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4 QUESTIONS WITH

Lee Weeks

Coral Hospitality's CEO looks to create 'wow' factor with golf-course projects



1 What projects are you focusing on now?

We did Margaritaville [in Hollywood, Fla.] of course, and set that for success. We have four diamonds there and made sure we had a strong sales program in place. When you first open, those first reviews paint a picture for people and you can lose it after that if it's not right.

Fortunately, we surpassed what everyone thought it was going to be, which was our goal. We have exceeded our [revenue] budgets and have a great forecast going forward.

We're also working on a Florida Keys project, a resort and golf club in Marathon. It has approximately 120 units, plus we're redoing the golf course and buying the marina attached to it. We're looking to create that 'wow' factor and we are excited about that.

2 Nationwide, golf is a struggling sport. Why focus on it?

We own golf courses and we purchased several within the last few years and will add another 10 in the next few years. We have strategic thinking about golf. We will

not do it just anywhere, but in places where there is a need such as in Florida, the lower southern states and some places out West where there is a large retirement community. They're looking to play golf and have a quality experience with great service.

This also allows us some diversification for our company, which is very helpful. We offer deep knowledge on community association management, and that has helped us support our business. The golfing public is still the top 5 percent to 10 percent of the population; they are going in good times and bad because they have the additional dollars to spend. We see this as a strong market, if you're strategic.

3 What are the biggest trends as you see them?

We focus on the relationship between team members and our guests; that is what brings people back. This is so important; guests must feel like they are home at one of your locations and feel that

hospitality. And we know what they like such as which pillows, dining outlets and more, and accommodate them ahead of their arrival to find out those things. To better connect, we also call them during their stay. With society's focus on technology, we provide escapism to make them want to put that stuff down and enjoy amenities we have.

4 How is technology changing the guest experience?

People crave an escape from being tied to the phone and email. At Margaritaville, we have the FlowRiders and our adventure lodges do just that. It's hard to answer a phone when you're hanging from a zip line over a 600-foot gully.

But we also acknowledge people do have expectations and there is a need for it. It's especially true with streaming entertainment from the internet. Many properties are charging for additional bandwidth; I think those days are gone and that people expect hotel bandwidth to cover their needs. **HM**