



Five Star Service

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



The Presidential Suite living area (left); Terrazza Restaurant (above)

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. Earlier in his career and prior to joining The Ritz-Carlton in 1983, Staros worked for Hyatt Hotels Corporation. He holds a degree in hotel and restaurant administration from Florida State University.



Edward V. Staros

PROPERTY BRIEF The Ritz-Carlton Resorts of Naples (www.ritzcarlton.com/resortsofnaples), 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, features 295 guest rooms, including 38 suites and two championship Greg Norman-designed golf courses. Amenities at the Golf Resort include two restaurants, a gourmet coffee shop, a billiards room, and an impressive Club-Level lounge with balconies overlooking the 18th hole. Guests staying at either resort may enjoy the amenities of both.

What makes this property so special?

I fell in love with the Naples property and the dedicated ladies and gentlemen during the pre-opening process in November of 1985. On December 3, grand opening eve, I was looking out the hotel window at the sunset, when I called my wife and I told her how incredible the hotel was and that the location, amenities, and employees at this resort were the best in the business. From the beginning, the Naples team has always been genuine in providing exceptional service to our guests.

She said, "Maybe someday you will come back to be the GM." That happened in October of 1999 when I hung up my frequent flyer card as VP of Operations worldwide, a position I held from 1992 to 1999. I chose to give up my corporate position, after much consideration, so I could have

more time with my family, and oversee the resort and team that had inspired me so many years prior.

Why was the timing right for the most recent renovation?

In 2011, I had a meeting with the ownership group and offered my vision of what needed to be updated in the hotel over the next few years. What prompted my recommendation to close the resort entirely was that I recognized that the scope of the project was immense. The hotel was 26 years old and various structural, mechanical, and engineering upgrades were needed throughout the property. I realized then, that in order to maintain our exemplary level of service and facilities for the next 25 years, a lot of infrastructure work was warranted and necessary. The only way to accomplish a project of this magnitude without impacting our guests was to close for 66 days.

During that initial meeting in March 2011, we put our plan on paper and it was finalized by November. That initial document, if you read it today, reads as a historical document rather than a visionary document – because everything in it has come to fruition. We did an amazing amount of work in a 66-day period, and opened on time and on budget. Today, we are reaping the benefits of a beautiful hotel. Not only did we remaster all the suites, corridors, and guest rooms, but we updated three food and beverage experiences that are the best of the best: DUSK bar features creative cocktails, sushi, and a new patio that overlooks the Gulf of Mexico; Terrazza, our Italian-inspired restaurant, now has an open-air dining option allowing guests to enjoy the cool Gulf breezes; The Grill, our classic steak and seafood restaurant, now has a contemporized, yet sophisticated design. Additionally, Artisans, our special occasion venue, has been brightened with soft silvers, whites, and greys—making it the perfect backdrop for weddings, receptions, private parties, and intimate events.

Was it important to maintain some of the heritage of the property?

Yes, we didn't want to change our soul – we just wanted to reenergize it. Although we remastered many of our spaces, we remain committed to our heritage of providing product and service excellence. For example, recently, we had a young lady who grew up vacationing at this hotel with her family since age six. Now at age 29, she told her father there was only one place she wanted to get married – the resort where her fondest vacation memories had been created: The Ritz-Carlton, Naples. This story is increasingly common as we welcome the next generation of travelers through our doors.

Is hospitality today a different industry, in terms of the online component?

Today, social media plays a large role in our marketing and guest satisfaction strategies. Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Foursquare are a few of the social media platforms we utilize to generate awareness and promote guest engagement. For instance, we use these platforms to monitor guest feedback, thus allowing us to enhance the guest experience. In addition, we have won numerous accolades for our Facebook page, including a Platinum Adrian Award from Hospitality Sales and Marketing International.

Why doesn't this job ever get old?

My career has never been dull or gotten old because I was fortunate to find my niche working in luxury hospitality. After spending nine years in operations at The Ritz-Carlton's Buckhead and Atlanta, in 1992, Horst Schulze (former President and COO of The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company) asked me to join the team at the corporate office.

Why doesn't this job ever get old?

I enjoyed the corporate environment because it allowed me the opportunity to coach and mentor up-and-coming talent. However, over time, I began to miss working with the ladies and gentlemen at the property level on a daily basis. Coupled with the constant travel, I was open to accepting a role that would require less travel, offer more time with family, and allow me to coach and mentor our ladies and gentlemen. When the opportunity to return to Naples became available, I eagerly accepted the position.

Over the years, I have seen Naples grow. Naples was a tiny beachfront community of 25,000 people when we broke ground in 1983. Now, Naples has approximately 285,000 residents, many of whom were once guests of our resort. Additionally, while we have created memories through guest engagement, we have also created lifelong friends. I have many corporate friends who have stayed at the resort and, as a result, now own property in the Naples area.

What also energizes me on a daily basis is my involvement with several local philanthropic organizations. There is no better charitable footprint to be involved with than the organizations in Naples, Florida. Our community is fortunate to have some of the most generous and well-meaning people who not only live, work, and visit our corner of paradise but also take time to get involved. ●