

# LEADERS IN *Hospitality*

## Repositioned for the Recovery

An Interview with David J. Colella,  
Vice President and Managing Director, The Colonnade Hotel



**EDITORS' NOTE** David Colella has held his current post since December 1992. He is Chairman of the Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau and Vice President of the Massachusetts Restaurant Association. He sits on the boards of the University of Massachusetts Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, First Night Boston, and Skat Club International, Boston. Colella is a graduate of the Isenberg School of Management at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. He was recently inducted into the Massachusetts Lodging Association's Hall of Fame.



David J. Colella

**PROPERTY BRIEF** Situated in Boston's Back Bay, The Colonnade Hotel ([www.colonnadehotel.com](http://www.colonnadehotel.com)) is an independently owned and managed luxury property featuring 285 sophisticated rooms and suites with 21st-Century comforts and high-tech amenities. The property is home to the city's only rooftop pool and Brasserie Jo, one of Boston's most popular restaurants. Opened in 1971 by Bertram Druker, the hotel is overseen today by his son Ronald Druker, President of The Druker Company.

**When you look at the past year and the challenges we've seen with the economic downturn affecting travel and tourism, how much has Boston been impacted, and how challenging has it been specifically for The Colonnade?**

Having affected our industry nationwide, Boston has actually fared better than most cities. The city's central location in the Northeast, with multiple transportation systems and easy access, has insulated us a bit. The corporate sector has been most affected because business travel is down. It has forced hoteliers to operate more efficiently, to understand what is truly important to their clientele, and to balance quality with flexibility. With rates down and the business sector minimizing travel, we've become more aggressive within other markets. We have expanded our efforts within the leisure segment and have targeted business from industries that have been less affected by the downturn than others.

**Are you content with how the renovation has been received by the market?**

We are. Though we've always reinvested

and improved the hotel, had we not undertaken the most recent renovation completed in late 2008 – a \$25 million “reinvention” – it would be much more difficult for us to compete today. Over the past five years, Boston has seen a steady increase in new supply, and many existing hotels have renovated. We're very happy with the reinvention of the hotel, which includes all guest rooms and suites, public areas, the lobby, and our fitness center.

We spent a great deal of time and research testing our ideas in advance.

This led to sound decisions on key product and service enhancements that make staying at The Colonnade a more home-like experience. Our guests are especially pleased with the details in the rooms, such as custom Keurig® coffeemakers, iPod® docking stations, and state-of-the-art iBAHN entertainment centers with 37-inch flat-screen HDTV's, stereo, and DVD/CD players. We built in plenty of easily accessible electrical outlets and added thoughtful touches, such as 3X magnifying mirrors.

We also added environmental enhancements that won The Colonnade Boston's 2009 Green Business Award. Our windows were replaced with energy efficient ones that open and we added energy saving climate-controlled heating and ventilating systems. The Colonnade was the first U.S. hotel to implement the ElectroCide™ System property-wide. This cleaning process is 80 percent more powerful than chlorine bleach yet completely nontoxic to humans and the environment.

The Colonnade had long been known for its consistently high level of service. The enhancements have helped us raise that bar.

**How critical has it been for you to place a greater emphasis on open communication with your people during these times, so they understand the vision and plans for the property?**

Our culture is to communicate directly with all levels of staff. We openly discussed the renovation during the planning process and received some great ideas, many of which were incorporated into the plan. We continue to get ideas for tweaking our new product. We also communicated with staff early on about the downturn in the economy and its affect on the hotel. We said that we expected things to be difficult, yet operationally, were committed to

providing the same consistent level of exemplary service. They've embraced what we've had to do over the past year, delivering on our usual high standards while working harder and smarter internally.

**How critical has an open relationship and common vision with the ownership been for you, in terms of maintaining consistency at the property?**

I will celebrate 17 years at The Colonnade Hotel this December, and frankly, I never thought that I would be here this long. I'm thrilled that I have been, and I count that tenure as a good reason for some of the successes we've had based on consistency in management and ownership. That relationship is all important, and is fostered by direct communication within an independent operation versus the layered communication that is common within a larger company or chain.

There is a great deal of personal and family investment here. Bertram Druker opened The



Colonnade almost 40 years ago when the Back Bay was not the most desirable location. It was his foresight and commitment to establishing a major hotel here that helped revitalize this neighborhood; his son, Ronald, carries on that legacy.

As a family-owned independent hotel, the ownership and I have a shared vision regarding the hotel's role within the city, as well as the unique brand of hospitality that we offer.

**What are the key priorities you're focused on as you prepare to come out of this downturn in the economy?**

We're focused on continuing to expand our business nationally and internationally. We must continue to deliver exemplary service and insure that we provide the products and services that our guests expect. ●

*The Colonnade Hotel entrance (top); the lobby (bottom)*