



Never Content



An Interview with Steven Pipes,
President, The Jack Parker Corporation,
and Managing Director, Le Parker Meridien New York

EDITORS' NOTE Steven Pipes joined *Le Méridien* in San Francisco in July of 1983 as Front Office Manager. He was Resident Manager for two years at *Le Meridien Vancouver*, then General Manager of *Le Meridien* in Athens, Greece, and two years later, became General Manager of *Le Parker Meridien New York* where he is now Managing Director. Pipes also serves as President of *The Jack Parker Corporation*, the parent company of *Le Parker Meridien New York*. He received his bachelor's degree in hotel administration from Cornell University.



Steven Pipes

COMPANY BRIEF *The Jack Parker Corporation* (www.thejackparkercorporation.com), founded in 1955, is a family-owned company that has designed, built, and managed more than 15,000 residences, including high-rise luxury rentals, condominiums, and single-family homes, located throughout the Northeast and Florida. The company's hotel division comprises Manhattan's *Le Parker Meridien New York* (www.parkermeridien.com), *Parker Palm Springs* in California, and the *Holiday Inn* in Ronkonkoma, New York. Situated on West 57th Street, *Le Parker Meridien* boasts 727 rooms and suites and offers two restaurants, *Knave* – an espresso bar by day and bar by night, a 9,000-square-foot banquet space, rooftop pool, and a fully equipped spa and fitness center.

Le Parker Meridien is known for providing a consistent guest experience. How are you able to maintain such high service standards?

By never really being sure that you are. You have to constantly doubt that you are living up to the customer's expectations, look for your weaknesses, and try to improve. When we evaluate our performance, we are never content. This is a difficult concept for some, for they may view this as not being appreciative of the efforts that have been made. In fact, it is quite the opposite, because I regard the ability of people and I know that they can accomplish more in the future. Hence our saying: Always Happy, Never Satisfied.

How do guests measure value today and is there an effective understanding

that value is not just solely related to price?

With extremely few exceptions, everyone looks for value. The key is what is important to the particular individual. For one person, having a great car can give enormous pleasure, while for another, it is merely a means of transport from point A to point B. The same applies to all services and products. Our job is to create environments, service levels, and offerings that make someone who cares about where they stay want to stay in

one of our properties.

New York City has a number of hotels in development. Are you surprised at the increased supply coming into the market?

Surprised, no; concerned, yes. In a relatively short time, New York City is going from approximately 60,000 hotel rooms to 90,000 – this is an enormous increase. The reason is quite simple: all the feasibility studies were done at the same time, showing that New York City hotels are doing very well and the city can handle more inventory.

Much of what is being built now was financed or started before the crash, and the remainder primarily with offshore funds, frequently sovereign. I have no doubt that many of the new projects will fail and that existing hotels will be hurt as well. If Europe and the Euro continue down the road we have seen recently, and our politicians in Washington continue to act irresponsibly, I have little doubt that things will take a turn for the worse.

New York City is known to be resilient and the travel business has come back strong. What makes the city so special in regard to the strength of the hotel industry?

Notwithstanding my previous comments regarding the massive increase in supply, I believe that New York City has performed as well as it has over the past years because it has worn many hats: financial capital; tourist destination for international travelers, domestic visitors, and tri-state residents; entertainment hub; and shopping mecca for those with strong currencies. There is only one New York City and I believe it will remain attractive for a long time to come.

You are also involved in real estate with residential apartments. Would you

highlight this part of the business and your leadership in this regard?

For the past year, in my capacity as President of *The Jack Parker Corporation*, I have also had the privilege of overseeing our residential and commercial properties. It has been a lot of fun to take a hotel perspective to businesses that traditionally have not looked at service in the same way.

At *Parker Towers*, we are in the process of a massive upgrade to this *Forest Hills* landmark. We already have a premier spot in that market, but we will be bringing Manhattan design and service there.

In Manhattan, we continue to see an extremely strong rental market at both the *Biltmore* (Times Square) and at *Truffles* (TriBeCa). These buildings that we built and manage fit the demographic of their respective neighborhoods and we are continually upgrading them.

Our largest commercial building is *Parker Plaza*, located in Fort Lee, New Jersey; it is the first building you see after crossing the *George Washington Bridge*. We have had the good fortune of being fully occupied throughout this difficult time by having low turnover, the best product in the area, and a great team.

Another area that I spend a good deal of time on is looking for new deals. Ironically, it has been hard to find any that make economical sense of late. Unlike REITs or hedge funds, we are not compelled to make acquisitions and will wait until the appropriate time.

There are many young people who look forward to a career in the hospitality industry. What advice would you give them for early in their careers so as to grow and succeed in this industry?

It is not too hard to succeed if you have the following qualities: a positive attitude – if you wake up every day with a sour demeanor, try another trade. In a hotel, you need to be a happy person and have a real desire to work – too many hotel school students think that they will either be spending their time in front of a computer doing analysis or be in charge after six months. The reality is that you have to be prepared and enjoy working in operations. You also need common sense – a very uncommon attribute, but one that will allow you to navigate most difficult situations. ●

The entrance of Le Parker Meridien New York (left); pool at the Parker Palm Springs (right)