

Hospitality



Growing The Reeds

An Interview with Ron Gorodesky,
Managing Director, The Reeds at Shelter Haven
and The Riverhouse at Odette's



Skye Suite (left); entrance to The Reeds at Shelter Haven (above)

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to his current post, Ron Gorodesky launched Restaurant Advisory Services and a year later, opened Inn Site Hospitality Properties. After graduating from Penn State University's School of Hotel and Restaurant Management in 1979, he began his career working for Marriott where he climbed his way up the chain before leaving for an opportunity to lead the city restaurant division for Laventhol & Horwath.



Ron Gorodesky

PROPERTY BRIEF The Reeds at Shelter Haven (reedsatshelterhaven.com) is a year-round luxury boutique resort located directly on the bay and just steps from the beach in Stone Harbor, New Jersey. Overlooking the bay with 37 distinctively designed guestrooms and suites, The Reeds offers breathtaking seaside views, stunning sunsets, extraordinary guestrooms designed for pure relaxation and unique, mouthwatering dining options. The exclusive resort amenities include seasonal bay activities, boat docking and beach services, as well as convenient access to Stone Harbors' downtown shopping district and much more.

What is the history and heritage of The Reeds and how has the property developed over time?

The property that The Reeds is on has held a hotel for over 100 years. In 1912, the original Shelter Haven Hotel, which as a four-story structure, opened up on that site, and the development of that hotel determined where the downtown location of Stone Harbor was going to be.

In the early '60s, the hotel gave way to a typical Jersey Shore motel building called the Shelter Haven Motel, which had a shorter run before it disappeared in the '90s. At that point, the property sat empty while development plans were put together.

I was brought into the project as a consultant. I was asked to come in and reconfigure the property to make it more economical.

We made about a dozen changes, and it immediately attracted the investment we needed to make the deal work. I was there throughout the development of the project.

From the day it opened in 2013, the property really took off, which was an affirmation that we had done our jobs well.

The property began to grow and, as that happened, our appetite for growth and development grew with it. What started as 37 rooms and two

restaurants will soon grow to be 59 rooms, five restaurants, and a 6,000-square-foot spa. The second building will open in a few months with 22 new guestrooms and a full-service, luxury spa.

What has made this growth possible is our focus on the off-season. It's only when we're open year-round that we can attract a high-quality group of people to operate the property.

We have developed a team of committed professionals that have put us on the map, not just at the Jersey Shore, but nationally.

How broad is your target market?

When we first opened, our market was more regional, but that has since changed. We get a much larger national and even international draw today because they want to come to The Reeds and see what we have done here.

Are the opportunities to visit the property year-round well understood?

We have done a tremendous job nailing down shoulder seasons with a mix of weddings on weekends and corporate business during the week. The challenge lies in the colder months when the Jersey Shore is not top of mind as a destination.

It's out of this concern that we decided to invest into the spa that we're opening. We're putting in a world-class spa in Stone Harbor to convert what has traditionally been the off-season into the spa season.

In the Northeast, the busiest months for spa traffic are January and February, which are our two slowest months. We're looking to drive traffic to the hotel during these times based on the spa offering.

Are you partnering on the spa or running it yourselves?

We're running the spa ourselves. We brought in some very talented people in a consulting capacity, but ultimately we plan to operate everything on our own.

We want to make sure that there aren't different sets of agendas as we operate the entire property.

Will you touch on your food and beverage component?

It is the most challenging aspect onsite because there are so many moving parts and changes are always coming about. That said, we have done a great job in managing the F&B piece and opening new restaurants along the way, so we're continuing that success.

Where are you finding talent and how critical is the investment you have put into training?

This is a challenge all the time. We've developed a special model for looking for talent since we don't have the benefit of being a larger chain property.

We're opening up a second property in 2019, The Riverhouse at Odette's (riverhousenewhope.com) in New Hope, Pennsylvania and, in addition to that, we just bought a catering facility that we will be adding to our portfolio. This will enhance our success with talent by offering multiple training opportunities and having various sources for people.

We have a very aggressive internship program with Penn State. We take between 15 and 20 interns every year who we expose to all of the areas of the hotel, which gives our guests the benefit of having dedicated hospitality students and also gives us a chance to cherry-pick the best and brightest to work for us.

In addition, I co-teach a course in hospitality at Penn State. I do this to give back and also promote our internship program at The Reeds.

We also work hard to develop local talent coming out of Cape May County. It's our job as managers to identify people on our team who can be developed and to invest the necessary time and money into them.

This year, we are looking to create a training manager position that will handle staff training year-round.

How critical is it to have owners with a long-term vision for the property and a focus on continuous improvement?

It's very important. I have one key job each day and that is to maximize long-term owner value for the properties I manage. Over time, I am developing a strong investment for them so they can get a return.

As long as that is my mantra as it relates to these properties, I get to operate these properties with the full support of the management group.

I'm also completely transparent all the time because that builds confidence.

Is the Managing Director role today more focused on hospitality or on the financial piece?

They go hand in hand. I'm always coordinating efforts for new projects for this group. However, my top goal is to make sure that the hospitality aspect is being delivered on. ●