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Housekeeping

by Ronda Payne



A CLEAN SWEEP

THE ROBIN HOOD INN & SUITES RECEIVED THE BC HOTEL ASSOCIATION HOUSEKEEPING AWARD AT THE BC HOSPITALITY SUMMIT

The employee and operations manual makes it clear at the outset, “Housekeeping is the heart of the Robin Hood Inn & Suites.” It is perhaps this commitment to ensuring the quality of housekeeping at the Victoria-based hotel that secured it the BC Hotel Association (BCHA) Housekeeping award from among almost 40 BC properties.

The award presentation was made at the BC Hospitality Summit’s 2019 BCHA gala on April 9 in Kelowna, BC, but the property had a little advanced notice. When the

Robin Hood Inn & Suites General Manager, Sam Kirsch found out about the win on March 27, he was delighted.

“I had the honour of delivering the good news,” he says. “Everyone was thrilled. It was party time. I posted the email on both bulletin boards. We were on cloud nine.”

Kirsch says the housekeeping team works hard to keep the hotel’s promise of quality to the guests. He notes that over the last two years, that diligence has paid off with quests giving “high praise” to the housekeeping team on a number of online review sites.



Kirsch says. “They are the quality assurance team constantly inspecting in search of anything that may need improvement. Not only do guests find a clean, safe and friendly environment, they will experience a team of hospitality professionals that are committed to making every guest stay an exceptional one.”

Hospitality professionals is a term Kirsch uses often to describe the team at the Robin Hood Inn & Suites. Finding the right professionals is obviously important, yet experience isn’t the most sought-after element.

“The hospitality business has always been about trust and building relationships and above all else creating great memories whenever given the privilege to be of service,” notes Kirsch. “That is what the Robin Hood Inn & Suites has been doing for 56 years. Integrity, friendliness, desire to be of help, empathy, and being of good character are the attributes that we value most in team members. It is these attributes that we search for in an individual that wishes to join our team of hospitality professionals.”

Surprisingly, one of the professionals at the forefront of the housekeeping award isn’t even 25 years old yet. At 24, Courtney Tutube is the housekeeping manager.

“I think that she is the youngest person to hold the position of housekeeping manager in Canada,” Kirsch says. “Courtney has worked at the Robin Hood for just over three years. She is sincere towards her teammates at every level. She cares about them. It’s not about being a boss.”

“WHILE THE PROPERTY IS OLDER, THE ROOMS ARE UPDATED, BEDS ARE EXCEPTIONNALLY COMFORTABLE, PETS ARE WELCOME AND THE ROOMS ARE “IMMACULATELY” CLEAN.”

TripAdvisor, shows that more than 70 per cent of those who left a review ranked the property as either good or excellent. Comments on the site consistently note that while the property is older, the rooms are updated, beds are exceptionally comfortable, pets are welcome and the rooms are “immaculately clean,” according to one reviewer. Comments on Booking.com are similar with the average ranking of 1,760 reviews at 83 per cent.

It’s true, the Robin Hood Inn & Suites is far from new. Built in 1963 by original and current Owner Rolf Ullrich, the website describes the property as “an icon of the 1960s roadside

inn combining modernity and innovation.” Kirsch says that the hotel wasn’t just a business for Ullrich, but also a place for his young family to grow up around. Two of his children — Karl Ullrich and Stefanie Anglin, take an active role in overseeing the property while Ullrich stops in from time to time to ensure the tradition of hospitality he intended continues.

“They [the Ullrich family] are proud of what they do and it is for this reason that over the years they have nurtured a hospitality team culture that has developed inclusive standards in guest engagement to provide an extraordinary experience,”

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“NOT ONLY DO GUESTS FIND A CLEAN, SAFE AND FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT, THEY WILL EXPERIENCE A TEAM OF HOSPITALITY PROFESSIONALS THAT ARE COMMITTED TO MAKING EVERY GUEST STAY AN EXCEPTIONAL ONE.”

Kirsch explains that Tutube believes in helping each of her teammates do a great job. She puts the cards on the table on a daily basis so that everyone can contribute to the standards they work to meet. Inclusion is a priority for her.

“She leads with compassion,” Kirsch explains. “Goals are shared and plans are created to achieve goals. Everyone has a role to play.”

Although he doesn't think there is anything unique about

how Robin Hood Inn & Suites approaches housekeeping, he does think the constant effort to do better is what sets the property apart.

“It is the collective know-how of the team that is the most valued asset of the Robin Hood Inn & suites. Every team member is encouraged to talk to guests and listen intently to what they say about their likes and dislikes and what they would like that we don't have now,” he notes. “By sharing what

they observe and information that guests provide, areas that need improvement are identified, and changes can be made to prevent a potential negative occurrence from taking place. We are never satisfied with the status quo. Every operational policy and procedure is questioned for currency and usefulness, regularly.”

The safety and proper working order of everything on site is an element that overlaps with housekeeping.

“With an active health and safety committee ensuring that the property is in good working order and team members and guests are safe and comfortable, quality is maintained,” he says. “Everyone is aware of the trust that guests place in them and each team member takes this to heart in all that they do. They leave very little opportunity for a failure in the delivery of the brand promise.”

The property uses a PMS system to create housekeeping reports that align with guest reservations. Kirsch notes the reports help coordinate housekeeping scheduling to ensure rooms are ready for early and regular check-in times so guest arrivals are as stress-free as possible.

“A critical part of managing guest room cleaning and maintenance is having a communication system and protocol that is easy to use,” he says. “A PMS is an essential tool in the technology stack of any hotel. Today, even the smallest accommodation facility will have some form of PMS to help with reservations and to create housekeeping reports. Today everyone uses smartphones to communicate with each other by text. Using this method to connect the front desk with guest room attendants, laundry and maintenance is an important part of daily operations. Our team has got this down to a science.”

The Robin Hood Inn & Suites has 56 varied rooms and suites and is an icon on Victoria's Gorge Road East. As an independently-owned property, there is no set of corporate or franchisee standards to follow. Instead, the Ullrich family has set the standards based on what guests desire.

These standards and the demands for cleanliness extend from guest rooms to the new great room which offers a continental breakfast in the mornings, large screen TVs, billiards, foosball, air-hockey, board games and video games. The property also has a business centre and highspeed Wi-Fi. Ullrich picked the ideal location for his property steps away from the famous Galloping Goose Trail. Guests can use a complimentary e-bike (bicycle with an electric motor) to travel the trail, check out Gorge Waterway Park and a number of other parks minutes away. Kayaks are also available free to explore the waterway and there is a waterfront fitness centre with floor to ceiling windows that overlooks the waterway.

When all that activity signals the need for a rest, guests return to their rooms with Stearns & Foster mattresses, hypoallergenic gel-fibre pillows in a choice of soft, medium or firm, T-300 Opulence sheets and pillowcases from Eden Textile and Egyptian cotton towels. Every room has a mini-fridge and coffee maker and for those interested in an extended stay, some suites are like mini apartments with full kitchens. Guests can let the reservation desk know what groceries they'd like and the items will be delivered and unpacked into the kitchen.

There is an onsite laundry service and guest laundromat that is just as clean as the guest rooms and a courtyard picnic table area to complete the picture of a 1960s, family-friendly roadside inn. Many guests stated they wouldn't stay anywhere else in Victoria in their online comments. This is the kind of experience the team at the property hopes for and they even have a strategy to hit all the guest satisfaction points.

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THE ROBIN HOOD INN & SUITES HAS 56 VARIED ROOMS AND SUITES. AS AN INDEPENDENTLY-OWNED PROPERTY, THERE IS NO SET OF CORPORATE OR FRANCHISE STANDARDS TO FOLLOW. INSTEAD, THE ULLRICH FAMILY HAS SET THE STANDARDS BASED ON WHAT GUESTS DESIRE.

This strategy includes a focus on: location — proximity to trails, parks, waterway, shopping centres, hospital, harbor, butterfly garden, restaurant, Chinatown; and creating the best guest stay experience possible with all the features previously mentioned and more.

Obviously at the Robin Hood Inn & Suites, a guest experience goes beyond the housekeeping aspect, but quality housekeeping is a cornerstone of that brand promise Kirsch mentions.

“To help assist in maintain quality, we have developed a manual that includes work procedures, best practices, and

health and safety protocols. The manual is reviewed and updated whenever required,” he notes. “A housekeeping quality assurance program that incorporates simplified techniques and tools based on the Six Sigma method is used to decrease the occurrences of failures. Each area of operations can be measured on how effective we are at improving the customer experience and make work more efficient and satisfying.”

Six Sigma is a process improvement methodology that was first introduced by Bill Smith and Bob Galvin at Motorola in the 1980s. The theory of Six Sigma is that an increase in performance and a



decrease in process variation will improve the end result of efforts, increase profits and improve employee morale.

This goes back to the excerpt from the employee manual which continues, building on the initial statement:

“Housekeeping is the heart of the Robin Hood Inn & Suites. The housekeeping team contributes a major amount of profit though it is considered a service. Guests demand a clean and tidy room that is pleasing to the senses. Housekeeping generates the main value to overall impressions that guests recall,” the manual says.

Tutube makes it her mission to ensure housekeeping is meeting the statements of the employee manual. According to Kirsch, she

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has earned the respect of the hospitality team and stays focused on growing that team's culture organically through togetherness. By reviewing the quality assurance measures with the housekeeping team, she helps them see their scores and progress to help define potential for improvement and lower chances of failures.

"That in turn increases our guest satisfaction index," Kirsch says. "She has a clear vision of our objective to improve standards and set new quality benchmarks. My part in all this is to do whatever I can to provide the right tools, honour [the housekeeping



team] for their commitment to quality and help celebrate their successes. As a team of hospitality professionals, they are proud of their work."

If the online reviews are any indication, guests appreciate this attention to detail when it comes to housekeeping at the Robin Hood Inn & Suites. Kirsch finds it rewarding to answer the reviews and share them with the team at the property.

"Some days I cannot help blushing with pride when guests seek me out to express their satisfaction with their stay," he says. "They tell me how clean their room is. Some are surprised to know that we also change the shower curtain with each refresh."

Impeccable housekeeping wasn't necessarily the intention of Ullrich when he established the Robin Hood Inn & Suites, but it was a natural outcome of the process in striving for hospitality excellence. They believe in having people like Kirsch and Tutube who share a commitment to making a guest's stay exceptional each and every time they visit.

"Nurturing a service culture to develop a team of hospitality professionals that sincerely care about the quality of guests' experience creates an environment that generates guest confidence that the brand promise of an exceptional stay will be met," Kirsch says.

Cleanliness may be said to be next to Godliness, but in the guest-accommodation industry, cleanliness is what makes for a great guest review and experience from a base-line perspective. Ensuring an immaculate property will not always be easy, but it will lead to positive results. The Ullrich family recognized that a clean property and outstanding housekeeping team would prove that age can't erode the importance of meeting guest standards. ●

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