

Hospitality

A

One-of-a-Kind Venue

An Interview with Eric O. Long,
General Manager, Waldorf Astoria New York

EDITORS' NOTE Eric Long has been a Hilton veteran for more than 30 years, and held key management positions in New Jersey, Florida, and the Midwest. He moved to Waldorf Astoria New York in 1994.

PROPERTY BRIEF Waldorf Astoria New York (www.waldorfnewyork.com) has occupied its present Park Avenue site since 1931. Originally opened on Fifth Avenue in 1893, it is one of New York's premier luxury hotels, and offers a choice of 1,246 rooms and suites. The Towers of Waldorf Astoria features an additional 101 suites and 79 executive guest rooms, and employs a separate entrance and staff. The property is owned by Hilton Worldwide (NYSE: HLT), based in McLean, Virginia.



Eric O. Long

Waldorf Astoria New York remains an industry leader with a loyal clientele. What makes the property so special?

The building's design is simply brilliant. We have so much to offer – the combination of the Waldorf Astoria and The Towers of The Waldorf Astoria – provides customers with such a wide range of suites and luxury floor plans, in combination with our grand public areas and signature ballroom facilities. The Waldorf is a one-of-a-kind venue, which is why its reputation is so widely known.

The property has such a long and storied history. How critical is it to stay modern and current, but also respect the history and heritage of the property?

Continuous renewal is part of our daily lives – we plan our investments carefully. We are, however, fortunate to have been blessed with a building design that is widely celebrated as an Art Deco masterpiece.

Would you highlight some of the current projects taking place at the property?

We just opened the entire lower level and drive-through entrance after an extensive six month restoration – it was literally transformed – with many of the original signature elements, including the return of the large circular drive fully restored. Last fall, our Park Avenue lobby was also returned to its original design. Plans for the main lobby and adjoining areas are soon to come.

traveler to our strong presence in the entertainment and diplomatic communities – a large percentage of our clients have an international address – and we appeal to those individuals seeking a venue for an important business gathering or to celebrate an important moment in their lives. Our ability to offer something for everyone is what has sustained our business at the record levels we continue to see year after year.

The property has a number of food and beverage outlets. How challenging is it to succeed in a city like New York with so many high-end stand-alone restaurant offerings, and what is the key to making a hotel restaurant successful?

New York's wide variety of restaurant and entertainment offerings are what makes the city so special. We challenge our team to provide our customers with a restaurant offering that is relevant and worth a special visit, for both visitors to the city and the local residential community. Our culinary team takes that challenge very, very seriously.

You have placed an emphasis on offering a great spa product at the Waldorf. Would you provide an overview of the spa, and how critical is this offering for the property?

An extensive spa offering has become an expected amenity for today's luxury traveler. Ours is a unique facility with full en suite care – the only facility of its kind in New York. The spa's specialty is the Guerlain signature facial. Our most popular offering is a combination of specialty spa treatments and access to one of our many luxury suites.

The popularity of our spa has certainly been supported with the extensive



The Park Avenue entrance to the Waldorf Astoria New York

You have a wide range of accommodations with the main hotel and the Towers product, and a strong suite offering. How do you define your target market based on this broad offering?

We have such broad appeal, from today's business

recognition we continue to receive, contributing to double-digit growth in revenues this year.

The Waldorf is known for its ability to host meetings and events of all sizes. How critical is this part of the business to the property, and what types of gatherings do you host?

We pride ourselves on our reputation for hosting important business gatherings. A typical day will feature several board meetings, a networking meeting of various sectors of the financial markets, some of the highest profile social gatherings in the city or a private social gathering to celebrate a very special moment in someone's life.

You have led the Waldorf for many years and have maintained consistent service standards. How have you been so successful in this area, and would you describe your extensive training process and programs?

I'm particularly proud of the level of talent that is so evident throughout the property – particular emphasis is placed on individual learning and development.

Newer members of our team must complete a rigorous 18-month educational plan before being considered for a place on our leadership team. Graduates of our program are, in many respects, more developed in the fundamentals of our industry than the executive team of many of our competitors – it is just that good.

You speak about the property with such passion and excitement. What makes it so much fun for you after all this time, and why have you wanted to spend so much of your career here?

Simply said, it is an exciting property to be part of. The Waldorf has a high profile clientele. Extraordinary events occur so frequently, and the building itself is so special, but most importantly, it is all about people – the special people who continue to carry on the traditions of the Waldorf. We look for people with an unusual blend of talent, and a personal passion for service. Collectively, it is an inspiring and fun group to be part of. ●