

# Hospitality

## The Benefits of Being Independent



The entrance to The Colonnade Hotel (above); the entrance to Brasserie JO (below)

An Interview with David J. Colella,  
Vice President and Managing Director, The Colonnade Hotel

**EDITORS' NOTE** David Colella is a member of the board of directors of the Greater Boston Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Massachusetts Restaurant Association, the Hospitality and Tourism Management Program at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, and Board Chair Emeritus of the Massachusetts Lodging Association. In addition to his current post, which he has held since December 1992, Colella is Vice President of Hotel Operations for The Druker Company Ltd., The Colonnade's parent company. He was named Massachusetts Restaurant Association's Restaurateur of the Year in 2008 and he was recently inducted into the Massachusetts Lodging Association's Hall of Fame. Colella is a graduate of the Isenberg School of Management at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.



David J. Colella

**PROPERTY BRIEF** The Colonnade Hotel ([www.colonnadehotel.com](http://www.colonnadehotel.com)) is an independently owned and managed luxury property featuring 285 sophisticated rooms and suites with 21st-Century comforts and amenities that are both high-tech and soft touch. Situated in Boston's Back Bay, the property is home to the city's only rooftop pool and one of Boston's most popular restaurants, Brasserie JO. Opened in 1971 by Bertram Druker, the hotel is overseen today by his son Ronald Druker, President of The Druker Company.

### How is the hospitality business faring today? Are the rates coming back up?

Yes, we experienced a dramatic growth in rate in 2012. In 2011, we began to see improvements in occupancy and to a lesser degree rate. We anticipated a bounce in rate and occupancy in 2012 due to advanced bookings driven by conventions and trade shows being at almost a record high. We had not experienced that kind of presell in some time.

So we knew we'd have the ability to push rate and drive RevPAR with so many strong dates due to city-wide conventions.

Toward the end of 2011, we also started to see an improvement in corporate meetings and corporate travel. We didn't necessarily consider that a precursor to the economy dramatically improving but corporations can only remain stagnant for so long in terms of not having sales meetings or meetings with clients to generate business.

Due to pent-up demand, which we began to see at the end of 2011, and in 2012, rates were up dramatically and occupancies better than expected.

While the presells for conventions in 2013 are not as strong as they had been in 2012, we expect to see continued improvement in rate and smaller improvement in occupancy. That's in spite of the fact that the economy hasn't rebounded as

we had hoped and also given that we have had an increase in supply of hotel rooms in Boston over the past few years.

However, Boston is a strong comeback city and has always demonstrated its resiliency whenever we have had economic setbacks.

**In 2008, an investment was made to reinvent this property. Is the property where it needs to be today?**

The reinvention that took place in 2007 and 2008 gave us a tremendous boost and helped us during the downturn. The hotel industry had become extremely competitive with the citywide falloff in demand and so much new supply.

Having a newly reinvented product set the stage for us to be competitive without sacrificing rate.

Going forward, we do have plans in place for redecorating, replacement, and refining, which includes making improvements to our grand ballroom, junior ballroom, and meeting space.

The guest rooms will be upgraded in the first half of the year with new soft goods. While we have tweaked the rooftop pool over the past few years, we have begun plans to make dramatic changes prior to opening for the 2013 season.

Continued product improvement is essential in this competitive environment.

**Brasserie JO is not thought of as a hotel restaurant but as a Boston restaurant. What makes it so special?**

It's truly a legitimate French brasserie that offers great food with great value. That concept in a fun and lively atmosphere has helped set the tone for Brasserie JO.

Brasserie JO has begun its 16th year and the concept has virtually remained unchanged. We have been consistent in maintaining it as a Brasserie, serving great French food in a casual setting and appealing to the public at so many different levels.

The casual atmosphere works for any occasion. From the outdoor café to the private dining rooms to the bar activity, which is always strong, it has become a Boston favorite.

**What is it about this property that has kept you here?**

As an independent hotel, you're able to be more creative with what you're doing with the physical product, and the relationship that our management team and our associates have with the local ownership is unique.

Boston is a terrific city and the community is strong and engaged – the city attracts good hotel managers and

there is very little turnover. I have loved living elsewhere and running other hotels, but nothing touches you as much as an independent with terrific associates and supportive ownership.

We have been successful in creating movement internally for young managers, enabling them to grow from within, which allows The Colonnade Hotel to maintain continuity at all levels.

**Are there challenges to being independent?**

The challenges associated with being independent breed creativity. You have to be creative in how you market your hotel and in how you recruit and retain talent. The process challenges our management team to create a strong and competitive product. Those challenges, while sometimes imposing, spark incredible opportunities.

**Do GMs need to be more focused on financials today and less on hospitality?**

While there are students graduating from the great hospitality schools with a strong financial foundation, they must also possess the passion of hospitality. Understanding the financial piece is certainly important; owning the personality to please and be of service is essential. ●