

## Outstanding Community Service Employee of the Year

Lisandra Rivera, Holiday Inn Club Vacations - Orange Lake Resort



Lisandra, who was honored for her outstanding **community service**, has been at her current property for over 14 years, having worked in nearly every department.

She is the heart of the team and arrives every day with a smile on their face, a warm greeting and is always ready to assist their team members and leaders whenever they can.

Lisandra has also consistently found ways to serve our community at work and on days off. This includes countless volunteer hours with several local charities, including give kids the world, Florida food pantries and clean the world. Also, earlier this year she jumped at the chance to create a best practice training manual, which has aided in the retention of new employees and inspired co-workers to stay proactive. Over the years, she has trained more than 200 new team members, some of which have gone on to become leaders of the organization.

The impact that Lisandra has made with her kindness, passion as a teacher, trainer and mentor, and willingness to selflessly help others within our community will last for years to come.

## **Outstanding Bell Person/Concierge Employee of the Year**

Abdellah Falous, Wyndham Orlando Resort International Drive



As the **bell person / concierge** employee of the year, Abdellah is someone who has dedicated the past 30 years of their career to the industry.

A 17-year employee at his current property, Abdellah is always the first walk up to you whether you are driving in or walking up with a smile and asks, “how may I help you?”

Additionally, Abdellah is always cognizant of what is happening at the hotel, always ready to lend a helping hand and extremely proud to share a history lesson of how the hotel has evolved throughout the years. Furthermore, he is the type of person that is always smiling, never complains and will complete any task you ask them to do.

He is considered a hero to the guests because of how this person continues to go above and beyond and carries the count on me values. Plus, he has become so well-known that team members at other properties within their brand always ask how he is doing.

Recently, guests at the hotel were spending their final few hours at the pool before catching their flight back home. While entering the pool, the daughter slipped and injured her ankle. Witnessing the incident, Abdellah immediately notified everyone that was needed and stayed with the guests until help arrived. He was also the first to volunteer to go to the pharmacy and buy anything they needed to make their travel back home as comfortable as possible. After the guest received medical attention, he drove the guests to their room to avoid putting pressure on her foot and even returned to them to follow up before they left.

This is just one example of why Abdellah has previously received several “count on me” awards and several golden pineapple award nominations and is referred to as the “mayor of the hotel.”

## **Outstanding Front Office Employee of the Year**

Angelo Moncayo, Holiday Inn Orlando International Airport



Angelo is someone who is dependable and provides invaluable service to their lodging property. As an immigrant from Venezuela, he sought to pursue the American dream by beginning his career in hospitality as a banquet server, before quickly finding their way to the front desk.

While he had no experience, Angelo showcased amazing memory and quick learning skills. After one day of observing the front desk operation, he quickly became independent and soon enough their co-workers would reach out for help and assistance.

Despite the struggles with his English skills, he has always been able to handle any last-minute group arrival with a smile and makes everything seem like it was set for success. Furthermore, his hotel doesn't have a dedicated "IT" person, so Angelo has found ways to fix any IT issues including computers, printers, PBX systems and computer configurations and has now become the de facto IT expert for all departments, issues and front desk related items.

Always willing to help the reservations and sales departments, with billing, rooming lists, and so much more Angelo was recently promoted to a new position of sales coordinator as the hotel noted, "our hotel would not run properly without this key individual."

## **Outstanding Laundry Employee of the Year**

Alix Escalante, Sheraton Suites Orlando Airport



Alix, the recipient of the outstanding laundry employee of the year, is also living the American dream. Five years ago, she came to the U.S. from Venezuela, looking for a fresh start.

While Alix could not speak English very well, that did not stop her from achieving her dreams by demonstrating her will to do anything, if given a chance.

From day one, Alix's determination showed what a hard worker she was, always willing to do whatever it took to get the job done. In an effort to better learn English speaking skills and to communicate better with fellow employees and guests, she enrolled in ESL classes and today she is even taking online courses to further her education.

As a laundry attendant, Alix ensures that clean linens are supplied to the entire hotel and her attention to detail makes her excellent at her job.

While Alix works in the back of the house for most of the time, recently a guest fell and needed immediate assistance. Without hesitation, Alix - who was around the corner - radioed for assistance and calmly stayed with the guest to help assure them. Later, that guest sent a personal letter to the general manager at the property to let them know what a treasure they had in her.

Furthermore, Alix went above and beyond and volunteered to stay at the hotel during hurricane Ian. Since the hotel was completely sold out and being used as a shelter for members of our community, Alix wanted to ensure that all the needs of the guests were being met around the clock. In addition to her laundry duties, she rolled up her sleeves and assisted in the restaurant and kitchen, when the dishwasher broke during the storm.

Well loved by her peers and manager, she takes pride in everything that she does and her passion for life is truly contagious and inspiring.

## **Outstanding Housekeeping Employee of the Year**

Christina Derival, Universal's Ventura Hotel



Christina has worked in the hospitality industry for over a decade and is often described by her co-workers as a great team member, helpful and motivated. Always with a smile and even on the most difficult days, she finds a way to get the job done and is always ready to take on additional tasks.

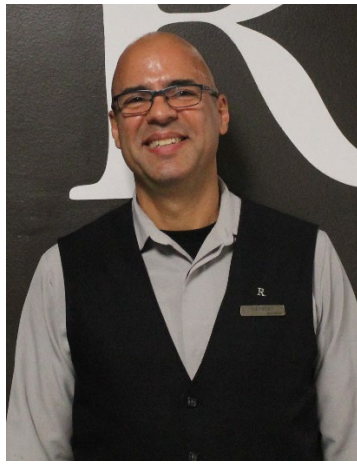
Christina was unfortunately impacted greatly by hurricane Ian, resulting in the loss of all of her personal belongings, including her home and car. Despite having to find temporary housing for her family, Christina didn't allow the adversity to interfere with her job, as she came to work each day on-time with a positive attitude, finished her assignments and even assisted others. You can often find her making beds and rooms that are not assigned to her, just because she has completed her duties so quickly and her willingness to help support others on the team. Because of her impressive work ethic, she is now assisting with punching rooms and training new team members at the property.

Always willing to go the extra mile, it is not uncommon to find Christina walking guests to the laundry room, the ice machines or to the bus loops.

Lastly, as a mother, this individual works very hard to ensure her kids are taken care of and loves to give back to the community, including participating in a recent U.S. hunger event, by helping to pack 50,400 meals for those in need.

## **Outstanding Convention Center/Banquet Employee of the Year**

Eduardo Rodriquez, Renaissance Orlando at SeaWorld



Eduardo has been working in the hospitality industry for the past 33 years! Always with a positive attitude and willingness to lend a hand whenever needed. He is also very proactive by planning out his day ahead of time, to ensure that all the details are executed perfectly and performs at a top level of service for each client.

Often looked at for guidance by his colleagues, he knows when that extra VIP touch is needed, and no task is ever too difficult when it comes to the attentiveness of servicing his guests. This includes always coming up with suggestions on how to constantly improve the guest experience and if he sees something out of place or if the food does not look presentable, he never hesitates to question and correct the situation.

Also, as much as he likes to serve the guests, he also helps the team by making sure the property maintains the highest level of cleanliness and equipment is working properly. Recently, while setting up for an afternoon coffee break, Eduardo heard popping sounds coming from one of the kitchen appliances. As he called engineering to come and investigate, the appliance sparked again, resulting in an immediate flame. As he told his team members in engineering and security to come quickly, he immediately grabbed a fire extinguisher and quickly put out the fire before it grew to become uncontrollable. By the time the engineering and security departments showed up, he had already put out the fire and explained to them what happened. He was then recognized for his quick heroic response and avoiding further fire damage to the kitchen area.

Lastly, Eduardo always receives great recognition from clients and is constantly mentioned by clients on how great of a job he does, along with being an excellent server and wonderful associate that maintains a positive can-do attitude.

## **Outstanding Security/Loss Prevention Employee of the Year**

Vanessa Fleurilien, Sheraton Vistana Villages



Vanessa has excelled in her current role, often receiving numerous positive guest comments and praise from her co-workers for her dedication and hard work.

After working in the customer service and security industry for the past five years, she continually demonstrates a positive and whatever it takes attitude with both guests and associates. Additionally, she is trilingual, being fluent in English, French and Creole and is extremely helpful with guests and fellow employees.

Vanessa also played a key role in a recent near drowning incident. As the first to arrive on the scene and administer CPR and compressions, she was able to thankfully regain the victim's consciousness, breathing and pulse by the time the paramedics arrived. As a result, the victim was successfully saved, and she was commended by the paramedics for her quick and heroic actions.

Lastly, as an employee of the month nominee, the ultimate goal of Vanessa is to become a registered nurse and is currently working towards her degree at Keiser University.

## **Outstanding Culinary Employee of the Year**

Enrique Gonzalez, Doubletree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld



Enrique began his journey in the hospitality industry in 1980, as a chef in Cuba. Wanting a better future for his family, he sought that opportunity on Christmas Day of 2005, and came to the United States, seeking an opportunity to join a culinary team that had the same three principles of #1 loving to cook, #2 to have fun, and #3 to give back generously to the community.

Once arriving to the U.S, Enrique has spent his career participating in many cooking competitions and giving back to the community by donating his time to cook for weddings for those less fortunate, cooking at local churches to feed the homeless and volunteering for the Make a Wish Foundation. Furthermore, he dedicates his personal time to teach and mentor others, especially those just entering the industry.

Fast forward to 2018, Enrique and his wife both received the devastating news that they had been diagnosed with cancer. After undergoing treatment, he spent the next year battling this disease and ultimately won. Unfortunately, on Thanksgiving Day of 2019, he had a relapse and had to step away from the kitchen again, which was shortly followed by the pandemic.

Then in the summer of 2020, his former chef called him and asked him to reassemble the food & beverage team again. After initially declining the offer, Enrique was back at the doorsteps of the kitchen saying, "I am ready to come back, this is what I need to beat cancer twice."

If that doesn't give you goosebumps, when you ask him about his accomplishments, the thing he is most proud of is that he got to meet his granddaughter, the opportunity to see his daughter graduate as a registered nurse and seeing his son graduate from engineering school.

Today, he has unfortunately lost his voice, but not his will to live and provide the utmost hospitality to our community and guests.



## **Outstanding Steward/Dishwasher Employee of the Year**

**Nairobe Chirinos, Hyatt Regency Orlando**



Nairobe has worked in the hospitality industry for the past five years. While she lacks the longevity compared to other nominees, she makes it up in commitment and determination, and her ability to demonstrate high ethical practices.

While working in both the pastry cafeteria as well as a banquet steward, Nairobe has been able to perform at a high level and each year she has improved to be one of the most trustworthy stewards in the department.

Furthermore, she continues to exceed expectations on whatever her assignments might be, from performing a broad range of assignments with efficiency and accuracy, to always going the extra mile to exceed expectations.

As a pastry steward, her attention to detail has captured the attention and praise of the chefs in the kitchen. Though most of her tasks are very physical, dirty, and challenging, she displays a certain grace and is always warm and genuine to all that she comes in contact with.

Lastly, Nairobe is a single parent to three children, having worked two jobs at times to provide a better life for them. Often working extra hours to be able to send her three children to school and to college today, perhaps the most inspiring thing about Nairobe is that she is currently taking English classes to enhance her chances for a better life for herself. She continues to amaze her coworkers with her pleasant demeanor and a positive attitude regardless of any difficulties.

## Management – Front of House Employee of the Year

Farrah Strickland, The Grove Resort & Spa



Farrah was introduced to the hospitality industry at an early age, first working as dishwasher, then as a cook, to a cashier and then into management. Throughout her career, she learned quickly that your performance, no matter the position, is equally as important in serving others.

Now managing one of the largest departments at her current property, she is always open to new ideas and discussions, letting her team think outside the box for creative and innovative ideas. Additionally, as a great communicator and former athlete, she has been an effective leader, by emphasizing teamwork and working towards a unified goal.

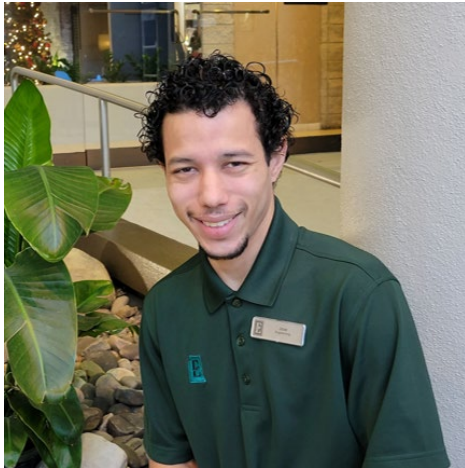
Since taking over her current role, Farrah has also turned her department into a guest focused culture, while increasing their revenue by more than 150%, generating \$650 thousand dollars in their first partial year, to over two million dollars forecasted this year.

Furthermore, she has a unique skillset that gives her the confidence and assurance to positively impact the lives of her team members, as she embraces the opportunity to mentor and teach every day.

Moreover, the heroic actions of Farrah were instrumental in saving the lives of two guests recently. In 2022, a young guest nearly drowned at the waterpark, and it was her quick response in administering CPR and chest compressions that saved the young ladies life. Then, responding to another call that a guest needed medical assistance in the spa, she again performed CPR, before attaching the AED, shocking the guest twice before they started to breathe again on their own. But before the EMT's arrived, the guest stopped breathing once more, and Farrah continued CPR until the guest started labored breathing again and the EMT's had finally arrived.

## Engineering Employee of the Year

Jose Alvarez, Embassy Suites by Hilton Orlando ICON Park



Jose has a family and works two jobs to support them. Despite that, he has an impeccable record of coming into work on time and bringing 100% positive energy to it. He also has self-initiative and is always looking to find things that need attention, is very amicable with co-workers and extremely attentive to guests.

Jose will always go beyond his department's duties, any time a guest needs assistance. Responding to guest call in order to change a light bulb, might result in a guest mentioning a possible stain in the carpet. At that point, he, will make a mental note and will return minutes later with a carpet cleaner, so that way by the time the guest returns, the room has been magically cleaned and smelling nice - understanding that the guest has a good experience and felt at home.

In another instance, he was called to a room because a heater was not working well. Realizing that he did not have the ability repair the equipment until the following morning, he took it upon himself to go to the laundry and deliver extra blankets to the guest, as well as a few packets of hot cocoa.

Because of that attention to detail, the international guest returned the following year and asked specifically for Jose, just to say hello.

## Recreation Employee of the Year

Christopher Quinonez Lopez, Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort



With over six years of hospitality experience, including a year-and-a-half at his current property, Christopher continues to give 110%, not only to the guests, but to the internal cast as well. Always striving for growth, he is consistently creating new ideas to improve the recreation's department operation and re-mapping of their complex's recreational space.

He is also consistently recognized by guests for outstanding customer service and as a natural leader among his peers. Once you meet Christopher, it is evident that he is passionate about taking care of his guests.

Recently, during a major storm, he jumped into the lake to rescue a couple stranded on one of the resort's swan boats. He went into the lake, swam up to the boat and pulled the boat back to the beach, helping the couple out, then paddled back to the dock in the pouring rain.

However, his most heroic moment was when he helped to create a magical moment for a returning guest, who had missed the opportunity to experience their annual "elf tuck-ins" due to chemotherapy treatments for several years. It was the guests' Christmas wish to experience this unique property event and as a cancer survivor himself, he understood how much it meant to be able to deliver this experience with a personalized "elf tuck-in."

After working with his teammates, Christopher surprised the guest and their family with a private area to experience this wish, along with complimentary presents from the north pole to commemorate the occasion.

In addition to delivering superb service as part of the recreation team, he has countless stories with other guests, where he illustrates his exemplary behavior and finds ways to be exceptional in every category!

## **Management – Back of House Employee of the Year**

Jennifer Olivo, SpringHill Suites Lake Buena Vista South



Jennifer has produced one of the strongest departments, that the property has ever had. With the housekeeping department continuing to produce top scores on guest surveys and brand standards, she goes out of her way to be there for each team member and has made turnover within the department almost nonexistent.

During the pandemic, she was one of four managers who worked at the property, which resulted in learning front desk duties and found creative ideas in order to keep the property operating. She would report to work, leave a walkie talkie at the front desk, and then head upstairs to start cleaning rooms. When a guest arrived at the front desk, they would call this individual over the radio, and Jennifer would head downstairs to handle the check in process. Once check-in was completed, she would return upstairs to continue cleaning rooms.

Additionally, she is always willing to lend a hand to fellow team members, such as covering breakfast during emergencies, watching the front desk when help is needed and even organizes a team to help complete maintenance projects when they are running behind.

Another example is when Jennifer recently learned of an employee that was homeless and was able to secure a small room to rent with her young daughter. However, the employee had no furniture or bed and when our Jennifer found out, she scoured the Facebook Marketplace for a mattress and household items. She then paid for these items, picked them up and delivered them using her own money. She even did some grocery shopping for the employee, until the employee got back onto her feet and had other team members work together to donate spare home items.

This is just one of the many examples showing how big and selfless her heart is.

## **Back House Employee of the Year**

Debra Williams, Sheraton Vistana Resort



Debra has been an intricate part of her current department for over a decade. In her current role, she manages their department's checkbook for a yearly \$2.5 million dollar budget, exhibiting laser sharp attention to detail, while also taking initiative to research, correct and communicate any concerns or discrepancies to their department head.

She has also led the department to be within four percent of the 2022 forecast budget year to date, despite an unforeseen substantial wage increase for all employees at the beginning of the year.

She was also instrumental in the implementation of new tracer units at the property and a new ambiance program, including working with key tracer vendors and technicians, providing training to all staff on its implementation. Both projects were extremely tedious and required an inordinate amount of focus, patience, and partnerships with several departments to replace more than 300 locks and move the resort back into compliance after revisions to its key control policy.

Furthermore, Debra also partnered with the resort manager to coordinate the "shoes for crews" program, which provides every associate an opportunity to purchase safety shoes as part of the brand's "be safe" initiative and help reduce workers compensation claims. Moreover, she is an active member of the safety committee and is always looking to identify ways to make a safer work environment.

Lastly, Debra is one of the first points of contact for all new associates, as she continues to demonstrate world class service and a can-do attitude. This is why her peers recognized her with the "better together" award, which is one of Marriott Vacations Worldwide core values, earlier this year.

## **Food & Beverage Service Employee of the Year**

Luis Nunez, Four Seasons Resort Orlando at Walt Disney World Resort



Luis has only been in Florida for a few years, but certainly has made a significant impact at his property.

He was initially hired because of his quick-witted attitude, positive personality, and love for providing luxury service. Starting as a restaurant host, he quickly made a lasting impression, due to his ability to connect with the guests on a personal level and his desire to increase his knowledge of food and beverages.

Within two months on the job, Luis was then promoted to a full-time position and just weeks later to a server assistant.

Shortly after the hotel reopened during the pandemic, he was hired as a full-time server where he brought his unique style and elegance. But this was quickly noticed by the management and patrons alike and Luis was then cross trained as a bartender.

He was then tasked with helping to kick start a new beverage program in 2022, by taking much of his interests, culture and passion and began to wow patrons in the glass. With a knack for providing unique experiences, as well as focusing on the small details, he, along with a coworker, elevated the bar program to new heights.

By creating several new and unique cocktails that were special to the restaurant, Luis' pride and passion truly shows, as they now describe cocktails or dishes as painting a picture versus a list of ingredients.

Lastly, on a weekly basis he has made countless commitments to assist other departments within the hotel and has continuously been recognized by his peers as employee of the month, as well as being recognized by guests for his impeccable, and approachable top-shelf service.