



Employees First

An Interview with Edward V. Staros,
Vice President and Managing Director,
The Ritz-Carlton Resorts of Naples



The Ritz-Carlton, Naples (above);
The Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort, Naples (left)

EDITORS' NOTE Edward Staros served as Vice President of Operations for The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, L.L.C. from 1992 to 1999. In October 1999, he was appointed to his current position as Vice President and Managing Director for The Ritz-Carlton Resorts of Naples. He has also served as Vice President and General Manager of The Ritz-Carlton, Buckhead (Atlanta); General Manager of The Ritz-Carlton, Atlanta; and Corporate Director of Rooms Operations. Prior to joining Ritz-Carlton in 1983, Staros worked for Hyatt Hotels Corporation. He holds a business degree in hotel and restaurant administration from Florida State University.



Edward V. Staros

PROPERTY BRIEF The Ritz-Carlton, Naples (ritzcarlton.com/naples), a Forbes Five Star, AAA Five Diamond resort located on Florida's Paradise Coast, offers 450 guest rooms, including 35 suites and 70 Ritz-Carlton Club rooms, all featuring spectacular Gulf of Mexico views. Resort amenities and activities include seven restaurants, a spa with 35 treatment rooms, three miles of pristine white-sand beach on the Gulf of Mexico, two pools, four tennis courts, and a variety of water sports. Just three miles away, The Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort, Naples (ritzcarlton.com/naplesgolf), features 295 guest rooms, including 38 suites, four additional tennis courts, two championship Greg Norman-designed golf courses, four restaurants, and an impressive Club-Level lounge with balconies overlooking the 18th hole. Guests staying at each resort are considered registered guests at both resorts and may enjoy the amenities of either property.

How do you keep the history and heritage of The Ritz-Carlton, Naples alive while making sure the property is current and relevant?

The Ritz-Carlton, Naples' reputation of being one of the premier luxury resorts in the country is attributed to respecting our history while reinvesting in our property. We have an incredible ownership group that believes in reinvesting in our property. Physically, we closed the hotel last June and reopened in September and spent millions of dollars to ensure the infrastructure stays relevant.

However, it's truly about the 1,300 ladies and gentlemen that keep this hotel running day after day and who are responsible for the long-term

success; the average employee has been with us for 16 years. The core of our relevance is derived from delivering on our reputation and consistently providing intuitive, personalized services and experiences to each of our guests.

Guests have been coming back for over 30 years in a row because of the service we continue to provide. The Ritz-Carlton, Naples will remain relevant as long as we engage every guest, and the only way to do that is to engage each and every employee.

Remaining committed to introducing new and exciting experiences that our guests might not know they are looking for, whether it's well-aging treatments in our spa, using healthy ingredients in interesting ways, or educating our youngest guests about our delicate ecosystem – that innovation comes through each of our ladies and gentlemen.

My personal commitment is to ensure open, frequent and transparent communication with our staff. I spend the majority of my day with our teams discussing their own guest interactions and experiences. By encouraging their inventive ideas, we are able to continuously develop and motivate an enhanced guest experience. The employees have to come first; their happiness at work leads to a commitment to excellence, and the reason why our repeat guest ratio is so high.

How important is it to have ownership that is so engaged in the property?

It is imperative. We have a long history together and we strive to continue to maintain the relationship we have built together.

We reflect on the potential within the resort, and how we can take something from good to great. We contribute thoughts to the ownership group often, and because of our track record, they listen and budget for new ideas accordingly. We consistently recommend enhancements to our ownership that bring value to all four of our customers; employees, guests, owners and The Ritz-Carlton Management Company. Keeping our owners engaged is the key. We have a tendency to under-promise and over-deliver, and we've worked together long enough that they have confidence in our ideas and subsequent results. We are extremely thankful to have such a wonderful relationship with our owners, Host Hotels and Resorts.

Is a true luxury hotel experience today about personalization and creating a one-on-one guest experience?

If we think about what guests are looking for today, individualized service accounts for 80 percent and only 20 percent relates to having a strong property. While the travel experience has transformed, most guests look for an escape, yet still want to know that there's an opportunity for access to connectivity and other "bells and whistles."

They want anticipatory service and outstanding food and beverage. Our saucier makes all soups and sauces from scratch. We also bake every piece of bread as well as make every sorbet, gelato and ice cream by hand. I believe that is part of what differentiates The Ritz-Carlton, Naples experience for our guests.

A third of everything on our menu is individualized to meet our guests' dietary needs or taste preferences. We never say no; it's always yes, because we can do that. We individually prepare food for guests so they can have the best of the best, and can accommodate their many needs. Our guests repeat their stay because they trust what they're going to see, taste, and experience each time, which I believe is a key component of luxury.

How important is having a diverse and inclusive workforce to the success of the property?

I come to work every day to apply the principles of trust, honesty, respect and integrity, and in order to fulfill the commitment, we have to take care of each other.

We have the diversity of 67 countries represented by our hotel staff, and we all care deeply for each other and celebrate each other's heritage. I have a flag for every single employee's country to celebrate our diversity, the perspectives and cultures that are brought into the building every day.

If our team knows they're in a loving environment, that positive energy is circulated to each guest. I hear it every day. Guests love our hotel because they connect with our employees. For example, I have three doormen who have been here from the day we opened and they can identify a guest before they step out of their cars.

Some days I never make it to my office because I go from employee to employee and from guest to guest. Those are by far my favorite days; the guest and employee relations are the most important part of my job and I'm proud of the constant communication I share with our staff and guests. ●