



## Delighting the Customer

An Interview with David J. Colella,  
Vice President and Managing Director, The Colonnade Hotel



**EDITORS' NOTE** David Colella is Chairman of the Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau and Vice President of the Massachusetts Restaurant Association. He sits on the boards of the University of Massachusetts Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, First Night Boston, and Skol Club International, Boston. In addition to his current post, which he has held since December 1992, Colella is Vice President of Hotel Operations for The Druker Company Ltd., The Colonnade's parent company that owns and operates two additional Boston hotels. He was named Massachusetts Restaurant Association's Restaurateur of the Year in 2008 and he was recently inducted into the Massachusetts Lodging Association's Hall of Fame. Colella is a graduate of the Isenberg School of Management at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.



David J. Colella

**PROPERTY BRIEF** Situated in Boston's Back Bay, The Colonnade Hotel ([www.colonnadehotel.com](http://www.colonnadehotel.com)) is an independently owned and managed luxury property featuring 285 sophisticated rooms and suites with 21st-Century comforts and amenities that are both high-tech and soft touch. The property is home to the city's only rooftop pool and one of Boston's most popular restaurants, Brasserie Jo. Opened in 1971 by Bertram Druker, the hotel is overseen today by his son Ronald Druker, President of The Druker Company.

### How has The Colonnade Hotel fared during the economic downturn and do you foresee opportunities for growth for the property?

In 2009, we completed a full-scale \$26-million reinvention of the hotel that some people might consider poor timing. While no one could have predicted the exact moment of the start of the economic crisis, we believe the timing might have been just right for us to embark on such a grand renovation. It allowed us to differentiate ourselves from the competition and to stand out with new amenities and offerings in the marketplace. The Colonnade was one of the first hotels to install 37-inch HDTVs with 100 percent HD programming in all guest rooms, and the first with Keurig gourmet coffee makers, which we had a hand in designing. There were many other firsts including environmental measures like introducing chemical-free cleaning throughout the property. During this

tough stretch, we were able to maintain our long-term customers and our new product helped us attract a new customer base as we repositioned ourselves within the market. Based on our results this past year and guest feedback, we are extremely positive about our prospects for growth. History has shown that hotels that maintain or improve standards during lean times come out ahead when the economy picks up again.

### Your owners continually invest in the property to maintain your leadership position in the market.

#### Would you highlight some of the projects planned for the property?

We're very fortunate to have an owner who is hands on and who takes a long-term stance in the stewardship of the property. Our owner has continually invested large amounts of capital in the property over the years, which has allowed us to remain competitive in a market that has seen a tremendous growth in supply over the past 10 years; 2012 will be no different. We are finalizing plans for a new entryway to the hotel that will include a modernization of the main lobby entrance, giving guests upon arrival an idea of the thoroughly new Colonnade that awaits them. In addition, our grand and junior ballrooms will be redesigned in a "classic modern" style.

#### How do you maintain such consistent service standards at the property?

While there are many components that are vital to our superior customer service delivery, we concentrate on the basic principle of genuine courtesy. This principle is applicable employee-to-employee as well as employee-to-guest. When our employees consistently treat each other with courtesy and respect, it is a natural extension to deliver the same to our guests. We also place a high value on genuineness; we allow our employees to deliver customer service in an authentic way, not one that is contrived or forced. Through constant and daily monitoring of our internal and external guest comment cards and feedback, we verify the effectiveness of our training and ensure that the hotel's culture remains intact. Through role-playing and service shops, we fine tune our service delivery, make corrections to standards and procedures, and adjust our staffing levels with all efforts geared toward exceeding our guests' expectations. Our associates are recognized regularly for delivering superior service and we host

a quarterly employee and manager luncheon to reward them in a public forum.

### What excites you about the industry and how has the role of general manager evolved?

What excites me about the hotel industry is how innovation and technology is becoming more important and integral to our service delivery to guests. The hotel industry of the past did not readily adopt technology; our industry is embracing change more quickly today. Innovations like the iPad and iPhone offer us excellent opportunities to embrace design and functionality while enhancing service. This is something we make use of in both our product and service offerings. The explosion of social media and digital check-ins has also not gone unnoticed. As an independent hotel, we believe that we can extend our genuine service approach across these channels to attract new customers and provide additional service support for existing ones.

While the tools and channels have evolved over the years, the role of the general manager for an independent hotel has remained largely similar to that of a COO of a small- to mid-size company. We're charged with making certain that the business is running optimally, that the culture of service delivery is developing to exceed the needs and expectations of our guests, and that we apply financial resources in such a way as to maximize the overall value of the business for our owner. In addition, community involvement is key. Being able to positively influence the property through my and our managers' involvement on local boards and charities allows us to contribute locally and weaves the hotel into the community. It is an integral part of The Colonnade Hotel's DNA.

### As you look to 2012, what are your key priorities for the property?

We're constantly looking for new ways to surprise and delight the customer. Some of our key priorities for 2012 include adopting a new guest profile system that will enhance our ability to track and update our guest needs; a complete Web site renovation including our mobile site; optimization of our yield management system; and improvements to the property entrance and grand ballroom. We also have grand plans for the hotel's signature rooftop pool – the only one in Boston. As we look ahead, we're excited about prospects for another successful year as Boston's Four Diamond luxury independent hotel. ●

The only rooftop pool in Boston at The Colonnade Hotel (left); Brasserie Jo restaurant (right)