

The Evolution Of An Icon

An Interview with Mark Ferland, Area General Manager, The Ritz-Carlton, Naples



EDITORS' NOTE *Mark Ferland established his roots with Ritz-Carlton more than 20 years ago and has been integral to the brand's growth in the Southeast region and beyond. Early in his career, he opened several Ritz-Carlton hotels in sales and marketing. He was later promoted to Vice President, Global Sales where he oversaw all Global Sales offices and Field Sales for Ritz-Carlton. He accepted his first General Manager assignment at The Ritz-Carlton, Atlanta before joining the 584-room The Ritz-Carlton, Orlando, Grande Lakes. Most recently, Ferland served as Market General Manager of The Ritz-Carlton Key Biscayne, Miami, and The Ritz-Carlton, Coconut Grove, Miami where both luxury properties unveiled masterful redesigns and new offerings under his leadership. Joining The Ritz-Carlton, Naples in 2022 as Area General Manager, Ferland has led the full transformation of the iconic property*



Mark Ferland

PROPERTY BRIEF *An icon of Florida's Paradise Coast, The Ritz-Carlton, Naples (ritzcarlton.com/naples) recently reopened its doors to debut its long-awaited "Evolution of an Icon" transformation. The comprehensive renovations inspire a new guest experience that pays homage to nearly 40 years of iconic experiences, featuring a stunning new lobby and Lobby Bar, three new dining outlets, a redesigned pool experience, an expansive Ritz-Carlton Club Lounge and newly-designed luxury guest rooms and suites. Located along the beautiful shores of the Gulf of Mexico, The Ritz-Carlton, Naples extends its legacy of world-class amenities and extraordinary guest service, making it the perfect escape for creating unforgettable memories.*

Will you highlight the transformation that has taken place at The Ritz-Carlton, Naples?

It has been such an honor to bring the incredible transformation of The Ritz-Carlton, Naples to life this year. As one of the largest renovations in the history of The Ritz-Carlton brand, we left no stone unturned and this level of investment to the future of the resort is a testament to our loyal and future guests, as well as the local Naples community.

Guests are immediately greeted by a refreshed lobby and new Lobby Bar, specializing in Champagne, and it is once again the social center of Naples. Two additional new dining spaces were unveiled alongside the Lobby Bar including Sofra, which focuses on vegetable-forward Mediterranean shared plates, as well as the coffee shop Moka, serving hand-picked beans from a third generation roasting family.

A major highlight of the transformation is the addition of the Vanderbilt Tower. This new tower comprises 70 Club Level suite accommodations and a sprawling 4,000 square foot Club Lounge – which is the most spacious and innovative in the brand with a full-service bar, media room, exclusive programming, and five daily culinary presentations. Alongside this new tower, there were extensive redesigns to all other guest rooms and suites within the resort.

Guests will now also find a revamped outdoor experience including new pools, cabanas and ten enclosed bungalows complete with air conditioning, living space, and bathroom facilities for extra privacy and comfort.

How did you balance keeping some of the history and traditions of the resort with the focus on bringing a modern and current feel as part of the transformation?

As a legendary resort on Florida's Paradise Coast for nearly four decades, it was important to honor traditions while ushering the property into its next era. So many of our guests have a strong connection and memories that have been made here, and it was crucial for us to ensure that continued as we look towards the future of the resort. While the appearance is new, the roots remain, and the commitment to the service and guest experiences that we're truly known for is still very much at the forefront.

Within the new design, inspiration was drawn from the historic glamour of travel and the destination's unique coastal elegance, which resulted in interiors that honor the resort's heritage and traditions. The result was a timeless luxury that guests have been very excited about since returning.

Will you discuss The Ritz-Carlton, Naples' focus on offering personalized service and a customized guest experience?

Exceptional service first starts with our Ladies & Gentlemen, and our dedication to them within our "Employee Promise." It states "our Ladies & Gentlemen are the most important resource in our service commitment to our guests" and I have seen that translate directly into the premier level of service that they provide. The employee promise is a key component of our Gold Standard, which also outlines steps of service and service values. The level of service and commitment to the guest experience defines The Ritz-Carlton as a brand and leads everything we do.

How do you define the role of the general manager and what are the keys to being effective in the role?

I define the role as a General Manager, especially within The Ritz-Carlton brand, by leading and energizing the brand values and being the guardians of the Ritz-Carlton culture. Very few companies in the world have an employee promise and it is the very foundation of everything that we do. I personally lead and teach by our five Gold Standards, and I find it to be an extremely effective way to lead in the role. It all starts with focusing on our hotel values in orientation for new Ladies & Gentlemen, rather than the technical functions of their job. Immersing them in the culture of the hotel and Ritz-Carlton brand from the very beginning allows for true understanding of our priorities, which is premier service and guest experiences. We then inspire innovation, lead with compassion and accountability, and continuously empower our Ladies & Gentlemen.

What advice do you offer to young people interested in pursuing a career in hospitality?

This is an extremely rewarding career, as we are in the business of creating memories for our guests that will last forever. I would advise those interested in the hospitality industry to be patient and learn from your leaders and mentors. Every general manager has started their journey with hourly positions and has worn many hats while working their way up which allows for many learning opportunities and exciting growth. Joining a highly respected organization, such as Marriott International, provides endless opportunities to explore a variety of disciplines across food and beverage, rooms operations, sales, and more, that allow for your aspirations to be fulfilled. To be a general manager, this must be your passion. A hotel never closes and therefore requires commitment and flexibility, but it is all worth it. ●