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An Interview with T. Colm O'Callaghan, Vice President and Managing Director, Trump International Hotel & Tower Chicago

**EDITORS' NOTE** Prior to assuming the roles of Hotel Manager of The Peninsula Chicago in 2002 and General Manager of Conrad Chicago in 2005, Irish native Colm O'Callaghan worked at hotels throughout Europe and the United States, including New York's renowned St. Regis. In November 2006, he was hired into his current position as Vice President and Managing Director of Trump International Hotel & Tower Chicago.



T. Colm O'Callaghan

**PROPERTY BRIEF** Located in downtown Chicago, the Trump International Hotel & Tower ([www.trumpchicagohotel.com](http://www.trumpchicagohotel.com)) offers 339 luxury guestrooms including studios, one-, two- and three-bedroom suites. Completing floors 29 through 89 are 486 elegant private residences, which offers studios; one-, two-, and three-bedroom residences; as well as two-, four-, and five-bedroom penthouses. Each features floor-to-ceiling windows with panoramic views of Lake Michigan, the Chicago River, and the city skyline; 10-foot ceilings, with 13- to 16-foot ceilings in the penthouses; hardwood floors and solid wood interior doors; spacious walk-in closets; washers and dryers; fireplaces; and individually controlled air-conditioning and heating.

**Have the current economic challenges we've seen affecting all industries had an impact on the business of Trump International Hotel & Tower Chicago?**

We're in a unique situation. There has been a lot of pent-up anticipation in the local market for this property, and we've been able to benefit from that, and we expect this positive trend to continue. We're on a steep incline, in terms of the growth of our business. Our first year was 2008, and we did not experience a pullback at all. Surprisingly, we are faring very well considering what's taking place in the market. We're very positive about 2009.

**Are you serving a niche market for high-end clientele, or is your market broader than that?**

We're certainly serving a niche market. We're appealing to a luxury customer who may be currently going to the very fine hotels in the city, but we have amenities and services at our hotel that truly make us unique, such as the size of our space, the drama of the views, the

floor-to-ceiling windows, and the full kitchen in every room. All of our rooms are a minimum 600 square feet in size, and all of our suites are a minimum of 1,000 square feet, making them the biggest rooms and entry-level suites in the city. In addition to that, we have a 23,000-square-foot spa. It is the largest, most well-appointed hotel spa in the city. When Donald Trump was looking at Chicago, he carefully looked at the other luxury properties, and he delivered a product that is unlike anything else in the city. He truly brought luxury to a new level in Chicago.

**How critical in the development of the hotel was the spa concept, and has it been a well-received product?**

I don't think anyone in his or her right mind would develop or build a luxury hotel today without a significant spa, and our spa truly is exceptional. It's an essential part of our business, and it appeals to different consumers on different levels. On the weekend, it appeals to the leisure customers who want to come down, work out, and have all the spa treatments and the exceptional dining experience – to them it's an urban resort. And during the week, it appeals to the business travelers who want to stay on a regimen and want a place to work out in the morning and relax in the evening with a massage or similar treatment. So it is an essential component of the modern day luxury hotel, and it will continue to be so going forward.

**Chicago has many fine stand-alone restaurants. How did you determine the right concept for food and beverage for the hotel?**

Our restaurant, Sixteen, has been a tremendous success and is sold out months in advance for many evenings. We have an exceptional space, we brought in a very talented local designer, and we recruited a very imaginative, creative young chef whose food is exquisite. We matched that with a level of service that stands apart from what people are experiencing in this market.

**Is there a focus on meetings at the property, and how broad are the facilities in terms of the size and scale of the events you can host?**

We have 20,000 square feet of meeting space, and that's the perfect size for this hotel in this market. We have two ballrooms: one ballroom seats 180 people, and the other seats

280 people. Our space is unlike any other hotel banquet space in the city, in that its design is very modern and the views are breathtaking. It's important for us to appeal to the business traveler for corporate meetings and to smaller upscale groups who want to have meetings or want a private dinner that is high end in terms of quality. We've found a market for that and have been very successful.

**How much of an emphasis have you put on technology, and how do you make sure you keep the human touch?**

We added some technology items that we think make a real difference to our guests' experience. We added some practical items such as switches that turn all the lights in a room off and on, which adds a convenience factor for the guest. We also added some exciting features, such as an in-mirror TV in the bathroom. We have an espresso machine and full Sub-Zero refrigerators in the rooms. Technology has to be both practical and exciting for guests and offer them something different from what they've experienced elsewhere, and we've found the right balance.

**As you look at the team you have put together, are you happy with the talent you've been able to find? Has your staff helped position the property?**

There's not a person on this team who is not tremendously excited about this project. This is a landmark building that truly reshapes the skyline of the city and changes the dynamic of downtown Chicago. Everybody we've recruited shares that excitement with us. It really has been a fabulous collaborative effort and something that everybody has enjoyed working on with the Trump family, which has added another unique and very satisfying dimension to the project.

**Some say that the hotelier enjoys either opening the property or running the hotel, but you seem to enjoy both. Did you enjoy overseeing the opening, and are you fond of the day-to-day work as well?**

I've enjoyed tremendously the opportunity to open up this landmark facility, but I think I'll enjoy even more watching this project continue to come to life and realize the potential that we all recognized in it many years ago. We have a long way to go before this hotel reaches its full potential, and I certainly want to be here for that. ●

*The Rebar bar at Trump International Hotel & Tower Chicago*