

LODGING



Lee Weeks Strikes Balance Between Sports and Resorts

Posted by: Kaitlyn Njoroge in People, Success Stories January 13, 2017



Tennis, surfing, swimming, golf—name a sport and Lee Weeks has probably done it. Throughout his college years, Weeks could be found lifeguarding and teaching swim lessons at local clubs. His love of sports led him to pursue a degree in business management and recreation. “I’m just a sports nut,” says Weeks, chief executive officer of Naples, Fla.-based management company, Coral Hospitality. Today, Weeks is heavily involved in the resort and club management industry, where he has been able to combine his love for all things sports with the hospitality business. “I wanted to pursue fields that would allow me to continue to grow in the areas that were passions of mine,” he says. “I think hospitality and recreation are just a natural fit in that regard.”

After working his way up to the general manager’s role at a local country club after graduating from college, Weeks set his sights on resorts. The resort business was a logical progression, and is what landed Weeks in Maui, Hawaii. In the Aloha State, Weeks began his career as the head of recreation for Hyatt Hotels. He climbed up the ladder, thriving in different disciplines within the company, including management positions overseeing five-star dining and nightclubs, front office,

and housekeeping. Weeks was then promoted to assistant rooms executive, where he made the move to Atlanta, Ga. Various promotions and opportunities landed Weeks with the Ritz Carlton in Naples, Fla. Once again, the Aloha State came calling, and Weeks returned to Hawaii as vice president of operations for the Grand Wailea Resort. Finally, an opportunity to take on the role as vice president of operations at the all-new Atlantis Resort in Paradise Island, Bahamas, offered the professional growth Weeks was looking for to be able to pull him from his beloved Hawaii.

With a keen understanding of multiple disciplines under his belt, Weeks felt ready to reach for the next rung. This was when he reconnected with John Ayres, who, at the time, was the owner of Coral Beach Hotels & Clubs. They initially met during a committee meeting in Naples, Fla., where Ayres was looking for a partner with whom he could create something fresh. At the same time, Weeks was looking for the chance to start something big. Together, they founded Coral Hospitality. "I brought forth the golf side of the equation to complement John's hotel experience," says Weeks. "We put those two things together and that's how Coral Hospitality was formed."

Since launching Coral Hospitality in 1999, Weeks and Ayres have worked hard to diversify the company's portfolio. This was a smart move, and likely saved the company during the Great Recession in 2008. "We were working on a variety of condo and hotel projects when the real estate market fell apart in 2008 and 2009. We had 12 projects in the pipeline at the time, and that number was growing. Having golf courses, state-run resorts, and high-end resorts in our portfolio helped us stay afloat and today, that diversity has become a cornerstone of our business."

An eye for diverse projects is what eventually led Coral Hospitality into managing state parks, lodges, and resorts. In 2005, the North Georgia Mountains Authority was in need of a new hospitality management company. They conducted a nationwide search of more than 100 companies to find their match and selected Coral Hospitality based on their experience managing multiple diverse assets.

"We were offered the opportunity to manage the resorts that were located within the states parks. We didn't go in saying, 'We're going to manage the state parks themselves,'" Weeks explains. "We just seized the opportunity when it presented itself and do a great job. We started out small, and because we did well, they offered us more and more. Eventually, we landed the opportunity to manage the entire complex, including the park lands and natural resources. I think the driving force behind our success is having a passion for things like hospitality, natural resources, recreation, and sports. So, it's just been a natural evolution."

Working with state parks and the government entities that are responsible for them has its own set of challenges. They run a great deal like country clubs, with directors and boards as the final decision makers. For Weeks, meeting these challenges includes making sure Coral is ever mindful of the great responsibility of managing states' assets, and being flexible and nimble enough to work together in this public/private partnership.

Today, Coral Hospitality manages numerous hotels, resorts, state parks, and golf clubs across the Southeastern states, hosting a variety of amenities including golf, tennis, ziplining, fishing, and more.

Maintaining diverse assets is key to Coral Hospitality's success. The end goal is simple, yet not easily attained. "Making sure that we are creating a positive guest experience with our employee training is crucial, because they are the key to creating memorable experiences," Weeks says. "Our company culture allows all employees to openly have discussions and shine a light on any service issues. After all, they are the ones on the front line with our guests and they must feel a sense of ownership when it comes to the business."