophia Shirley became a proud naturalized citizen on November 29th.



We are happy for both team members and congratulate them on their news!

FAIRFIELD INN & SUITES MILLVILLE

Vineland, NJ native and Millville High School graduate Mike Trout was recently a guest at the hotel. Trout is a pro baseball center fielder for the Los Angeles Angels. Nicknamed the "Millville Meteor", he is a six time MLB all star and received the MVP award in both 2014 and 2016. He took a few moments to pose with GM Jeff Webb. Mr. Trout was a very pleasant and gracious guest.



Truth or Turkey?

1. Truth or Turkey? All turkeys can fly.
2. Truth or Turkey? All turkeys gobble.
3. Truth or Turkey? The first department store to hold a Thanksgiving parade was Macy's.
4. Truth or Turkey? Turkeys can't see behind themselves.
5. Truth or Turkey? Canada also has Thanksgiving.
6. Truth or Turkey? The Pilgrims only "celebrated" three official days - the Sabbath, fast days, and days of thanksgiving.
7. Truth or Turkey? Cranberries are tasted to see if they are sweet enough to harvest.
8. Truth or Turkey? A baby turkey is called a chick.
9. Truth or Turkey? Approximately 280 million turkeys are eaten each year on Thanksgiving in the United States?
10. Truth or Turkey? A snood is the official name of a Pilgrim's hat.



Answers on Page 6

Match a Name to a Carol

Recently our own Kris Kringle Suzanne Baele did a poll amongst GRAM office staff to see what was their favorite Christmas Carol. Can you guess what song is each person's favorite?

Send your answers to Suzanne at Suzanne.Baele@GreatAmericanHG.com for your chance to win a great prize! You must submit answers no later than 12/15/17. Prize will be awarded before 12/31/17. Most answers correct will win!

Note: Some staff may have voted for the same song!



Dave



Suzanne



Gabrielle



Asha



Ben



Rob



Jim



Linda



Teena

- A. Holly Jolly Christmas
- B. O Holy Night
- C. Little Drummer Boy
- D. Jingle Bells
- E. Silent Night
- F. Carol of the Bells
- G. Grandma Got Run Over By a Reindeer
- H. I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus
- I. White Christmas
- J. What Child Is This?
- K. All I Want For Christmas is My 2 Front Teeth
- L. Santa Claus Is Coming to Town

More Property Happenings

FAIRFIELD INN & SUITES MILLVILLE (CONTINUED)



Meet Jasmine Wells, our newest FD Agent. Jasmine hails from The Fairfield Inn & Suites Mt Laurel NJ, is a Capricorn and is studying Hospitality Management at Grand Canyon University

HOMEWOOD SUITES GATEWAY HILLS



We're expecting a new addition at the hotel. No, not a renovation, a BABY! Our Chef Dani is expecting a baby very soon. The staff has a baby shower planned for 12/2/17.

The winner of our annual Pumpkin Carving contest is

Felicia. Every year, each member of the staff is encouraged to carve a pumpkin. The pumpkins are then anonymously displayed in the lobby. Guests vote on their favorites!

The staff enjoyed a "Friendsgiving" Luncheon to celebrate Thanksgiving.



Secret Santa is underway. Not only will there be gift exchange, but they are doing "random acts of kindness" as well!

How to Manage Your Hotel's Online Reputation

Excerpted from an article published by Hotel Online - 10/2/17

Online reputation has become vitally important across all industries and for those operating in the hospitality sector it's an essential area to manage. Today when booking a hotel, googling and reading reviews is one of the most common steps travelers will take – it has a huge impact on your bottom line.

Those hotels that fail to manage their online reputation can seriously harm the number of reservations they're achieving. It's not an area that you can afford to skimp on. The sheer number of holidays and reservations made online should give you an indication of why your digital reputation should be among your top priorities.

If you don't have a clue about where to start managing your online reputation and how to use it to secure customers, we've got the practical tips that you need.

Google your hotel – The first step that you should be taking is to Google yourself. It'll give you an idea of what potential customers are seeing about your hotel and give you a baseline from which to build your success.

Respond to feedback – It might seem like a time-consuming task but it's one that can have a very positive impact. Review sites like Trip Advisor draw in a huge number of people every day so ranking well is crucial. Where good feedback is left, a simple, professional thank you message will be appreciated. If you've received critical feedback it's crucial that you respond. You don't want to appear that you're making excuses but you should directly address any issues outlined, including how you're going to make improvements.

Encourage reviews – As well as responding to reviews, you want to encourage them. Up to date reviews could tip the scale in your favor if someone is deciding whether to make a booking. It can be as simple as mentioning it when your guests check out or you could offer an incentive to really boost numbers.

Engage on social media – Social media has become a core marketing strategy for hoteliers and is an effective way to build engagement, staying in the minds of potential guests. While you can have a friendly persona on social media platforms it's typically best to keep it professional, viewing it as an extension of your other customer service aspects.

Refresh your listings – When you come across a listing for any business that's outdated it can be frustrating and off putting. Regularly go through the online listings for your hotels to ensure it has fresh pictures, data, and more. It'll show that you're a business that takes a proactive approach.

Taking Special Care of Risky Guests

An elderly guest checked in to the Elite Inn in St. George, SC. He called his daughter in NJ to check in and she noticed he seemed upset and confused so she called the hotel to see if anyone could double-check on him. GM Gerald Law went to check on the elderly man and found that he was very weak and dazed after driving too long and not eating more than dry cereal. His also had lost his cell phone charger and his phone was dead. Gerald went out and bought him milk, water, a TV dinner and a new cell phone charger then helped him call his daughter to assure her he was ok. All turned out well. Gerald's advise: It is very important to take care of all our guests and be observant - especially the elderly.

Is Sales Just Marketing, Or Is Marketing Just Sales?

There is often confusion as to whether a good sales person is actually “selling” or whether they are just wandering around the community marketing their hotel and hoping a sales contract drops in their laps. In order to try to specifically define the difference, I called on my old friend Wikipedia to help me with the definition:

Sales: The activity of selling, or the amount of goods or services sold in a given time period.

Marketing: The study and management of exchange relationships. Marketing is used to create, keep and satisfy the customer.

Our hotel **Sales** Managers are primarily responsible for finding customers appropriate to our hotel facilities, and converting lookers into bookers. Being able to sort through leads, prospects, and data to find people to talk to about our product takes skill. Learning how to find a customer is more than half the battle.

Sales Managers must understand the steps of sales in order to fulfill their goals. Getting to know your potential customer, walking the fine line between developing a business relationship and “getting in their business”, and being able to listen to what the customer wants before asking for the sale is critical.

Sales Managers in our hotels are responsible for all aspects of booking group business, soliciting and signing Local Negotiated accounts, and working with the brand to court and convince national accounts to book at our hotels. While Sales Managers are not primarily responsible for finding and booking transient guests, it is important that they participate in revenue management strategies and decisions so that they are looking for the right group/volume/LNR business, at the right times, and at the right rates. Having all these tools in their tool boxes will give them the advantage over the competition.

So when do we use **Marketing** to make sales work? After all, the definition above says marketing is used to create, keep and satisfy the customer!

A good Sales Manager has a few marketing skills up their sleeve at all times. Developing marketing materials and collateral, creating packages and promotions to support specific sales efforts, and being creative are great skills for every sales manager. Marketing can be learned. Sales has to be in your blood!

I interviewed many of you before you joined the hotel in a sales capacity. Remember the question I asked? Are you a creative type or a nuts-and-bolts type? Your answer gave me insight into you and your ability to distinguish your skill set as it applies to sales versus marketing. A good sales person is probably a blend of both creativity and productivity!

So, what do you do if you are more Sales or more Marketing? You focus on learning what you need to improve in both categories. Sales people who want to be more creative: talk to people, brainstorm, reach out to people you know who are creative and learn to think outside-the-box. Creative types: You need to become more grounded and focused on the details and learning the skills needed to convert lookers into bookers. Set up your own personal learning plan. Take courses, read, and work with those who have strengths where you do not.

Happy Selling!

Linda



Truth or Turkey Answers:

1. Turkey - Wild Turkeys can fly but domestically grown turkeys for eating cannot because they are too heavy.
2. Turkey - Only male turkeys gobble. They do it to attract female turkeys.
3. Turkey - It was Gimbal's.
4. Turkey - They can see 270 degrees.
5. Truth - They celebrate the second Monday in October.
6. Truth
7. Turkey - Cranberries are bounced to see if they are ripe. They should bounce about 4" high.
8. Turkey - A baby turkey is called a pout.
9. Truth
10. Turkey - A snood is the loose skin under a male turkey's neck.

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Year End Reminders:

- Make sure you complete verifications of current addresses for all associates for W-2 purposes.
- Clean up all payroll related matters to include entering all appropriate fields of data (including dismissal dates).
- Review any local laws (county, city, state) that have been recently enacted or are scheduled for 2018.
- Review any minimum wage changes (if applicable).

Looking "Great" In East Hartford!



Recently, the team in East Hartford showed off their new uniforms from LandsEnd. Don't they look G R E A T? "Feeling the Hamptonality" above (from left to right) are Sophia, Kaeshly, Charlotte, Shantal and Nicole. Below, the team "strikes a pose" with GM Mercy Breitenbach. Pictured below are from left to right, Kaeshly, Charlotte, Sophia, Mercy, Nicole and Shantal.



By The Numbers *Gabrielle Smith, Corporate Controller*

On 11/8/17, Microsoft issued **Security Advisory 4053440** providing guidance on securing Microsoft applications when processing Dynamic Data Exchange (DDE) fields. The DDE protocol enables messages to be sent between Microsoft applications and uses shared data to be sent between applications.

VISA notes that a malicious cyber actor could leverage the DDE protocol when delivering specially crafted files to users through phishing and web-based downloads, and strongly recommends that users exercise caution when opening suspicious files. For more information, refer to the security advisory noted above, or contact GRAM for more information.