

# LEADERS IN *Hospitality*

## Creative and Innovative

An Interview with Robert R. Matheu III,  
General Manager, Nemacolin Woodlands Resort

**EDITORS' NOTE** "Trey" Matheu joined Nemacolin Woodlands Resort in May 2002 as Director of Lodging and was appointed to his current position in May 2004. He previously served in a number of senior positions in the hospitality industry, including Food and Beverage Manager at the Keystone Resort in Colorado, Resident Manager at Jackson Lake Lodge in Wyoming, and Resident Manager at Snake River Lodge & Spa, also in Wyoming. He holds a bachelor's degree in history from Pennsylvania's Lafayette College.



Robert R. Matheu III

**PROPERTY BRIEF** Situated 70 miles southeast of Pittsburgh, in Farmington, Pennsylvania, Nemacolin Woodlands Resort ([www.nemacolin.com](http://www.nemacolin.com)) features 335 luxurious guest rooms, suites, townhomes, and single-family homes, 125 of which are located in the Chateau LaFayette. There are 42 additional rooms at Falling Rock, the AAA-Five-Diamond Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired boutique hotel overlooking the Mystic Rock golf course. The resort also features the Woodlands Spa, offering more than 60 treatments; more than 31,000 square feet of meeting and banquet space; 10 dining venues and seven bars and lounges; and a private airfield. The property's outdoor attractions include two golf courses, the PGA Tour-tested Mystic Rock and the traditional The Links; a 25-station sporting clays facility; the 18-mile Off-Road Driving Academy, featuring Hummer H1 and H2 vehicles and Toyota FJ Cruisers; an equestrian center; featuring dog sledding in the fall and winter; a downhill and cross-country skiing facility; and the large Hawaiian-style Paradise Pool. Guests may also browse a \$45 million art collection and view live animal exhibits featuring black bears, zebras, wallabies, lions, tigers, and emus.

### How have the recent economic challenges impacted the property, and how challenging will growth be in the future?

Nemacolin is a unique property simply because of its geographic location; it's a five-hour drive for a third of the population of the United States. During the summer, we saw some of our corporate customers becoming more budget conscious than they had been before. But we saw a pretty good increase in transient travel, three-day weekend visitors, and families going away for family activities. Nemacolin has



positioned itself over the past 10 years to push the family aspect of the resort. So in the summer, we offset any loss of corporate business with our transient or social travelers.

In the fall, we transition into more of a corporate environment, and during that period, we look to build stronger partnerships with our corporate clients. We want to make sure the experience they get has more added value than they've ever seen before, providing such things as team-building

experiences to solidify whatever point they're trying to drive home during that conference, creatively packaging various resort offerings, and working with our partners to create what they require rather than what has typically been more convenient for the resort in the past. So we've become a lot more creative and innovative.

### How can one property truly cater to both leisure and corporate travelers?

Nemacolin is almost three different resorts in one environment. We have an amenity package that includes golf, a spa, an outdoor center, and an off-road driving academy, and that supports more than 300 or so rooms. Those 300 rooms are divided into three different areas. Falling Rock, which is 42 rooms, is great for a corporate retreat, family reunions, or weddings, and it stands as its own separate resort in terms of food and beverage and accommodations. We also have the Chateau LaFayette and The Lodge, which are more of a traditional hotel. Between those two units, we have approximately 220 rooms that are more centralized and within walking distance to the spa. Our town house and multihome products are great for the family or corporate traveler. So we're almost chameleon-like in that we can handle different types of guests. When you add in the amenity package, we're able to offer the guest the advantage of a luxury resort as well.

### Do guests often go outside the property, or do they generally stay on the property?

Both. We have partnerships with many locations and activities in the area. Fallingwater is about 15 minutes from the property. Kentuck Knob, another one of Frank Lloyd Wright's houses, is about 10 minutes from the property. Ohiopyle State Park, which has class four and five rapids for white-water rafting and is the largest state park in Pennsylvania. National Battlefield is

located within a few miles of Nemacolin. We also have Fort Necessity, which is right next door. We have a few wineries in the area. It depends on what our guests are looking for.

### Has the spa been a growth area for the resort?

Absolutely. We've seen tremendous revenue increases, and we're seeing spa connoisseurs who are a lot more educated than they were five or six years ago. The demand has risen because the profile of spas in general has risen. We've added an additional 10 treatment rooms, so now we're up to 40 treatment rooms and 32,000 square feet. We've also added some new signature treatments, acupuncture, and some alternative healings, as well as traditional hedonistic massages or treatments.

### You provide an extensive wine offering and have broadened into wine classes and teaching. Is learning an important part of Nemacolin's amenities package?

We try to add new amenities on an annual basis. With our wine classes, we recently built a classroom setting and offer presentations with PowerPoint to educate guests on which side of the river certain grapes are grown so they can learn the different tastes of the wines based on soil content, sun exposure, and other variables. At the driving academy, we teach guests how to drive with two feet, how to navigate on 45-degree angles, and how to control a vehicle on ice. We continuously strive to teach our guests skills – we call them "life skills" – that they can apply to everyday settings to enrich their own lives.

### During your time off, are you able to not worry or think about what's happening at the property?

Yes. There is a very stable team in place. For me personally, it's a lot more fun to be out there. It allows me to move in some different directions and get involved in even more of the organization. I'm learning on a daily basis. Do I worry? Absolutely, but it's definitely a labor of love. We have built a place of which we're incredibly proud, we love working for the owners who are good to us, and every day we're trying to give them a return on their investments in the resort. ●

*The statue of Gene Sarazen keeps watch over this visually intimidating tee shot. Long hitters will try and carry the rock wall and valley which will provide the best view of the green. The deep bunkers left and a sloping green demand a precision approach.*