

# All About Service

## An Interview with Chris Plummer, General Manager, Nemaocolin Woodlands Resort

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Chris Plummer recently assumed his current post. He joined the property in October 2006 and, most recently, served as the Assistant General Manager. Prior to this, he held positions with Caesars Entertainment, Olympia Gaming, and Booth Creek Ski Holdings.*



Chris Plummer

**PROPERTY BRIEF** *Situated in picturesque Farmington, Pennsylvania, Nemaocolin Woodlands Resort (www.nemaocolin.com) features 335 luxurious guest rooms, suites, townhomes, and single-family homes, 125 of which are located in the Chateau LaFayette. There are 42 rooms at Falling Rock, the AAA Five-Diamond Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired boutique hotel overlooking the Mystic Rock golf course. The resort also features the Woodlands Spa, offering over 100 treatments; more than 31,000 square feet of meeting and banquet space; 10 dining venues and seven bars and lounges; and a private airfield. The property's outdoor attractions include two golf courses, the PGA Tour-tested Mystic Rock and the traditional Links Course; a 25-station sporting clays facility; the 18-mile Off-Road Driving Academy featuring Jeep® and TOMCAR vehicles; an equestrian center, featuring dog sledding in the fall and winter; a downhill and cross-country skiing facility; and the large Hawaiian-style Paradise Pool. Guests may also enjoy a \$45-million art collection and view live animal exhibits featuring black bears, zebras, wallabies, lions, tigers, and emus.*

**Nemaocolin caters to many different markets and clientele from families to the corporate market. Has it been beneficial to have such a broad offering, and have you seen signs of business picking up?**

Yes to both of those questions. It absolutely helped us during 2009 to have a broad offering. With decreased earnings, there is more pressure on business from both the federal and state governments, and shareholders in general, to shed expenses, and one of the first to go is corporate meetings and especially meetings where travel is involved. In 2009, we fell back on a lot of our transient business, which was relatively flat compared

to 2008. There were certain activities and amenities that were more popular with the transient guests. We've seen this trend over the past three or four years where guests are driving towards multigenerational activities. The free time that people have is shrinking, so they want to do activities and experience amenities that will appeal to their entire family set, which is something Nemaocolin excels at. We fit the niche for when people are looking for a weekend or week-long getaway.

We didn't see any shrinkage in our average length of stay with our transient guest so that was relatively flat. We are seeing some positive signs for corporate travel in 2010. We are a relatively short driving distance to the mid-Atlantic region. Some of those meetings that traditionally have been held at other outlets that may require air travel or substantial drive travel are relocating to a closer area, and Nemaocolin fits that bill. We're probably a five-hour drive from a quarter to a third of the population within the United States, and we're starting to see some of those groups come back.

**Nemaocolin offers a broad range of amenities, but you're currently in discussions about bringing gaming to the property. What makes you feel it will be the right addition, and how is that opportunity progressing?**

At Nemaocolin, one of the things we've predicated our existence on is every single year, we add a new amenity. Last year, we added the pet hospital and the animal care center, as well as the pet resort and spa. The casino is yet another reason to not only drive business to the resort but for the betterment of Pennsylvania by driving some outside dollars to the state that wouldn't have been seen otherwise. One third of our business comes from that D.C. corridor, one quarter of the business from Ohio, and a decent book of business from West Virginia, so those are new dollars that we'll generate for Pennsylvania itself.

The casino is in a building that is separate from the main resort complex, so those people who are drawn to gaming will have an establishment that they can use, and those people who aren't drawn to gaming won't be affected one way or another.

**Have you found the right partner with gaming expertise for the casino?**

We did. When we originally looked at this project, we considered doing it ourselves. But we found a partner in Isle of Capri Casinos, who can do it much more efficiently than we can, so we'll generate more revenues and therefore more tax dollars to the state. They're using their Lady Luck Casino brand for Nemaocolin, and it will be one of the flagship properties they're now offering.

**For owner Maggie Hardy Magerko and for the resort broadly, how important has investing in the community been to the culture of Nemaocolin?**

Fayette County is the poorest rural county in Pennsylvania, and we need to invest in the community which in effect invests back into our associates; between 60 and 70 percent of our associates come from Fayette County, specifically. To help with things such as the infrastructure of the schools, the ballparks, after-school programs, the Boy Scouts and 4-H, and investing heavily in children – which is one of Maggie's passions – is not only good for the community but comes back to the resort as well.

**You're known as a very service-oriented resort with a tremendous amount of guest contact by your associates. Has attracting and retaining that talent something you've been happy with?**

Absolutely. There is something about the base of the people that live and work in this community that you can't say enough about. Their natural inclination is to help people. I've worked in numerous places around the United States and I've never seen a group of people that is as nice, warm, and inviting as they are here.

**As the resort has grown, how challenging has it been to maintain the feeling of a family culture?**

The one constant at Nemaocolin is the culture that was created and is fed by the Hardys – that is their vision. We don't have a lot of policies and procedures or books of things that have to happen when there is a situation that occurs. Everything we do goes back to that family atmosphere, the culture, being hospitable to the guests – everything stems from that. When the culture is set, when the culture is cultivated to that point, it's much easier to maintain everything else and retain that feel as you grow and expand. ●