

# Executive Travel

## Stars of Land and Sea

An Interview with Don Glassie,  
Chief Executive Officer, Atlantic Stars

**EDITORS' NOTE** During his long and diverse career, Don Glassie has served as a Captain in the U.S. Air Force, a salesman in the metal production industry, a small business guidance and development counselor, and a successful entrepreneur, leading companies in the clothing and real estate sectors. Having concentrated on real estate and hospitality since the mid '70s, Glassie has developed many condominium buildings and has renovated a number of hotels along the United States'



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eastern seaboard, some of which he continues to own and operate today. The recipient of a bachelor of arts degree from Amherst College, Glassie studied engineering at Stanford University and business at George Washington University.

**COMPANY BRIEF** Based in Newport, Rhode Island, Atlantic Stars ([www.atlanticstars.com](http://www.atlanticstars.com)) operates small, independently owned hotels and inns in destinations along the United States' Atlantic seaboard including Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts; Newport, Rhode Island; New York; and Miami's South Beach. The company also runs harbor cruises in Newport, Rhode Island, aboard the classic 1929 motor yacht, Rum Runner II, and the schooner, Madeleine, and seasonal cruises in New England and the Caribbean on the sailing cruise yacht, Arabella.

**In building brand awareness, are you more focused on promoting Atlantic Stars, or the brands of each individual property?**

When we started building our Web presence, we realized we needed a home page, and that's how the name Atlantic Stars came about. Before that, the individual properties were our focus, but now, we're starting to push the Atlantic Stars brand more.

**You started by renovating small, intimate properties, but your new property in New York, the Strand, is larger. How do you see your portfolio developing?**

We started with some small properties in New England, but now we wouldn't develop a property with fewer than 100 rooms. The Strand, on 37th Street and just west of Fifth Avenue in New York, is going to be a business hotel, much like our other hotels. Although we mainly target the leisure market in Florida, our South Seas Hotel is located very close to the



Miami Beach Convention Center, and we capture a segment of the business market because of that.

**Is that emphasis on the business market reflected in your provision of meeting space?**

We've gone quite far with meeting space at the Strand. We have two pretty significant meeting rooms for the size of that property, plus a big breakout space in between. So a small convention – let's say for 350 people – could have up to four small meetings

going at once, or two bigger ones. That's a pretty sizeable meeting setup for a small New York hotel. We hope that's going to be a selling point.

**Will your new hotel in New York compete with Park South Hotel, your other property in the city?**

I don't think so. The two businesses are located close to one another, so some people might use both of them. There's so much business in New York that I don't see them competing.

**In New York, hoteliers often find it difficult to run a profitable hotel restaurant, because of the abundance of exceptional stand-alone restaurants in the city. What are you planning for the new hotel, in this respect?**

In Florida, we run a restaurant called A Fish Called Avalon, which we opened in 1990. I think it's one of the oldest restaurant in Miami's South Beach. We're planning to bring A Fish Called Avalon to New York, because much of our large customer base in Miami is actually from New York. It's easier to get to Miami in the summer than the Hamptons. Because of that, we have a head start on the clientele in New York, so we're planning to make that move.

**Many talk about the economy slowing down. Have you seen a downturn in the travel industry in recent months?**

We have not seen any slowdown thus far. In fact, December 2007 was our biggest and best December ever, particularly in Miami. We just blew the socks off everything.

**What about the cruise side of your business?**

We have got a couple of commercial boats and, in addition, we have built a mini sailing cruise ship called *Arabella*. It operates in New

England in the summer and in the Caribbean in the winter. We've been getting good grades from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, which concerns itself with boats that leave the United States for foreign ports and come back again. They have surprise exams; they just show up and check you out.

**How many people can the Arabella hold?**

It has 20 private cabins, so it holds 40 passengers overnight, but it's actually licensed for 49 people to stay overnight. We can accommodate 149 for a party. It's a good little business; it's just not very big. So going forward, our main thrust will continue to be the hotels.

**As you develop the business, what kind of property will you be looking to acquire?**

We've done different things in different markets. We've done a lot of big gut renovations; that's probably the best thing you can do with the exception of building from the ground up, which is really the best deal. To buy an existing hotel that's in operation is not as good a deal, so we're more likely to pick up something that needs a lot of work to bring it back. That's not to say that we wouldn't move on an existing business that was in the right place, if it was a workable deal.

**Is Atlantic Stars' Web presence driving business?**

Yes. We love the Internet, and we've developed the ability to put up our own sites. We do a lot in-house, which is wonderful; it means we can change things quickly. There's no need to go to an outside person for those services, and that's important to us.

**With such a dynamic business, spread out over the entire eastern seaboard, how do you budget your time?**

I make sure that the properties we have now run as well as possible. A lot of our properties are not new buildings, so they're always works in progress and we're constantly improving them. I work with several very talented people, and that really helps.

**Looking back to when you started this business, did you expect it to grow to such an extent, and in this direction?**

I hoped it would, although I've always just done one thing at a time. ●

*The Park South Hotel in New York City (left) and the South Seas Hotel in Miami's South Beach (right)*