



Bonding in Baltimore.

At the HFTP sponsored opening night reception at HITEC, HFTP President Lisa Funk allows herself to be photographed with Rich. What you don't know is under her breath she was telling Rich to stop holding her so tight. Twenty years of pictures on the Publisher's Letter page and some things never change.

This is the final printed issue of 2012, but don't worry, we report information daily at www.hospitalityupgrade.com. Typically in this issue I reflect on the changes we have gone through as an industry this year and share my thoughts as to what I believe is coming. This year I am struggling with this reflection since this issue marks my 20th year of publishing on technology for the industry. Honestly, I have had the toughest time accepting that it has been 20 years. On the second night of our CIO Summit, Richard Tudgay from Omni Hotels grabbed the microphone and decided to share our table's dinner conversation. We had been talking about where we were 20 years ago, and he asked every person at the dinner to share what they were doing in 1992. Who starts a job and plans on staying there 20 years? Not me. When I started my career working at hotels I was lucky to see my anniversary date. When I started in the software industry I worked for three companies and averaged three years at each. When I was early in my career I never lived anywhere for more than three years, but today I have lived in Atlanta 14 of the last 20 years. How did this all happen?

I am thankful that I absolutely love what I do. Speaking for everybody in our group, we are proud of the quality of our work and the respect that we have earned from both advertisers and readers. This helps us love what we do. Reflecting on the last 20 years I know the one thing that supersedes everything else as far as bringing me my greatest joy. It is without a doubt, the people that have come into my life. When I walk the aisles at HITEC, I think how every one of the more than 4,000 people there is a friend. Of course, that is not true, but it often seems that way. Saying hello and catching up with so many attendees brings me great joy. I had a conversation with a friend from the industry who was prying into my personal life, which I have always had so much fun sharing via Siegel Sez on Hotel Online. Yes, I get asked when I am getting married. You would think after 20 years that question would have gone away, but it comes up. Not that marriage is coming anytime soon, but I told this person if I did get married I think I would do it at HITEC, and try to get someone to sponsor it. He said I am nuts. I thought it was a pretty creative idea. There are times I am accused of being off center in my thinking. Sometimes it has gotten me in hot water, but more often it has worked to our benefit.

Through the ups and downs, it has been an interesting 20 years. I know that I have done many things that have had people scratching their heads, and then I think about the success of our CIO Summit and Executive Vendor Summit and how those ideas worked. But even when a great idea doesn't pan out, you learn from the experience. I would always rather be the guy who is looked at as someone who tried and failed then never failed because he didn't try. I think that describes me perfectly, both professionally and personally. I am writing this late at night after a very arduous day putting the magazine together. I am thinking about the more than 32,000 people reading this publication in 110 countries, and then I think about that 20-page newsletter printed on bright yellow paper and mailed to 3,000 hotels in September 1992. I remember my first subscriber was a woman from the Hilton Northwest in Oklahoma City and I called her to ask why she subscribed. She said she liked my style and loved the joke I included in the newsletter. Yes, Rich's Junk Mail was born that day.

There are many stories from the last 20 years, but I would probably need another 100 pages. I will close with this: Often I get asked how I have reached a level of success with this business. I always tell them that the most important decision you will ever make is when you bring on your first full-time employee. I was lucky to have that person be Geneva Rinehart who was a 22-year old recent college graduate. When I tell people my first employee is still with me 17 years later, they can see how proud I am of that. I never had a goal of being a big business. I wanted to have fun doing what we do, have a great place to work and whatever we did businesswise, do it well. I have been lucky more than anybody should be, but today it is all about the great people I have around me: Geneva, Kate, Kris, Michelle, Kylie and Charlotte. I get grief about the entire female staff, but when they are great people, does it matter? Thank you for putting up with me and my rambling, it has been a wonderful ride and one that I don't feel like getting off anytime soon.

PUBLISHER
RICHARD SIEGEL
Rich@hospitalityupgrade.com

MANAGING EDITOR
GENEVA RINEHART
Geneva@hospitalityupgrade.com
Twitter: @genevarinehart

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER
KATE O'NEIL
Kate@hospitalityupgrade.com

EDITOR
KRIS BURNETT
Kris@hospitalityupgrade.com

MEDIA MANAGER/ASSISTANT EDITOR
KYLIE MCKLVEEN
Kylie@hospitalityupgrade.com

INTERNS
TANYA SICHYNSKY
CAITLIN RENN

Special Thanks:
George Opryszko

Contributors:
Jeremy Rock, Tim Coleman, Cindy Estis Green, Jon Inge, Bill Geoghegan, Joseph E. Buhler, Dan Phillips, Mark Hoare, Michael Schubach, Kris Burnett, Michael Kasavana, Ingrid Beierly, Mark G. Haley, Mary Siero, Laya Janssens, Jean-Pierre van der Rest, David Atkins, Geoff Griswold, John Burns and Scott Warner.

Cover Design: George Opryszko
Cartoons © 2012 T. Brian Kelly
ragstandman@msn.com

HOSPITALITY UPGRADE is printed three times a year for and about the hospitality and foodservice industries. There is no charge for qualified subscribers within the United States and Canada. All international subscribers will be billed \$25/year for postage and handling. Postage paid in Virginia. All contents submitted to this publication are believed to be accurate. SCI or its agents assume no liability for any said information that is misrepresented. Product and company names mentioned herein may be trademarked and/or service marked of their respective owners. Reproduction and/or distribution of any part of this publication without the written consent of SCI is strictly forbidden.
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Roswell, GA 30076
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70 Mansell Court, Ste. 225 Roswell, GA 30076 678.802.5300 Phone/ 678.802.5309 Fax

www.hospitalityupgrade.com / info@hospitalityupgrade.com

Magazine Association of the Southeast Member: **GAMMA Gold Award Winner 2007, 2008, 2009**

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