

The Future of Hospitality

An Interview with Steven Pipes,
President, The Jack Parker Corporation

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 Méridien Vancouver*, then General Manager of *Le Méridien* in Athens, Greece, and two years later, became General Manager of *Le Parker Méridien New York*. Pipes serves as President of The Jack Parker Corporation, the parent company of *Le Parker Méridien New York*. He received his bachelor's degree in hotel administration from Cornell University.



Steven Pipes

COMPANY BRIEF The Jack Parker Corporation, 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 Méridien New York* (www.parkerMeridien.com), *Parker Palm Springs* in California, and the *Clarion* in Ronkonkoma, New York. Situated on West 57th Street, *Le Parker Méridien New York* has 727 rooms and suites, and offers two restaurants, *Knaev* – an espresso bar by day and bar by night, a 9,000-square-foot banquet space, a rooftop pool, and a fully equipped spa and fitness center.



At a time where technology drives so much, including many of the decisions guests make on where to stay, is personal touch and service still relevant?

If you are planning a domestic trip that will entail air travel, will you call a friend and ask for advice on which airline to book? Not a chance. Your decision will be purely based on price, schedule, and/or frequent flyer points or status you have earned.

When the time comes to book your hotel, will you ask a friend for suggestions? Of course, you will call five people you know, research on eight or so different Web sites, and then make your decision.

Upon arrival at the airport, the majority of people will either have printed out their boarding passes at home or have them on their smart phones. Only if checking in bags will the traveler reluctantly deal with an agent at the airport. For 30 years, hotels have been attempting to economize by inciting guests to check themselves in at kiosks with extremely limited success.

Why do people not want to use kiosks in hotels? It's because hotels remain special places that evoke feelings of luxury, codling, romance, and the good life. Hotels are an escape from ordinary, everyday life. Interacting with caring hospitality workers is an integral part of the experience of staying at a hotel; a machine cannot replicate that, and will not in our lifetime. As much as hospitality has become an "industry" with real financial

controls, the most profitable members of this industry never lose sight of what drives our guests.

Why is food and beverage such a challenging component of the business?

While, historically, hotels have been home to some of the world's greatest restaurants, the demand for that ended some time ago. What



changed? Weary travelers once needed a place to stop and eat, and it was an obvious extension of their business for tavern keepers to rent rooms. Over time, as hotels grew in size, their eateries did too. Eventually cities became rife with specialty restaurants that drew the hotel guests out. Hotel restaurants tended to have one thing in common: they tried to be everything to everybody – offering breakfast, lunch, snack, dinner – all in the same place. As a result, they ended up being nothing for anybody, and the notion of a "hotel restaurant" became a real negative.

Over the past decade, this trend has been reversed, but more often than not in the non-traditional properties that have a reputation for being "happening" places, they are not operated by the hotel.

I believe that as the trend for more unique properties continues to develop, hotel restaurants will come to the forefront again. ●

Gardens of the Parker Palm Springs (left); the lobby and Normas restaurant at Le Parker Méridien in New York (above)