

Hospitality

Improving the Guest Experience

An Interview with Chris Plummer,
General Manager, Nemacolin Woodlands Resort



Lady Luck Casino at Nemacolin Woodlands Resort

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, Nemacolin Woodlands Resort (nemacolin.com) features 318 luxurious guest rooms, suites, townhomes, and single-family homes, 124 of which are located in the Chateau Lafayette. There are 42 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 over 100 treatments; more than 32,000 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® Rubicons; a 3,000' long dueling zip line; year round dog sledding; 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 expansive is the renovation you're currently undergoing and what can guests expect when it's completed?

Historically, our owners have been interested in adding more elements to the resort, so the focus of many of our projects over the years was on adding to our offerings. The focus of this renovation is upgrading the existing areas like rooms in the Chateau, The Lodge, and our public space and conference facilities to bring them up to a higher level. The goal was to improve the guest experience.

How broad is the guest profile for your extensive accommodation offerings?

I think we can meet the needs of any guest. Our founder, Joe Hardy, wanted to ensure that we have appropriate accommodations and activities for families, couples,

family reunions, and multigenerational gatherings, as well as for corporate. Whether you're looking for a high-end five-star pampering experience or a cabin in the woods to go skiing and zip-lining, we can provide that all in one place.

As difficult as it is to maintain the huge variety we offer, we do a really good job with it.

When you have such an expansive offering, is it harder to get the message across on what this property is all about?

Initially, it can be, but when guests get to Nemacolin, they quickly come to understand everything there is to do at the resort and we provide all the help they need in taking advantage of everything they wish to experience.

The answer is yes, it can be overwhelming, but when you become a part of the Nemacolin family, you come to appreciate what we do.

When you have such a broad focus, how do you maintain consistent service standards across so many different outlets and do you track the success with metrics?

We have metrics in place, but that goes back to the people we have and our leadership, and their understanding of our core values and standards. If you have those in place, you can't go wrong.

I owe our success entirely to the leadership we have and the various components that make up the resort.

Would you talk about how Falling Rock was designed as a hotel within a resort, and how corporations and business leaders can utilize it as an exclusive high-level conference destination?

Falling Rock offers 42 rooms with butler service, and does very well as a private-type corporate buyout facility with its own state-of-the-art meeting space attached. The experience one can have at Falling Rock with its high-level amenities make it ideal for the corporate buyout situation and we do a ton of them – our biggest market is the corporate private retreat-type situation.

Is the casino an amenity primarily for the guest or is the purpose to bring in the community?

It has done exactly what we wanted it to do: it has provided another amenity for Nemacolin.

Most casinos are the drivers of business to a place, but it's the opposite here, where the casino provides something else to do. We were lacking in nightlife and it has added that element.

Does the casino offer dining as well?

It provides nightly entertainment, smaller food and beverage outlets, and table games and slot machines.

How important has the relationship with owners been in leading the property?

They're huge believers in supporting their people, so they support me in the things that I want to do in terms of enhancing the guest experience.

They have a vision and they expect us to implement that for them. When they have ideas, they want them incorporated. When they have changes they want to make to the operation they own, we are here to deliver them. I wear two hats in terms of running a traditional operation but also responding to the owners' needs. We have the best owners in the world and we would never trade them. They are the most supportive anyone could ask for.

Nemacolin is known both for the quality of outdoor activities such as skiing and also for its spa and is truly a year-round resort. Are there better times to visit than others?

It is a year-round destination. We maintain our occupancy levels and have some dips in between seasons, but they are very short. We'll always be year-round and we want to keep people coming all the time, which is why our winter, spring, summer, and fall activities are all exciting and unique.

Do you take time to appreciate what you have created and how well this resort is doing?

You have your moments of feeling proud of what you do, but they come less from building things and more from meeting guests in the lobby when they talk about their experience or from helping solve a problem for someone. It's about the joy that comes from seeing others experience the resort. It's about the smile on the kid who is on the fourth lap of the zip-line – that is where you can really enjoy it.

In the hospitality business, we get joy from other's satisfaction – it's why we do what we do. ●