

Dream Makers Culture

**An Interview with Deborah Yager Fleming,
Chief Executive Officer & Partner, Acqualina Resort & Residences on the Beach**

EDITORS' NOTE *Deborah Yager Fleming joined Acqualina Resort & Residences on the Beach in March 2004 after having served as Vice President, Sales & Marketing, at Island Outpost where she managed marketing campaigns for 12 boutique hotels. She also garnered valuable experience in New York at Leading Hotels of the World where she held senior management positions and implemented the design of worldwide sales strategies and innovative marketing programs.*



Deborah Yager Fleming

PROPERTY BRIEF *With a lushly landscaped 4.5-acres of seaside bliss, world-class restaurants, curated amenities and spacious rooms and suites, all with balconies and water views, Acqualina Resort & Residences on the Beach (acqualinaresort.com) is at the center of Miami's Sunny Isles Beach providing an exclusive experience and an ultra-luxurious beach lifestyle. The property is the recipient of the coveted 2023 Forbes Five Star Award and the 2023 AAA Five Diamond Award. Additionally, Acqualina has been named the 2023 #1 Beachfront Hotel in the U.S. by TripAdvisor and 2023 #1 Best Resort and #1 Best Hotel in the U.S. by US News & World Report. USA Today awarded Acqualina as the 2023 Best Destination Resort.*

What have been the keys to the strength and leadership of Acqualina?

We are constantly looking for ways to improve and offer something new to our guests and residents. We have made several enhancements to our guest experience throughout the years and continue to always look ahead as to what we need to enhance or create so that our customers feel they are getting great value and care. As an independently owned and operated property, we know it is important for ownership to be present and walk the grounds and interior spaces to see how we can make them better. We also know that it is important to have many team members in every area of the resort who have a great sense of service and who are recognized for their outstanding service.

The customer journey begins with providing luxury five-star service for each and every guest. Building our customer loyalty remains a strategic pillar for our business. For the resort, we have maintained 50 percent

repeat guests who produce 50 percent of the room nights for years. It is the personalization by the caring personalities of our team members which provide lasting memories for our guests.

We also assist our team members with enhanced technology solutions, freeing up time for them to focus on the "WOW stories" and building a bond with our guests and residents. Employee engagement, together with technology, allow us to address how we further exceed customers'

expectations and make a lasting impression. We have created a sense of community providing a feeling of warmth and welcome, security, and luxury service. Our guests keep coming back because they enjoy the elevated level of comfort, amenities, and personalized service they experience while at Acqualina.

How do you describe Acqualina's culture and values?

We follow the highest standards in everything we do. As a family-owned and operated resort, we remain agile and nimble and constantly innovate and bring new services and amenities. By unleashing the incredible capacity of our team to make a difference and by opening our minds to new designs and technologies and



Spa Relaxation Lounge

by working together, we are making Acqualina an extraordinarily vibrant and safe place to live, stay or work.

We are bound by devotion to create a great living experience for our residents, guests, visitors, and team members. Our goal is to create exceptional experiences through happy motivated team members deliver our customer dreams. We constantly strive to do better, and we trust, respect, and recognize each other's talents.

Will you provide an overview of Acqualina and what guests can expect to experience when visiting the property?



Acqualina Resort & Residences on the Beach front lawn



Avra Miami restaurant at The Estates at Acqualina

Acqualina is built completely open to the sea with no barrier between our property and the Atlantic Ocean. Our outdoor setting is exceptional and makes one feel as though they have been transported to a Mediterranean island. Acqualina is reminiscent of a Mediterranean Villa atmosphere. Our gorgeous beachfront has over 20 outdoor living room settings in our signature red color on Seashore Paspalum grass. We have three sea level swimming pools, all featuring pool-side cabanas, two that are family friendly and the third is for adults only. There is also Acqualina Spa, a 20,000 square-foot spa facility that is very special. The spa has an outdoor swimming pool and heated jet pool with a roman waterfall. There are indoor relaxation lounges. All the spa spaces are intimate and a visit to the spa makes you feel completely rejuvenated.

We have four destination restaurants including one that sits next to the sand called Costa Grill which is open all day and offers Floridian cuisine with Mediterranean influences. It is the perfect dining spot where our guests never feel rushed and are able to linger as long as they want. We also have the newly-opened Avra offering Greek and seafood cuisine, the iconic Il Mulino New York offering authentic Italian cuisine, and Ke-uH with exquisite Japanese food. All of our restaurants have outdoor dining options overlooking the Atlantic Ocean.

Will you discuss Acqualina's focus on providing personalized service?

We have GEMs (Guest Experience Managers) assigned to each arriving guest and a Dream Makers Culture that empowers

our team members to customize the services based on our guests' needs. We encourage our team members to identify what would make a guest's experience extra special. And we recognize our team members for providing great service and reward them through our AcquaDollar program where they can accumulate AcquaDollars and cash them in for prizes, hotel stays, and U.S. dollars. The recognition and care of our employees is very important to us and every day there are team members who are acknowledged on our Employee App. Our ability to succeed is due to all our team members, those who interface with our customers as well as those who don't have the opportunity to meet customers, yet still provide a valuable service to the operation. Everyone has an important role and is needed for us to achieve our success. Therefore, we are appreciative to all of our team members who deserve to be celebrated and recognized.

Acqualina is committed to continuous improvement. What is planned for the property as you look to the future?

We are working with designers to provide a gorgeous event space on our Mezzanine level adjacent to our board room. In addition, we will be redesigning our fitness center area and introducing a new wellness program called AcquaFit, which will bring new fitness classes, wellness, and nutrition programs as well as an array of branded apparel and fun merchandise. This fall we will also embark on a redesign of our restaurant space to create a sophisticated and chic dining space for breakfast as well as evening dining.

Will you provide an overview of the residences at Acqualina?

Our residential community is comprised of three developments all offering lavish amenities for residents and their families to enjoy. Acqualina started with Acqualina Resort & Residences on the Beach in 2006 where there are 188 residential residences. This was followed by The Mansions at Acqualina which opened in 2015 with 79 residences, and last year we opened The Estates at Acqualina with the debut of our South Tower offering 154 residences. This year we will open the North Tower which has 94 exquisite residences. The Estates features a 45,000 square foot amenity villa including a fitness center and spa with a halo therapy salt suite. There is an ice skating rink, a Formula One simulator, golf simulator, bowling lanes, a movie theater, and a Wall Street Trader's Club room. In addition, there is a two-story speak-easy/residents club outfitted with a series of tiered seating and dance platforms with a bar and lounge and wine room. The grounds are full of beautifully curated gardens and feature multiple infinity pools, a FlowRider® for surfers, a basketball court, a romantic beachfront restaurant and bar. The South Tower and North Tower lobbies are designed by Karl Lagerfeld. The Estates marks the first and only interior design project in the United States for the late designer and reflects his iconic style and eye for detail, with custom features, finishes and furnishings inspired by the aesthetic of each space and the building as well as by the destination.

What do you tell young people about the keys to being successful in the hotel industry?

The hotel industry is great because you can start from an entry-level position or mid-management and develop a wonderful career. The first step is to determine which path would be best to follow that will make you fulfilled and allow you to achieve your aspiration. The hotel business offers many different types of careers, and management is always looking to promote from within the organization. If you do a great job, you will get noticed. New positions are always presenting themselves for individuals that are looking for career development opportunities. The key is to understand the goals and the tasks required to be successful with the position you hold. If you stay committed and keep learning and improving your skills, you will be valued and on your way to a successful career. At Acqualina, we promoted 40 individuals in 2022, and in the first six months of 2023 we promoted 16 individuals.

Did you always know that you were attracted to the hospitality industry and what has made the industry so special for you?

I started my career in a hotel management trainee program, then went into hotel sales and marketing roles on property, regional and then in a corporate role always looking for ways to improve and create new opportunities for the companies I worked for and the customers I served. I have always enjoyed travel and hospitality and have spent most of my career positioning independent luxury hotels. I am inspired by an entrepreneurial mindset and creating new experiences without boundaries that result in remarkable moments individuals can enjoy. ●