

LEADERS IN *Hospitality*

A Home Away from Home

An Interview with G. Paul LeBlanc, Vice President,
Marketing & Sales, Warwick International Hotels



EDITORS' NOTE As the executive responsible for all aspects of global sales, marketing, and positioning of Warwick International Hotels' brand, G. Paul LeBlanc oversees these efforts for the hotels and resorts owned by the hotel group, and provides the marketing direction for the affiliate members of the Warwick Collection. He has an extensive background in the hospitality industry and has been responsible for many significant achievements in strategic planning, sales promotions, revenue management, advertising campaigns, and Web site development. LeBlanc joined Warwick International Hotels in 2003 from Regal Hotels International Holdings Limited based in Hong Kong, where he was Vice President of Sales overseeing the local and global sales efforts of the Asia-based hotel company.



G. Paul LeBlanc

PROPERTY BRIEF Built by William Randolph Hearst in 1926, the historic Warwick New York Hotel (www.warwickhotelnyc.com) is located in the heart of midtown Manhattan and features 426 elegantly appointed guest rooms and suites, many offering spectacular views of the city's skyline from private terraces. Among the hotel's attractions are the restaurant Murals on 54, the award-winning Randolph's Bar & Lounge, eight conference and banquet rooms, a business center, and a well-appointed fitness center. The Warwick New York Hotel is one of the more than 40 luxury hotels in the Warwick International Hotels worldwide collection.

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Have you seen a major impact from the current economic climate, and how challenging is it to find the growth?

We can all agree that 2009 will be a challenge for the hospitality industry, with both consumers and corporations making cutbacks. There continues to be a concern about the near term health of our industry. We expect the broad economic slowdown to hurt both business and leisure travel. Fortunately, the Warwick New York is reasonably positioned to weather economic changes due to our diversified market segments.

Is it challenging to maintain rate integrity in this environment?

Through the better part of 2008, one saving measure was our ability to maintain rate integrity through persistent yield management. Going forward, we have to be responsive to the markets and

adjust our rates accordingly based on demand. We plan to keep the hotel active with high occupancy and our employees working. Therefore, we will continue to be flexible with our rates. As we enter into negotiation for 2009 corporate rates, the corporate clients are obviously holding a stronger bargaining power. We face the possibility of a decrease in corporate rates, but we aim to maintain the relationship. The most common expectation is for revenue per available room to remain flat in 2009, which will have a negative impact on profitability.

Have you been happy with the way Murals on 54 has been received? Has business for Randolph's, which has such a history and a following, been strong?

Murals recently launched a new Italian-themed menu concept based on guest input. It has been well received, and we are gaining momentum in increasing business for both lunch and dinner. We always focus on providing quality food at a good price.

Randolph's is a very special and intimate bar which has many loyal customers. We recently launched a new menu that offers more variety, and we kept the prices reasonable. We aim to provide good value in an elegant setting.

Does the Warwick New York have the right room mix, and has the suite product been a strong part of the business?

We have 426 rooms including 67 suites, which is a rather high ratio in suites. Our suites offer a luxurious and spacious area to our guests; business travelers find our suites especially attractive because they can actually conduct business in the suites. We are committed to our the commencement of our renovation in 2009 with complete new design concepts for our guest rooms and suites that would truly capture the essence of our hotel's unique and historic attributes.

As a hotel leader, how do you balance technology with the human element?

Delivering guests satisfaction and ensuring that our guests enjoy their experience at our hotel remains our focus. Internet and information technology is in place to provide more efficient or better service. We are planning to implement a paperless check-in process that will get our guests to their rooms faster. This year, we will fully utilize technology for marketing purposes, to enable us to capture more informed data on our customers, which will guide us to provide one-on-one

communication. We will be able to communicate special offers via direct mail and e-mail to hotel guests, letting them know we appreciate them and making an offer for them to return.

How critical is it to maintain relationships between guests and employees?

It's very important that our guests feel like the Warwick is their home away from home, that they see familiar faces when they return every time. Our staff also recognize our frequent customers and are able to address them by name. We always believe our employees are our most important asset. We work hard to develop a service culture that supports and develops our staff, to ensure that they are motivated and love coming to work every day.

How important has the owner/manager relationship been for you?

It's absolutely critical to have the support of the owner, who shares the same vision for the Warwick New York Hotel and Warwick International Hotels collection. It is important to have an open dialogue and be communicative. I am very fortunate to have been working for Warwick International Hotels for six years now, and having contributed to its growth in business, I am committed to continuous improvement and securing the future development of the hotel collection and the team members around me.

Has your experience at the Warwick New York been what you expected?

It has been more than what I expected. From day one, when I joined this hotel, I saw a hidden gem. The Warwick New York Hotel is a hotel rich in history at a prized location. The hotel exudes timeless elegance, and it is simply charming. Through our renovation and refurbishment programs over the past few years, from public spaces to our guest rooms, we were able to accentuate the character of the hotel and revitalize its image. The Warwick has been a fulfilling and rewarding experience for me.

Are young people coming into the industry and finding it a place where they can have a career?

I believe so. This business offers a lot of opportunities for anybody who loves to work with people and who is not afraid of hard work and long hours. One can learn and grow in this business by always keeping an open mind and having the hospitality spirit to serve and make a difference for others. ●

Randolph's Bar and Lounge at the Warwick New York Hotel