

Hospitality

All About Choice



**An Interview with Chris Plummer,
General Manager, Nemaocolin Woodlands Resort**

Falling Rock, a Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired boutique hotel; a Jeep® on part of the 20-mile off-road driving academy trails; the Lady Luck Casino; snow tubing, just one of numerous winter activities available at Nemaocolin Woodlands Resort (clockwise from upper left)

EDITORS' NOTE Chris Plummer joined the property in October 2006 and has served as General Manager since 2010. Prior to this, he held positions with Caesars Entertainment, Olympia Gaming, and Booth Creek Ski Holdings.



Chris Plummer

PROPERTY BRIEF Spread across 2,000 acres in bucolic Farmington, Pennsylvania, Nemaocolin Woodlands Resort (www.nemaocolin.com) features 318 luxurious guest rooms, suites, townhomes, and single-family homes, 125 of which are located in the Chateau Lafayette. There are 42 rooms at Falling Rock, the Forbes Five Star and AAA Five Diamond Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired boutique hotel overlooking the Mystic Rock golf course. The resort also features the Woodlands Spa, offering over 100 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 Links Course; a 30-station sporting clays facility; the 20-mile Off-Road Driving Academy featuring Jeep®; an equestrian center, dog sledding in the fall and winter; a downhill and cross-country ski facility; and the large Hawaiian-style Paradise Pool. Guests will also enjoy a \$45-million art collection and can view live animal exhibits featuring black bears, zebras, buffalo, lions, tigers, and hyenas.

How have you gotten the message out about the resort? What more can be done to build awareness of the many things that differentiate this property?

Providing an absolutely incredible experience for everyone that comes here and bringing more of those people here is what gets the word out. Our core focus is our wonderful product and the wonderful people providing the experience that we do.

How broad is the market? Are you targeting new markets from a location point of view?

Nemaocolin being situated where it is – a three-hour ride from Washington, D.C.; five- or six-hour ride from New York; five-hour ride from Philly – caters to a good chunk of the population on the East Coast.

Our location is our most significant strength but sometimes a major weakness. We are a drive-to destination and fortunately for us, we're positioned and our owners have put us in a place where there are plenty of people to drive to us.

Would we love to have people all over the world here? Would we love to expand to different cities plane rides away? Absolutely. Does that make good business sense for Nemaocolin? Not at this point.

How much of an advantage is being able to accommodate those high-end business travelers while also offering the family experience?

At Nemaocolin, it's all about choice, from the spa to golf, zip line, ropes course, mountain bike, whitewater rafting or relaxing and going to dinner. Our lodging options are simple along that philosophy: Chateau, the Lodge, the luxury homes, the townhomes, Falling Rock, the RV park – choice is key here. You can customize your vacation whether you come with family and you want to stay in the Maples Condos and have your own kitchen or come back with your wife and experience Falling Rock or the Club Level at the Chateau.

What you're looking for out of your experience at Nemaocolin and having the choice of many options is what it's all about, and lodging options fall into that realm.

How critical has training been in terms of providing consistent service standards?

Training and service standards are critical. However, hiring the right people and having the right people is even more critical.

We have a lot of standards set in place for our associates; however, we ask our people to treat our guests as if this is our home and we're inviting the 350,000 people a year that visit Nemaocolin into our home. We look for those who truly care and want to impart this feeling to our guests.

Is it tougher to define Nemaocolin because it offers so many different experiences?

When we get people here and they finally get what we are, what we're doing, and all that's available, they realize that not only can they come here with their business and corporations for meetings and conventions but they can come back with their wives and families.

We have families coming here for generations; we cater to that choice.

How critical has it been to find the right food and beverage mix?

It's been critical as we have seen our family vacation business booming over the past 5 to 10 years, and families need choices.

We offer casual outlets and more upscale dining restaurants in our collection – we offer 10 different kitchens and 10 different choices of menus. We also opened the new Sundial Lodge in December, which offers yet another dining option.

Many talk about the financial aspect of being a GM today. Is it tough to avoid losing sight of the hospitality side of the business?

Our leadership team knows their business so well that I can bounce among the different areas.

You can never lose the focus on what makes your business successful and that is happy, motivated associates, which provide a fantastic guest experience and that leads to financial success.

Do you expect to grow despite the economic conditions today? Have you seen the business come back?

The business came back rather rapidly after 2009, and we have had growth since then but it has not been nearly as rapid as desired.

We're still crawling our way through this, but our success is a testament to our product and service. It's the reason we have come out of this rather well.

Also, since 2008, we have added so many amenities – regardless of the financial situation, the commitment of our owners has allowed us to keep going.

Would you talk about the progress on your casino?

We have already broken ground on it and anticipate the opening to be in the summer of 2013.

It will be located in a building that is on the far eastern side of our property, so away from the hotel, but shuttle service is offered.

The casino will be full service with about 600 slot machines and 60 table games.

We are partnering with a company called Isle of Capri Casinos and we'll work with them to create one of the greatest amenity-driven casinos in the world. ●