



A Year-Round Escape

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



Newly remodeled Woodlands Spa (left); Lady Luck Casino (above)

EDITORS' NOTE Chris Plummer joined the property in October 2006 and has served as General Manager since 2010. Prior to this, he held positions with Caesars Entertainment, Olympia Gaming, and Booth Creek Ski Holdings.



Chris Plummer

PROPERTY BRIEF Spread across 2,000 acres in bucolic Farmington, Pennsylvania, Nemaocolin Woodlands Resort (www.nemaocolin.com) features 318 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 Forbes Five Star and 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 30-station sporting clays facility; the 20-mile Off-Road Driving Academy featuring Jeep®; an equestrian center; dog sledding in the fall and winter; a downhill and cross-country ski facility; and the large Hawaiian-style Paradise Pool. Guests will also enjoy a \$45-million art collection, and can view live animal exhibits featuring black bears, zebras, buffalo, lions, tigers, and hyenas.

Are there any product extensions or plans for change at Nemaocolin?

We're going to continue to commit to our family activities, and we're looking at adding some new activities next year. This will keep things fresh and new, and give people a further reason to come back.

We're also investing in our infrastructure – our room product, our conference space product, our meeting space, our public spaces, our landscaping; this is the main focus for our money over the next 18 months to two years. We're also focusing on making sure we have the newest and greatest family activities out there.

Is it difficult to get the message out about how you can fill the interests of almost any guest?

It's more difficult for people to grasp what we have until they come here for the first time. They come with a traditional luxury resort in mind and when they get here, their minds are blown by all of the opportunities and amenities we offer.

How has the food and beverage product evolved, and are you happy you have found the right mix to fulfill all the guests' desires?

We're constantly evaluating what guests say and their feedback as far as our food and beverage mix goes, so we're never happy.

But it's a diverse mix, everything from the world-famous Lautrec to our more casual offerings at the Sun Dial Lodge or PJ's Ice Cream shop.

It's also a challenge to make sure that guests discover all of this diversity and can choose what is right for them in the limited time they get to spend with us.

You have recently opened a casino in partnership with Isle of Capri. What made you feel this addition would be of value from a guest point of view and, a few months in, has it evolved as you had hoped?

It has. It's a great amenity to our resort for our guests. We are a remote property so nighttime entertainment tends to be challenging. We do our fair share of activities and dining, but we were missing that late-night excitement that a casino can offer.

This was the reason we decided it would be a great amenity for our resort, and a lot of resorts are going in this direction.

Is the casino heavily targeted towards the resort's guests or are you bringing in the local community?

It does a bit of both. Being a Category 3 casino in Pennsylvania, you have to be a patron of the amenities of Nemaocolin – you have to be some sort of a Nemaocolin guest of ours by spending money at the resort or purchasing a membership, for instance.

So it keeps the local mix and resort mix at a sustainable level, and we're happy with what we've done with it.

Are certain seasons more of a focus for you or are amenities available year-round?

We are a full 12-month, 365-day resort. As the seasons change, our amenities change and different activities open up and shut down, and we balance that out well.

Once winter hits and the ski slopes open, the summer/fall/spring activities shut down. So we never miss a beat on that. We always continue to offer things. The spa, the golf, and the outdoor activities morph as the seasons go. We don't have a traditional shoulder season up here.

How do you direct your efforts toward maintaining the service standards and training your staff? How challenging is it to recruit top talent?

It's not a problem getting the people. The local market is remote so we don't have a huge labor pool, but we do have a really good labor pool. We do have almost 200 associates that have been with us more than 10 years – that is almost 30 percent of our workforce. It's a very loyal and hardworking group.

As far as bringing new people in, we do ramp up during summer. The core group takes over and makes sure the standards are met by promoting the Nemaocolin Way. We invest heavily in training and focus on continuing to train – you learn something every day here and it comes from that core group of 25-plus year associates who have been here for so long, and who have created that Nemaocolin service standard.

In dealing with such a wide range of activities and facilities, how do you see your particular role?

I have to first make sure I have the right people in the right places, and then be there for those people. I make sure that I have the kind of trusting relationship with them that they're willing to call me, or that I can call them, for anything – good, bad, indifferent. I can have those conversations. I want to make sure that I do that.

How important is it that your messaging conveys the convenient location of the property?

It's definitely important. I hate the word remote because it's not a good marketing term, but we're what a resort should be – an escape. But there are no back roads. From Washington, D.C., it's three hours; from the suburbs it can be as little as two hours away – all via highway.

We're very accessible from all sides. From the north, we're only 30 miles from the Pennsylvania turnpike.

The roads are well-maintained in the winter as well. So although remote, we're very accessible. ●