



Group Services, Inc. Newsletter

New Wyndham Area Director for the Caribbean

Wyndham's Resorts named John Paul Oliver as the area director of operations for Puerto Rico and Jamaica. Oliver was born in Melbourne Australia and graduated from the University of Denver with a degree in hotel and restaurant management. His career started as a management trainee at the Renaissance Mayflower in Washington DC. He later moved on to the Hyatt Grand Champion Resort & Spa at Indian Wells CA, where he met his current predecessor Rich Cortese who he considers a mentor, a leader and a friend. He began his career with Wyndham in Puerto Rico in 1993. By 1998, he received the Wyndham Award of Excellence and was named "General Manager of the Year"

In 1997, Travel Concepts Magazine voted him the "Young Hotel-

ier of the Year". His first role model was his father, a Chicago-born stock broker, who has being his model of respect and responsibility. His says of his mentors Brian Gamache, president and CEO of WMS Industries, Inc. and Hugh Andrews, president of International Hospitality Enterprises, Inc. "They taught me to exceed my own expectations and never to accept mediocrity". His latest achievement is overseeing six properties in Puerto Rico and one in Jamaica. These are the El Conquistador Resort & Golden Door Spa, The Condado Plaza Hotel & Casino, The Martineau Bay Resort & Spa, and The Rose Hall Resort & Country Club (Jamaica). Oliver is also the General Manager of the El San Juan Hotel & Casino.

Vieques Airlink Expand their Services

Vieques Air Link, a local carrier has added two "Cessna Caravans" to their fleet in order to meet an increase in the demand for carrier and charter services. With this recent addition, the VAL fleet encompasses 10 planes and hires 82 employees. VAL connects the island of Vieques (off the island's east coast) to the Luis Muñoz Marin International Airport and the Isla Grande Airport (both located in San Juan), and airports located in Fajardo, Culebra Island and St. Croix (US Virgin Island). Future investments include a 19-seater "Sky-truck" with turbine engines and opening

new routes to St. Marteen and the Dominican Republic. According to a study by Strategic Consulting Group, demand for flights to the islands of Vieques and Culebra will increase 50% in the next five years.



Courtyard by Marriott wins award



The Courtyard by Marriott was honored with the "Best of the Best" award by the Puerto Rico Tourism Company last December. The PRTC evaluated service, housekeeping, facilities and guest comments at hotels, paradors (local Inns) and restaurants throughout the island for a period of one year. The Courtyard by Marriott Isla Verde Beach Resort excelled in all categories. Next May, the resort will undergo a \$26 million expansion. Renovations will include a 196-suite Residence Inn and additional parking. The hotel new features will include new furniture, high-speed internet, a business center free of charge to hotel guests and wireless Internet connection in the pool and beach areas. The resort is located at 7012 Boca de Cangrejos Avenue in Isla Verde. For information, call (787) 791-0404

Major's Agenda for Improvements in Tourism

Recently elected major Jorge Santini intends to turn San Juan into a city of tourism, history and culture. His tourism boosting agenda, which requires an investment of 50M, includes the San Juan Bay Project (redevelopment of the fisherman's village, new marina, hotels, residential housing, retail establishments and walking trails), a new Culinary Promenade at the Recinto Sur Street in Old San Juan and building an 18-hole golf course.

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Carolina Beach raises “Blue Beach Flag”

On the 1st week of December, a 1 mile section of the Carolina Beach (located on road 187, Northwest of the Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport) was designated a “Blue Flag Beach”. The Blue Flag is an exclusive eco-label, under the direction of the European Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) which encourages beach managers to pursue sustainable development at beaches and marinas through specific criteria which includes water quality, environmental education, safety and other services. Carolina Major, José E. Aponte De La Torre, proudly raised the symbolic flag which certifies that the Carolina Beach has joined the other 33 participating countries (2,093 beaches) world wide. Compliance within the program criteria is evaluated on

a yearly basis. Bathing water quality results, sensitive environmental resources and information on the campaign itself are publicly available. An investment of \$250K has provided major improvements such as life guards, structural improvements, security, emergency management stations and wheel chair beach access. The Puerto Rico Tourism Company is the organization coordinating the program locally. Other Blue Flag Beaches include Escambrón Beach (NW of the Normandie Hotel in San Juan), Monserrate Beach in Luquillo and Flamenco Beach in the island of Culebra (off the coast of Fajardo). For more information on the Carolina Blue Beach call 787-721-154 or 787-722-5115. You can also learn more through the project’s website <http://www.blueflagpr.com>



Business Travelers find safe heaven at Best Western Hotel

The Best Western San Juan Airport Hotel exceeded their projected occupancy rate projection last winter and anticipate a good future. The 125-room caters to airline, cruise line passengers and business travelers. The hotel provides an array of complimentary amenities such as continental breakfast, 800 and local calls, high-speed Internet access and a laundry room. Tired business travelers relax at the two whirlpool spas or the fitness area open 24 hours-7 days a week. The hotel also counts with a business center and a 3,000 square-foot conference center. The conference center features 4 board rooms (seating 20), 3 small meeting rooms (seating 30), fully equipped offices available for rent, work stations and a large 100 seat meeting room. For more information call (787) 791-1700.

New Marketing VP for the PRCB

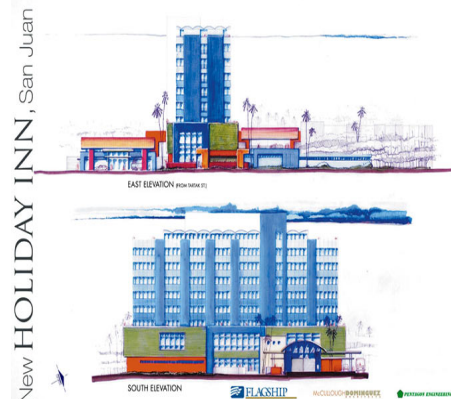
The PR Convention Bureau appointed Ramón Sánchez as the new VP of Marketing on December 7, 2004. As VP of marketing, Sánchez responsibilities include the organization’s overall destination promotion strategy, advertising, communications, e-marketing, research, strategic partnership alliances, managing and overseeing all activities of the Bureau’s marketing partners. Sánchez has an extensive experience within the industry which includes holding positions such as Director of Sales & Marketing at the Paradisus, as Deputy Executive Director for Marketing and Promotions at the PR Tourism Company, and leading sales and marketing departments at the Caribe Hilton, InterContinental, and The Westin Rio Mar.

Negotiations over Cayo Largo Resort Continue

The dispute over Fajardo’s Cayo Largo Resort continues. With 95% of the construction complete, Medio Mundo Inc. (owners of Cayo Largo) keep a positive outlook in spite of the setbacks and lawsuits and expect the resort to open in the near future. In February of 2003, disputes among partners in the resort over the decision of waiving the “guarantee-maximum price contract” resulted in halting all construction of the project. Later that year, the Government Development Bank (GDB) sued to take ownership of the resort by paying off bondholders and assuming mortgage payments. Although negotiations between the Tourism Development Bank (subsidiary of GDB) and Medio Mundo Inc. have been undergoing at a slow pace since March of 2004, both sides hope that progress will be made and the \$120 million resort will open in the future.

Holiday Inn San Juan opens

After a \$ 12M renovation, the **Holiday Inn San Juan** (former Carib Inn) was inaugurated on the 1st week of December. The 222-room hotel, located in Isla Verde and operated by Flagship Resort Properties, provides a new alternative for corporate and leisure travelers looking for moderate lodging rates. Amenities include a free-form pool with whirlpool, 3 theme restaurants, a coffee & pastry bar, fitness center, full service business center, meeting and conference rooms (featuring high speed internet), and full banquet facilities. In house dining options include “Vinifanto” (Mediterranean cuisine), “J.H. Yee’s” (Chinese Bistro) and “Fantasia” which is the pool side restaurant providing a mixture of California and Caribbean Cuisine.



Artist Renderings of Holiday Inn San Juan

Plantains are to Puerto Ricans what tomatoes are to Italians. They’re always cooked, because this tropical fruit isn’t sweet right off the tree. Different variation include: *mofongo*, mashed plantain balls flavored with pork rind; *tostones*, twice-fried plantain slices; *arañitas*, a spider’s nest of crisp slivers; or *platanutres*, potato chip like.

Source: travelandleisure.com

Chi Chi Rodriguez hosts 3rd Annual Ambassador Cup

The 3rd Annual Amateur Championship "The Puerto Rico Ambassador's Cup" hosted by the legendary Chi Chi Rodriguez was held from December 15-19, 2004. This year, participants enjoyed first-class lodging at the spectacular Wyndham El Conquistador Resort & Golden Door Spa and played 54-holes at three of Puerto Rico's best golf courses. Each day's golf featured a different course in which participants competed in a cumulative three-day tournament with Mixed Formats (Scramble, Best Ball or Stableford). The 18-hole championship course designed by Arthur Hills, located at the Wyndham El Conquistador Resort, is on top of beautiful cliffs overlooking the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea. This course according to Conde Nast Traveler, is among the best courses in the Caribbean. Greg Norman's River Course at the Westin Rio Mar Beach Golf Resort was the PGA's first Caribbean design. Norman preserved native foliage of the 6,945 yards along the Mameyes River, permitting the natural terrain determine placement of all holes. This breathtaking course is framed by vistas of mountains and ocean. Tom and

George Fazio's renowned Ocean Course (Westin Rio Mar) is characterized by Atlantic panoramas, ocean breezes and iguanas sunbathing along the entire 6,782 yards.

The Westin's Ocean course is one of Puerto Rico's most popular courses, its classic layout features four sets of tees, numerous bunkers and elevated greens. The signature 16th hole, an ocean side par 3, 238 yards, always rates among the Caribbean's best. A third golf opportunity was provided by The Palms, Lake and Ocean Courses of Coco Beach Golf & Country Club (located at the Paradisus Sol Melia Resort) which were designed by Tom Kite and Bruce Besse. Last years winners included Rich Richmond, Jason Wyatt, Dan Haskell and Scott Targowski on the professional level. Last years 1st place amateurs included Mike McCarthy, Mike Cary and David Carter. Participants indicated that besides the birdies and the good weather, one of the highlights of this event was Chi Chis' famous exhibition of a little golf, a lot of tricks and even more of Chi Chi's famous humor.



Wyndham Old San Juan now under Sheraton Flag

After the completion of a \$7.5 million upgrade at the Wyndham Old San Juan, the property has become the newest member of Starwood Hotels & Resorts and the 1st property flagged as a Sheraton. This 240-room property, now featuring "Sheraton Sweet Sleeper" beds and high-speed internet, is ideally located in the heart of historic and romantic old San Juan right on the waterfront where grand cruise ships dock. The 11,000 sq ft Casino, has 148 new slot machines, black jack, poker, roulette and craps tables. The casino is supervised by Ada Perez, who is the 1st woman to run a casino in the island. "La Fogata" is the hotel's new Steak House & Grill, featuring live music with indoor and outdoor seating for 150 guests. The hotel is steps away from world-class shopping, dining, and entertainment including over 52 restaurants, 33 art galleries, 12 museums, and 79 stores including Coach, Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfinger, Versace and numerous quaint arti-

sans and local shops. The hotel is only six miles from the International airport. Renovations include guestroom and casino refurbishments, construction of new meeting space overlooking San Juan harbor, as well as a redesign of the property's indoor/ outdoor restaurant.



Sheraton Old San Juan is located at 100 Brumbaugh Street, across from the Cruise Ship Pier No. 2 on the Old San Juan Bay. For reservations call 1-800-325-3535

The Power of saying "Thank You"

Saying "Thank You" is an underutilized edge in the marketplace. Extending old-time courtesies not only will make you stand out but can be a competitive advantage. It is also helpful in forging relationships that can turn into opportunities. **Pass along compliments.** When you want to express gratitude for something that's had successful ripple effects, get the third party to send thanks. It creates a strong incentive for your recipient to stay connected. In Orlando, Florida, a nonprofit group called A Gift to Teaching provides free school supplies to central Florida teachers. Over the past five years, it has given \$9 million of supplies to 278 schools. "The only thing the organization asks of teachers is to write, or have their students write, thank-you notes. It's been a great success," says the group's former publicist, Kylene Petrin. This idea isn't limited to nonprofits. Think about testimonials that could go out to customers from employees, vendors and more. Source: Microsoft's Small Business Center newsletter. By J.L. Krotz



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Local Holidays

- March 22 - Abolition Day
- March 25 - Holy Friday
- March 27 - Easter
- April 18 - José De Diego Day
De Diego (1867-1918) was a famous Lawyer, politician, writer and poet. He was considered a forerunner of the modernist movement.
- May 8 - Mother's Day
- May 30 - Memorial Day

1920's historic monument opens as new hotel in Ponce

After a \$1.2 million investment and 18-month facelift, Ponce's Fox Delicias Hotel opened its doors this week. Built in 1928 as a movie theater, the building is an historic monument, and its colorful facade was not altered during the renovations. It faces Las Delicias Plaza in downtown Ponce. The hotel's 30 guest rooms and suites are located on the second floor and are equipped with Internet, cable TV, and other amenities. The lobby, meeting space and two restaurants/bars are on the first floor. The restaurants serve Puerto Rican and Caribbean-fusion cuisines and feature live entertainment on weekends.

Source: Caribbean Business, 11/25/04

ON-GOING EVENTS

Evening Concerts by the Sea at the "Ventana al Mar Plaza", 1050 Ashford Avenue, Condado. Free Admission.

- Bohemia Fridays 7-9pm
- Jazz, Saturdays 6-8pm
- Chamber Music, Sundays 5-7pm

Romantic Sunsets every Sunday at Paseo La Princesa (Princess Promenade) in Old San Juan. Live Music from the 1930-1940s at 5:30pm

Art Gallery Nights in Old San Juan 1st Tuesday of each month from Feb to May 6-9pm for more info call 723-7080 or visit <http://members.aol.com/ednj8/arte/art.html>



Choral Sundays at San Cristobal Fort. Every last Sunday of each month at 5:00pm. For information call National Parks Service (787) 729-6777

Le Lo Lai Festival features the Areyto Folkloric Ballet. It highlights the island's Spanish, African and Taino-Indian heritage. Performances every Tuesday at 6:00pm Free with paid admission to the San Cristobal Fort in Old San Juan.

Whale watching season. January- March, Rincón. During the winter months, the Mona Passage serves as a highway for migrating humpback whales. These 50' and 50 ton whales are primarily mating and giving birth off the coast of Rincón. Other whales commonly observed are the 13'-15' pilot whales. The "El Faro" lighthouse park serves as one of a "passive whale-watching" site. Open 7 days a week. For info call (787) 823-5024

Bellas Artes Fine Art Center

- **March 18-20** . Ballet Concierto de Puerto Rico's "Don Quijote"
- **April 1-3, 8-10.** Civic Theater of San Juan's "What the Bell Hop Saw" a comedy of the absurd (English language) by William Van Zandt and Jane More. Hilarious and intriguing characters meet at one of New York City finest hotels.



- **April 5.** "Fusion" the multicultural history of Puerto Rico as told through a mix of music and dance.

For tickets call (787) 620-4444 or (787) 721-7727

CONCERTS

Santana April 1

Lionel Richie April 28

Performances at the Jose Miguel Agrelot Coliseum in Hato Rey.

Eddie Palmieri April 30 - Latin Jazz winner of 7 Grammys. Performing at the Ruben Rodriguez Coliseum in Bayamón.

Heineken Jazz Fest Advanced ticket sales start April 1. Concert dates June 2-5 at the Tito Puente Amphitheater in Hato Rey. For more info www.prheinekenjazz.com

Tickets available online at www.ticketpop.com

Puerto Rico Symphony Orchestra

• **April 1 @ 8:00pm.** Scenes from the Plump Jack Opera & Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 6

• **April 16 @ 8:00pm.** Beethoven Overture, Strauss Concert No 1 & Khachaturian's selection from Spartak Ballet



The Symphony Performs at the "Centro de Bellas Artes (Fine Arts Center) located in Santurce at the Ponce D' Leon Avenue, stop 22 1/2 For tickets call (787) 620-4444 or additional information (787) 721-7727

Puerto Rico Museum of Art

• **March 19 @ 3:00pm. Kite Building Workshop.** Free with paid admission.

Permanent Exhibit: Puerto Rican Art Through Time. Paintings, drawings, graphics, photography, sculpture, santos and ceramics tell the story of the development of Puerto Rican art from the colonial period to the present.

Museum opens 10am-5pm Tue to Sat (\$6.00 adults / \$3.00 children & seniors) For guided tours, please call the museum's Department of Education at 787-977-6277, Extensions 2230 or 2261

KIDS.

Disney on Ice: Beauty & The Beast (Spanish) **March 23-28** at the Ruben Rodriguez Coliseum in Bayamón. For tickets call (787) 740-2170 Mon-Fri

