

# Luxury Hospitality for over a Century



An Interview with Scott Geraghty,  
General Manager, The St. Regis Hotel, New York

**EDITORS' NOTE** *A chef by training, Scott Geraghty spent many years serving in executive chef and managerial positions in properties throughout the United States before assuming his current position in June 2004. Geraghty holds a B.A. degree in international relations from Lehigh University (Pennsylvania) and an A.O.S.A. degree in culinary arts from the Culinary Institute of America.*



Scott Geraghty

**COMPANY BRIEF** *Considered one of the top hotels in the world, the 100-year-old, five-star-plus St. Regis Hotel, New York, offers 229 guest rooms and suites, featuring Louis XVI-style furniture, crystal chandeliers, carved crown moldings and wainscoting, marble baths, and silk wall coverings; well-appointed meeting and events facilities; and a range of elegant dining venues. It is the flagship property of St. Regis Hotels and Resorts, one of the two premier brands (the other being The Luxury Collection) of metropolitan New York-based Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, Inc. (www.starwoodhotels.com), which reported net income of \$395 million on sales of approximately \$5.4 billion in 2004.*

**With the hospitality market rebounding well, what level of growth do you expect in 2006?**

I expect 2006 to be a particularly strong year, not least because the St. Regis brand is really beginning to come into its own. We have just opened a property in San Francisco, which gives us tremendous visibility on the West Coast. Our Washington, DC, property is undergoing renovation at the moment, and we are opening a new property in Fort Lauderdale in the fall. In fact, over the next 18 months to two years, we will open approximately 10 hotels, and that will feed our growth tremendously. Some of that growth will be through mixed-use facilities, including residences and residence clubs. So we are very excited about our growth prospects.

**Do you think the trend toward**

**mixed use is here to stay?**

Yes, I think the industry is embracing this new model. It makes a lot of sense for hotels that operate in the 60 to 70 percent occupancy range, because it gives you 20 percent of your occupancy to play with. That's an untapped value to any company.

**The St. Regis Hotel, New York, has just completed extensive renovations. What improvements have you made to the property?**

We've just finished renovating all of the guest rooms and suites. We have installed substantial new technology, so that everything the guests need can now be controlled from the bedside table or the desk. Not only can our guests now control their own lighting, television, music, temperature, and so forth, but they also have an interactive screen that enables them to pull up a full room-service menu or information about the Museum of Modern Art, for example. If you push one key, you can dial straight through to the reservation agents at a particular airline. Basically, you can be as in touch with the outside world as you want to be.

**With all those technological advances, do real people become redundant? What happens to the human touch, which many guests cherish?**

Some people want to be wired all the time, but there's still a large segment of the population that really just wants to be taken care of. We like to think that we provide for both types of guest very well. We have the best technology, and we also offer an unparalleled level of personalized service. We'll take care of everything for you.

**To what extent is the Internet driving reservations?**

It's driving reservations at all levels. Some people prefer not to interact with our associates when booking their rooms. At the same time, there are many people who do enjoy talking to someone, and our salespeople are here to accommodate them. If we have the opportunity to interact with our guests, we are better able to

tailor their stay. To me, that's what five-star service is all about.

**In New York, there are so many luxury hotels going after the same high-end client. How can you show what makes a property unique?**

I think competition is beneficial for the five-star-hotel market in New York. If we are aware of the services provided by our competitors, we will drive our level of service ever higher. How do we do that? This hotel is more than 100 years old. It was built by John Jacob Astor to rival the best hotels in the best service cultures of Europe, and it has really stayed that way over the decades. Providing butler service for every single room is a big differentiator. Someone is always right around the corner, at your beck and call at all times. There's always someone to make sure that your desires are taken care of, even before you get here, and someone who can coordinate your overall stay. So, if you need theater tickets, they'll help you take care of that. If you need laundry done at the last minute, or you need to print some documents, you have an extra pair of hands at the ready. That's nice to have.

**What advice would you give to young people hoping to emulate your distinguished career?**

I think that everybody who gets out of hotel school would like to be a general manager, and I don't think I was any different. You always think, "When can I be the boss?" But I think it's very important to move laterally through a hotel. You need to work through the various businesses, so that you fully understand them. Ultimately, the better the platform you put together in your younger days, the higher your career plateau will be.

**Is it difficult for you to get away from the business?**

I work with a tremendous group of individuals, and I am rarely ever contacted after work. I can only think of a handful of times in the last three years, and that was when it was really important. I set a portion of my weekend aside to do e-mail, but that choice is mine. ●

*A St. Regis suite's living room*