

LEADERS IN *Hospitality*

Ritz-Carlton Culture

An Interview with Scott Geraghty,
Area Vice President and General Manager,
The Ritz-Carlton New York, Central Park



EDITORS' NOTE Scott Geraghty's background spans over 30 years and crosses a range of disciplines within the hospitality industry. Before assuming his roles with The Ritz-Carlton, he was General Manager of The St. Regis New York in June 2004. Geraghty holds a B.A. degree in international relations from Lehigh University and an associate in occupational studies degree in culinary arts from The Culinary Institute of America.



Scott Geraghty,

PROPERTY BRIEF The Ritz-Carlton New York, Central Park (www.ritzcarlton.com/centralpark) offers luxurious hospitality where guests feel at home in a hotel that boasts the residential ambiance of a New York town house and is comprised of 259 guest rooms – including 47 spacious one-bedroom suites and 12 luxury condominiums. Amenities include 400-thread count fine linens, oversized marble bathrooms with soaking tubs and separate stall showers, exclusive Frédéric Fekkai bath amenities, and exceptional views of the world's most famous park. The property also offers an on-site fitness center; a La Prairie spa; a full-service, multilingual concierge; limousine and Bentley services; and a conference concierge. BLT Market, the hotel's award-winning restaurant, features the seasonal, market-inspired cuisine of acclaimed celebrity chef, Laurent Tourondel.

Over the past year, travel and tourism has been hit very heavily. How much of an impact have you seen broadly within the New York City market, as well as for The Ritz-Carlton?

There has been a significant economic impact in New York as well as across the United States in every business – certainly we haven't been hit as hard as the financial institutions. As finance has gotten healthier, our industry has followed. It's no different for The Ritz-Carlton than for the other five-star luxury properties in the city. Everyone has seen a dip, but we had a stellar fourth quarter of 2009. It's not where it has been in previous years, but it's great to see clear signs of improvement.

How critical has it been to maintain that open dialogue with your team on the vision for the property right now?

It's at the core of The Ritz-Carlton culture.

We genuinely believe that it's the genuine care and comfort our ladies and gentlemen provide who are with us every day that make the difference on the front lines with our guests. If we make an operational change, we communicate why we're doing it so they can accurately re-communicate that to our guests, who may pose questions. We've had changes in personnel and numbers of staff, and it's important to let them know what's coming and why. In leadership, you need to provide the light and the guidance to move through the challenging times.

Has the BLT Market restaurant concept been what you had hoped, and can you really be profitable in that part of the business in a city like New York, with so many great stand-alone restaurants?

BLT is a great calling card. We do a tremendous amount of business-related lunches and dinners within the space. It has also become a neighborhood favorite within the local community. BLT is a wonderful brand, and Chef Laurent Tourondel has put together a collection of restaurants that draw exceptionally well. We're very fortunate to be in partnership with them.

For clientele in the five-star space, do you have to offer much more than a health/fitness facility today? Do you need to offer a true spa experience?

It's certainly important. When it's cold outside, it allows us to create somewhat of a resort feel within the city. We have created an experience: the five-star New York City town house hotel. We have a lovely, well-appointed La Prairie spa that attracts both overnight and day-spa-goers phenomenally well. They are a wonderful team of dedicated professionals who create extraordinary experiences for people. I would argue that in stressful times like these, there has never been a better time to have such a highly respected and truly luxurious brand such as La Prairie as our signature spa offering.

You also oversee the property in Boston. Is there close coordination between the properties?

We have two additional properties in the New York area – Westchester and Battery Park. We talk frequently, as we're in each other's markets. These are very different products, each in very different neighborhoods, but they all provide The Ritz-Carlton's finest personal service for



our guests in a warm, relaxed yet refined ambiance. Our level of service is absolutely top-notch. Boston is very closely tied to us as we share the Northeast corridor. Our guests flow between Boston, New York, and Washington, D.C., so we have a very similar relationship with our D.C. property as well. We're continually cross-marketing and strategizing with each other to make sure we're taking care of our guests as they travel.

There are those who suggest that we'll never see the kind of rates we once did, and that the current rates reflect a new dynamic. Do you agree with that?

Not at all. We have not had an easy time, and we're clearly not through it yet, but I think we've seen the bottom and we're on the way up. Every time that we've had to take two steps back in the history of our country, we've then geared up to take two or three steps forward. So I can't see any reason why we wouldn't see very positive things to come. Times like these teach you how to be better managers and leaders, and consequently, when the market does come back, we will be phenomenally adept at producing wonderful margins again, as we had in the past.

You have a very calm way about you. Is that your nature or do you just hide the stress well?

I believe in the adage, never let them see you sweat. In the luxury markets, you have to be like a duck on a pond, so everything on the top surface is very calm and serene, and those little legs are paddling like crazy underneath. We're in a very experiential industry at the end of the day – no one wants to be part of our challenges, and our trials and tribulations every day. They come here to relax, to have an oasis in the middle of a tough time. We want to make sure that when guests arrive, they see the best of what we can produce every day for them. I'm the eternal optimist. ●

Park View Suite (left); BLT Market restaurant (right)