

# TELEGRAM



## CHARTING A COURSE FOR 2022

*Editorial by Dave Akridge, GRAM President*

It is difficult to predict or forecast business lately. There are so many variables out in our world and the traditional, tried-and-true practice of researching trends and using historical data to base future strategy upon seems to change moment-to-moment. It gives great credence to the fact that our hotels need to keep an open window to the times and be able to switch gears at any given moment.

"While leisure travel has been the lone saving grace for the hotel industry since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, hotel sales and marketing experts are hopeful that the business mix could grow more diversified in 2022. Over the past two years, the hotel industry has seen little to no corporate transient business, but hoteliers say that could change this year," according to Dana Miller from Hotel News Now.

There's indications of a slight shift. It's anticipated that most markets in the U.S. could realize an increase in business travel compared to 2021 and 2020. However, the focus on the strength of leisure travel will probably be our main source of occupancy.

"We are seeing some local corporate business venturing back into hotel," notes Linda Komornik, GRAM Corporate Director of Sales & Marketing, "but, short booking windows, unreliable transportation methods, weather, and last minute cancellations due to pandemic circumstances does not give our hotels any comfort margins to forecast with accuracy. Those destinations that have a built-in leisure attractions seem to be performing the best - allowing people to combine business travel with pleasure. Pure business travel destination cities are suffering the worst losses and require us to continue to be more creative with our sales and marketing strategies."

As a professional management company, it is our duty to guide our teams both through the operational challenges and strategy options.

*Continued on page 7.... Charting a Course*

## CELEBRATING A CAREER



Retirement is not the end of the road for Rob Greene; it is the beginning of the open highway... literally. On January 31st, our Regional Director of Operations Rob Greene, will begin a new chapter in his life as he trades his GRAM keys for that of his RV and will now have the ability to take off for a plethora of bucket-list destinations with his wife Pam and family.

Rob began his career with our company (Ocean Hospitalities) in 1997. Previous to that year, he worked with our ownership partner Ocean Properties and at the property level for many, many years. "Rob was always there to complete the task at hand, no matter what it took to resolve any challenges that were thrown in our paths," notes Gabrielle Smith, GRAM Corporate Controller. "I will sincerely miss Rob. We've had some interesting times over the past 23 years, for sure."

Known for his drive and distinctive laugh, Rob has always had a "git 'er done" mindset. From hands on hard work to endless project oversight, he has been an asset to our company and will be missed.

A family man, Rob never let an opportunity to brag about his family go by. Sharing stories and pictures of his wife, their children Christiana and David, and grandchildren Ava, Layla and Harper, was one of the many highlights of his day. He is looking forward to retirement so as not to miss any more big events, births, school plays, sporting events, and share in the grand-parenting duties that his rigorous travel schedule often prohibited.

"The last 35 years working with Ocean Properties, Ocean Hospitalities and Great American Hotel Group has been one heck of a ride! It has been very rewarding to have helped turn around so many hotels across the country," added Rob. "The most rewarding part has been working with and getting to know my fellow employees and clients throughout the years!"

"I am going to continue working on a part time basis for a short time and take on projects here and there where Pam can travel with me. We'll also travel in the RV on weekends during the projects and after projects are finished. Our number one bucket list trip is to take the RV to Alaska and return via the various ferries along the inland passage and return thru Seattle or Vancouver."

Rob is legendary for his antics and humor. There are many stories that will be logged in the annals of OHI and GRAM history that involved Rob - most notably about his penchant for driving too fast and then again for his ability to slow down and take time to savor the natural wonders of the property locations he visited. "I remember one stressful trip where Rob said, to me, 'c'mon - lets go for a drive'," noted Linda Komornik, Corporate Director of Sales & Marketing. "We got in the car and he took me to this beautiful vista overlooking the river where we took time to just breathe and enjoy the sights. I'll never forget that kindness." "In Alaska - we walked on a glacier, saw Beluga whales, moose, and the most beautiful mountains," added Gabrielle. Rob's vagabond spirit will not be forgotten nor will the fact that he always tried to find the best in every situation, no matter how hard things got or how unpleasant the task.

"Rob has worked tirelessly on every project we asked him to tackle over his many years with our company. He has logged countless air and drive miles across most every state in the US, and a few territories outside the country. He embraced each and every challenge with gusto and a great attitude. We will miss his day-to-day efforts and never-say-no spirit," noted Dave Akridge, President. "I know he'll enjoy future trips where he is able to be on the open road with Pam."

We all join Suzanne Baele, Corporate Director of Human Resources as she wishes a traditional Irish blessing, "May the road rise up to meet you. May the wind be always at your back. May the sun shine warm upon your face; the rains fall soft upon your fields and may God hold you in the palm of His hand."

So, from all of your teammates, current and over-the-years Rob, we wish you a happy retirement and the best of luck in all your new ventures.



## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

LET'S CELEBRATE - 2

I AM HUMAN - 3

NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK - 3

BY THE NUMBERS - 4

SELLING THE SIZZLE - 5

CELEBRATING SERVICE - 6

OPERATIONALLY SPEAKING - 7

ROOMER HAS IT - 7





Photo credit: Joan Vallente Cabras  
Printed with permission: Pixabay

## LET'S CELEBRATE

### CELEBRATION STATION

In case you want to celebrate, here is a list of National and "other" holidays: 1/17 - MLK Birthday; 1/19 - Popcorn Day; 1/24 - Compliment Day; 1/28 - Fun at work Day; 2/2 - Groundhog Day; 2/6 - Super Bowl Sunday; 2/9 - Pizza Day; 2/14 - Valentine's Day; 2/21 - President's Day; and 2/28 - Chili Day.

Remember salesmanship means being unique and standing out from the crowd. Some of these "days" will allow you to get your customer's attention in a positive and unique manner.

### A LITTLE BIT WISER

Wishing a "Happy Birthday" to our Great American Hotel Group office and property GMs:

Randi Lovec - January 29  
Greg Smith - February 14

### AROUND THE BLOCK

Wishing a "Happy Anniversary" to our Great American Hotel Group office and property GMs:

Dan Hays - 21 years (February)  
Jeff Karl - 4 years (February)  
Kim Bates - 3 years (February)

## TELEGRAM STAFF:

**EDITOR/CORPORATE SALES & MARKETING**  
Linda.Komornik@GreatAmericanHG.com

### CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

**PRESIDENT**  
Dave.Akridge@GreatAmericanHG.com

**CORPORATE HUMAN RESOURCES**  
Suzanne.Baele@GreatAmericanHG.com

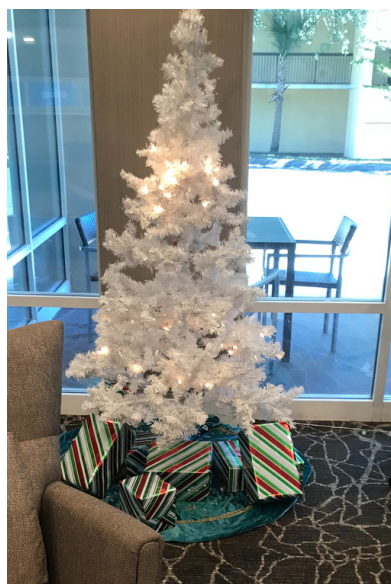
**CORPORATE CONTROLLER**  
Gabrielle.Smith@GreatAmericanHG.com

**REGIONAL DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS**  
Rob.Greene@GreatAmericanHG.com

180 LOCUST STREET | SUITE 2 | DOVER, NH 03820  
603.373.1510 | WWW.GREATAMERICANHG.COM

## DECKING THE HALLS

Hotels throughout the portfolio made special efforts to decorate for the holidays. Guests and associates alike enjoyed the holiday decor and the spirit of the season!



White lights and tree in Altamonte Springs at the SpringHill Suites echoed the beach vibe of the Florida sunshine. The traditional red and green tree in Sheffield at the Clarion stood proudly in the lobby and also on stage in Fizz (restaurant).



The team in Sheffield also had a little fun with an old ornament that was found in their boxes of holiday decor. Playing on the "Elf on the Shelf" idea, the staff took turns playing pranks by hiding "Creepy Mrs. Santa" around the hotel for unsuspecting associates to find. It gave the team a bit of levity and merriment trying to figure out where the doll would show up next.

Santa (GM Brian Kasper), Best Western Plus Bolingbrook, brought treats for all the good girls and boys on staff and they all enjoyed a holiday gathering to celebrate.





# I AM HUMAN, I AM A RESOURCE

SUZANNE BAELE, CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES



## HR Corner

**New Hot Line Phone  
Number guarantees  
total anonymity!**

**All complaints of harassment  
must be taken seriously and  
communicated to Suzanne  
Baele, Corporate Director of  
Human Resources at  
603-828-4212.**

A New Year, a new mantra... not yet I am thinking.

I know that all of us are weary of the ongoing ever changing Covid and its new variants... and I know that some of us perhaps are letting our guard down just because we are tired of living the way we have been forced to live these long months. BUT, now is the time to stay the course, stay safe and be smart. Taking the precautions suggested by the CDC will go a long way. Great American Hotel Group and her affiliate properties are committed to following these guidelines put forth by the CDC. Even this can be challenging, given the best practices and their recommendations change daily. Furthermore, some of our states/counties have their own version of what is or isn't necessary, our brands are staying consistent with a safety first message, top of mind.

We can do this. For all of our sakes, let's hang on tight for a bit longer.

## NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

Meet FJ Worley - new General Manager at the Fairfield Inn & Suites in Millville, NJ. FJ joined the team the day after Christmas.

An accomplished, award-winning, and talented hospitality professional with a comprehensive background in leadership, general management, business development, operations management, staffing, recruiting, human resources, and project management, FJ is known for delivering outstanding customer service and client success and satisfaction. His previous experience includes GM duties for the Fairfield Inn Valley Forge, Home2 Downingtown, Residence Inn Great Valley, Courtyard Collegeville, Hampton Inn Philadelphia International Airport and coming full circle, the Fairfield Inn & Suites Millville.

A graduate of Harrisburg Area Community College with a degree in Hotel and Motel Management, FJ also boasts several prestigious awards: 2012 GM of the year and 2012 Diamond Award Winner with Marriott International, and his properties finished in the top 5% of the brand in the years 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015.

Born and raised in Harrisburg, PA, FJ is the father of 3 children (25, 15, and 11 years old) and a proud "Pop Pop".

He is a huge Dallas Cowboys and LA Lakers fan, he loves to play golf, antiques, and traveling to different places.

"We are delighted to welcome FJ back to Millville," noted Dave Akridge, President of GRAM. "His familiarity with the hotel and the community makes him a welcome addition to the team and we look forward to watching him rekindle relationships and help to continue this great property on their upward path."



## BACK IN THE SADDLE AGAIN



We are pleased to welcome Jerry Ianella back to the GRAM team. Lured out of retirement to operate the Best Western Plus in Bolingbrook, Jerry brings great spirit and a can-do attitude to the hotel.

"It's a different kind of cold here in the Chicago area and it's going to take a bit of time to adjust to the weather, but I am glad to be here," notes Jerry.

Jerry retired after his last GRAM GM position at the Garrett's Desert Inn in Santa Fe. He and his wife Maria subsequently settled in Santa Fe after the hotel was sold and have become fixtures in the community.

Jerry has never strayed too far from the GRAM fold and gladly accepted this temporary role to help out the hotel during a leadership transition. He brings to the table a wealth of operational knowledge and a the drive of the Energizer bunny!

Another GRAM GM has moved locations. Dan Hays has traded his Connecticut snowsuit for Arkansas flip flops making this southern boy very happy. Now that the Baymont Inn in Groton has transitioned to a new owner, Dan enthusiastically accepted the opportunity to get back to a hotel that is in a warm weather location. He has assumed the role of GM at the LaQuinta Jonesboro, Arkansas.



No stranger to the bench GM life, Dan has held roles in many transitional hotels for GRAM. Before Groton, he most recently held the reins in Rochester, MN, and Bakersfield, CA.

# DON'T MAKE A RESOLUTION - PICK YOUR WORD OF THE YEAR INSTEAD

The following are highlights from an article written by Tara Parker-Pope in the New York Times published on January 6, 2022. Follow [this link](#) to read the full article.

To get the most out of 2022, try choosing a word that can help you make thoughtful decisions and nudge you toward positive change. Start by picking one word that captures your values and intentions for the next year. The value of this word exercise is that it helps you focus on the things that are most meaningful to you and the positive changes you'd like to make in your life, no matter what 2022 has in store.

Try not to think of your word as a resolution (like "diet") or specific goal (like "saving money"). Instead, find your word by reflecting on your favorite experiences, your hopes and dreams, and areas in your life that deserve more attention. Unlike a resolution, a single word can't be broken. Visualize this as a word that sits on your shoulder and gently nudges you toward a more improved version of yourself.

## Think about your values.

Value-oriented words (such as family, love, kindness, compassion, friendship, optimism, fitness, leadership) are a good place to start when choosing a word.

## Use the dictionary.

Look up words and explore their varied definitions. For instance, the word "create" has several meanings, including "to bring something into existence; to cause something to happen as a result of one's actions; to originate a character or role."

## Don't stop at your first word.

Workshop the words that come to mind. Don't stop with the word "happiness," for example. Think about the times when you have felt your happiest. What were you doing? Who was with you? What did these experiences have in common? Instead of "happiness" you might discover a word that better reflects how you might achieve happiness — perhaps through friendship, dance, movement, collaboration, volunteering or kindness.

## Think about decisions you might be making this year.

A good word is one that guides you when you're making both small and big decisions. Should I spend my time on this? Try this new thing? Change jobs? Move to a new place? Buy this item? Spend time with this person? If your word is "fearless," you may come up with different answers to those questions than if your word is "relax."

## Share your word.

You'll get more power from your word if you share it with others. This might be a great exercise for property teams to do together!

## BY THE NUMBERS

GABRIELLE SMITH, CORPORATE CONTROLLER



Some owners and property teams have asked, "Why do hoteliers need accounting services and tools?" In a recent article in M3's M3ssenger Magazine, an article noted the following:

"Over the past decade, cloud-based accounting software has transformed the way hoteliers manage their financials. With new software and services entering the market every year, it can be difficult for hoteliers to keep pace with newly emerging products and determine exactly what tools and services are right for their businesses."

"To help hoteliers sort through the hodgepodge of accounting providers and products, M3 has tapped into a wealth of in-house hospitality experts to help identify an accounting package that is best suited to fit a hotelier's specific needs."

"Hotel accounting is a unique service and one that requires industry skill and years of experience to understand. Just like hotels, accounting packages come in all shapes and sizes, offering everything from automated payroll and invoicing systems to fully outsourced accounting services. So, when it comes to selecting a hotel accounting package, it is important to understand how the right combination of solutions and serves can best support properties and staff."

Further, another article in the same magazine, noted that "many hotels experience back office issues that impede workflows and put undue stress on busy teams. Investing in forward-thinking, industry-specific accounting services and tools is the first step to easing the operational pain points that back office personnel experience daily, including: Mismanaged Data, Busy Work, Managing Available Cash, Decentralized Financial Systems, and Non-Specific Business Insights."

Working with M3 and Great American Hotel Group's Accounting Services Staff will help properties overcome these "pain points" and offers real-time data management and financial access, automation, centralized cloud delivery, and built-in analysis and reporting. Our staff services eliminates the need for a GM to "put on their accounting hat" and takes the bulk of the detailed accounting duties on eliminating the need for small, select or limited services properties to have dedicated accounting staff on property.

# SELLING THE SIZZLE

LINDA KOMORNIK, CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF SALES & MARKETING

*"If you're one of those marketers who's been hoping that video would just kind of go away, we hate to break it to you, but that's not going to happen. Video has been a staple of marketing for ages and continues to embed itself in our daily lives."*

*(Source: Social Media Examiner | [Facebook Live as a Marketing Strategy](#) | by Michael Stelzner | January 6, 2022)*

I don't know how to break it to you - but social media marketing isn't going away - no matter how much you protest, how much you think it is not working, or how much you hate all things social media on a personal level. Truth be told - it is still a very viable strategy in hotel sales marketing - a strategy you must embrace and use. IMHO, those hotels who abandon this arm of their marketing strategies are making a huge (and costly) mistake.

An integral part of social media marketing involves digital assets - and specifically, video. Even more specifically, given the demographics of most of our hotel's, we are talking about Facebook Live, Stories and Reels.

Here's the poop:

- *Facebook is the largest social media platform in the world, bar none.*
- *Even people who don't like Facebook continue to use it because that's where their friends, family members, and other connections are hanging out. That's where their networks are. And if your audience includes people older than 35, there's a high likelihood that's where they're spending a good portion of their time online—and it's a part of their daily routine.*
- *And while you might be thinking that Facebook is over the hill (so to speak), and therefore irrelevant, the truth is that Facebook Live has never been more relevant than it is now.*
- *If you look at what's been happening in the marketing space as privacy laws get more stringent and devices get stingier with data they share between platforms, Facebook Live has become the vehicle through which you can grab first-party data. This data allows you to build and target your audience within Facebook Ads Manager and keep your ad spend at a minimum.*
- *Additionally, live video is the fastest way to grow an engaged and qualified audience that converts. This audience will actually help you build your business.*

Over the past years, I have encouraged our sales teams to use video in their every day sales. How many times have I suggested that you take your smart phone and do a "selfie" tour of your hotel and amenities. Tour your meeting space (set up for a group), walk through your public amenities (pool, fitness room, breakfast area, business center, etc.) and spend 15-60 seconds showing each area and making personal comments. Use a selfie stick or better yet, have another associate film you giving the tour. Put yourself in the picture/video to breed familiarity with your customer! People buy from people they know, like and trust. Once you have an arsenal of video clips, use them in your sales solicitations and on your social medias.

Every customer and planner in your markets receives letters, emails, sales kits, requests for meetings or tours, and other correspondence from every hotel and sales manager in your comp set. They are predictable..... "Hi Mary, just checking in on you and ABC company...." Wouldn't it be a change to send that sales check up or solicitation in a video?

*In past blogs, telephone conversations, and emails I have suggested that the progression of sales in the "new normal" follows the Care-Compassion-Hospitality format. While I think this is still the way to go with our existing customer base, these three metrics can also be the foundation for building relationships with new customers too. Showing our authenticity and humanity to potential new customers gives them insight to the type of salesperson we are, and the quality of service we will provide. If we lead with the strong desire to know our customers, have genuine interaction with them, and learn what makes a difference to them and their company, then we have accomplished a great feat. Suddenly we are getting to know more about customers than ever before! We are talking to them while they sit at their dining room table, in their home office, or even from their patio... we get insight into their personal lives and what makes them tick. Thanks to Zoom, WebEx and Facetime we can see that they have pets, that they have families, that they have hobbies, what their design aesthetic is, and what they look like! From a sales perspective, we are now managing customer relationships on a more personal level. Care, Compassion, and Hospitality can be integrated into all aspects of our prospecting and sales calls when we truly are face-to-face.*

*Let's go back to my previous blogs and talk about face-to-face, voice-to-voice, and computer-to-computer sales calls. Are you just a voice hiding behind your smart phone? Did you ever set yourself up to make digital sales calls using your webcam? Have you tried to reach out to potential meeting planners while sitting inside your meeting room that has been set up for social distancing? Did you ever create a 15-, 30-, or 60- second video of yourself introducing your product (elevator pitch)? Are you sending these videos embedded in your emails so your customers can see you and your product? If you haven't done this, why not? (In the linked blog there is an example of a 60-second elevator pitch.)*

*Continued on page 6.... Selling the Sizzle*



# CELEBRATING SERVICE HEROES AMONG US

WE DON'T SAY IT OFTEN ENOUGH - BUT YOU ARE AWESOME!

THIS SECTION OF OUR NEWSLETTER IS DESIGNED FOR PROPERTY LEADERS TO SHARE STORIES FROM OUR CUSTOMERS ABOUT OUR MOST VALUABLE ASSETS - OUR ASSOCIATES.

SEND YOUR SUBMISSIONS [LINDA.KOMORNIK@GREATAMERICANHG.COM](mailto:LINDA.KOMORNIK@GREATAMERICANHG.COM) FOR INCLUSION IN FUTURE EDITIONS OF THE TELEGRAM.

## SpringHill Suites Quakertown PA

*The front desk staff were wonderful! The gentleman was on his third day and treated us as his best customers. His trainer was even better. Room was clean and large. Shower was in a different area than bathroom. Nice. Appreciated the pool.*

## Homewood Suites Germantown TN

*I honestly enjoyed my stay and the team members were all awesome!!! Thank you Sylvia!!! I'm sorry I've forgotten the other team members names. The breakfast was awesome and good.*

## Clarion Inn & Suites Sheffield AL

*A Gem In the Shoals - The whole experience, from the hotel to Fizz and the staff was excellent.*

## Lakeside Inn Wakefield MA

*Double bed with clean sheets, a mini fridge, microwave, lamps. If you're looking for a clean place to lay your head this is the place. Affordable, super friendly staff, close to most everything you need.*

*Selling the Sizzle continued.....*

Creating a video elevator pitch or tour of your facility doesn't require special equipment (although a nice ring light or tri-pod makes them look less amateur). Simply draft your thoughts, practice a few times, and then give your pitch or tour naturally. If you don't like it - rerecord!

Here are some basic concepts:

#1 - Create a hotel positioning statement following your hotel's brand identity. Use your personality and expertise to craft this message.

#2 - Create a story. You don't need a "start" and "end", but you do need to keep a cohesive message in similar formats. For example, use your brand messaging, text, words, and your personality to convey each message. If you are using (tasteful) humor, then do it consistently, if you have a slogan or tag line - integrate it into your story.

#3 - Optimize your video and provide a call to action! Make sure you provide a hook or reason for the customer to reach back to you and give them a way to do it easily. Make your video easy to find and watch by embedding keywords into the video and tagging it to show up in search.

#4 - Use advertising dollars wisely.

*One of the magical things about Facebook is the ability to build an audience based on live views. This means you can allocate a small portion of your ad spend to reach a wider audience with your Facebook live. Engagement ads are one of the most underutilized strategies for increasing both organic engagement as well as future paid advertising strategies. As you're creating your engagement ad, start by using a custom audience that you've built through other means, starting with your email list and the people who have opted to receive marketing from you. Facebook currently allows you to build up to 500 custom audiences, although most business owners typically have between 5 and 10. It's also an underutilized feature of Facebook that can become very powerful when you build a strategy around it.*

*Once you've created your custom audience, you can grow it based on views of a specific video, and then double down and create a lookalike audience based on that custom audience. Having a paid advertising strategy behind your live videos to reach more people on Facebook and gathering that data will help you when it's time to run your launch or product ads.*

Practice making videos and try using them in your next set of prospecting emails. Talk to your social media company and create a mini-marketing plan to complement your sales and marketing plan.

Happy having fun with video,



# OPERATIONAL SPEAKING

ROB GREENE, DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS



In the last issue of the TeleGRAM we spoke about decorating for the holidays and creating an atmosphere of festivity. With the holidays behind us - and as we pack away our decorations for next year - it is important to create an inventory of items that you have on hand. You should follow good operational procedures include discarding any items that have fallen into disrepair, making sure all items are organized and clean, packing and labeling boxes, and storing all items responsibly.

'Tis the season to take advantage of sales of decor and items and purchase new decor at low prices. Sit down with your team and decide what you might need to complete your decorating theme is and then go out and pick up lights, trees, bulbs, garland, and other items on your wish list! You'll save a lot of money and be prepared for next season!

U.S. hotel average daily rate (ADR) reached an all-time weekly high, according to STR's latest data 26 December 2021 through 1 January 2022 (percentage change from pre-pandemic comparable):

- Occupancy: 54.3% (+10.7%)
- Average daily rate (ADR): US \$157.91 (+15.1%)
- Revenue per available room (RevPAR): US \$85.74 (+27.4%)

Though the record-breaking ADR level was highlighted by luxury resorts, the Top 25 Markets reached almost US \$200 in aggregate, led by Miami (US \$455.31) and Oahu (US \$411.47).

*Charting a Course continued....*

As we think about and identify our 2022 strategy, we will need to rely on the word of our boots-on-the-ground staff and what they are seeing in their individual markets. This is hard given the labor shortages in many of our hotels - especially as it relates to a dedicated sales person on staff. Many hotels have either moved their sales person into an operational role, or worse - had to furlough them for financial performance reasons during COVID. As time goes by, the competitive nature of the employment market is making it nearly impossible to find a qualified candidate who wants to do hotel sales at the salaries that we have in our budgets. The phrase "every one is a sales person" is now more true than ever. Our GMs are wearing a sales hat (as our front desk staffs) as well as working the front desk, cleaning rooms, and serving breakfast.

Not having a dedicated sales person to pound the pavement means that our hotels are more reliant than ever on quality revenue management and rate positioning, managing discounts and third party bookings, responding to outside lead generation services, and considering moving to a virtual sales teams that give relief from overhead costs (e.g. Jacaruso). The first quarter of 2022 will give our hotels the impetus to decide how they are going to tackle sales and at what costs.

All the news is not dismal. Going into 2022, we are seeing group booking levels returning - in some hotels - matching 2019 levels. This combined with strong leisure travel gives us hope. Certain segments like medical, construction, oil and gas have stayed healthy, and we are seeing segments like technology picking up. The truth of the matter is that urban locations are growing at a slower pace than suburban locations. With international travel bans being lifted (slowly) for vaccinated travelers, we should see these urban and gateway cities picking up - perhaps as soon as early second quarter.

Small executive-size meeting bookings have improved given the impact of vaccines and boosters. Properties and brands with flexible cancel policies, and the ability to book and cook a group on the fly, will probably be in our favor. With that being said, these travelers have also become more savvy, research and book everything on line or through an online travel partner. This means our expenses go up and commissions are higher. Keeping our rates competitive is more important than ever. Capturing the right customer at the right rate means our sales strategies need to be fresh and unique. (Read Linda's column on Page 5 for a new idea.)

At Great American Hotel Group our goal is to deliver results for owners and investors. Our 2022 goal is to continue working with each of you and providing the best guidance so that your teams are the best versions of hoteliers.

## ROOMER HAS IT

CLARION INN & SUITES SHEFFIELD

Fizz, located inside the Clarion Inn & Suites recently hosted the cast and crew party for the location filming of the movie RESPECT. In attendance were many of the movie actors and musicians. Pictured here is Myk Watford, who played the legendary Rick Hall of FAME Studios with our own GM Kim Bates.



Myk Watford was raised in the Muscle Shoals region of northern Alabama. He attended the University of Utah, under the tutelage of Kenneth H. Washington, and studied at the Shakespeare Theatre in Washington, D.C. According to IMDb, Watford has appeared on just about every cop show on TV, most notably a recurring stint on "Law & Order: SVU", as well as all the "CSI's", "NCIS's", and every other procedural using acronyms. He has also appeared on Numb3rs (2005), Bosch (2014), Training Day (2017), The Mentalist (2008), Private Practice (2007), Bones (2005), Breaking Bad (2008), Cold Case (2003), Elementary (2012), Without a Trace (2002), The Closer (2005), True Blood (2008), Justified (2010), Longmire (2012), Lethal Weapon (2016), and Scandal (2012). In 2019, he was first seen as Detective Morelli in Season 3 of HBO's True Detective (2014). He appeared in the based on real-life made-for-TV movie, New York Prison Break the Seduction of Joyce Mitchell (2017), as well as such feature films as No Country for Old Men (2007), Spider-Man (2002), and Trailer Park of Terror (2008).

GREAT AMERICAN HOTEL GROUP



The team in Dover gathered to celebrate the holidays with a group luncheon. Pictured from left to right is Tenny DiCarlo, Gabrielle Smith, Candy Grimbilas, Jason Rickett, and Jeff Karl.

Dave Akridge was the photographer and was in attendance but not pictured.





## THIS WON'T HURT A BIT

On December 13th, Great American Hotel Group lent office space to the community to host a Free COVID-19 vaccine event in the local Dover, NH community. The event was well-received and many local residents came down to take advantage of event.

One of the first in line to receive his booster - was our GRAM President Dave Akridge.



## HOW CUSTOMER REVIEWS CAN IMPROVE YOUR SEO EFFORTS

*The following are highlights from an article written by Corey Patterson for SEO SearchLand published on January 6, 2022. Follow this [link](#) to read the full article.*

Customer reviews aren't just trust signals for your customers — they can also provide potential SEO ranking boosts when used effectively. "They [reviews] build trust in your brand," said Kyra Sammis, customer success manager at Trustpilot. "Reviews are an opportunity for anyone familiar with your brand to publicly share what they love about your products, services and customer experience. Having reviews publicly available conveys that you're safe to do business with."

Featuring reviews — even if they're bad reviews — is vital for brands wanting to build customer trust in today's competitive SEO landscape. And with 53% of all trackable website traffic coming from organic search, marketers would be wise to capture some of that share with customer reviews. "Reviews are a powerful marketing engine in their own right — they're a way to build trust in your brand," she said. "You can turn that brand trust into measurable ROI through increased web traffic sales and revenue."

Here are five ways Sammis says marketers can help boost their rankings by leveraging customer reviews:

- **Emphasize off-site SEO** - Off-site SEO describes any actions you take to build up a digital footprint outside of your actual website. Whether it's building credible backlinks to your page, staying active on social media platforms or even creating a profile on a third-party review platform.
- **Don't neglect referral traffic** - On top of the off-page SEO benefits for your actual website, creating a profile on a third-party site can also lead to a huge spike in referral traffic. When someone searches for reviews of a brand, many of these third-party sites can wind up right at the top of the search results.
- **Display reviews on your website** - Featuring customer reviews on key landing pages is easy to pull off with review widgets and this small addition to your website can improve how often your pages show up in organic search results.
- **Pay attention to star ratings** - When marketers think about star ratings and search results, paid listings usually come to mind. Most marketers don't realize that they can also earn star ratings on their organic search listings and appeal to those savvy customers who might be less inclined to click on an ad.
- **Make use of long-tail search queries** - Reviewing the ultra-specific, long-tail keywords your customers use when searching for your products, services or brand is key to capturing your niche's audience. But marketers can also leverage the queries used in company reviews, which are highly relevant and amplify customer voices.