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Scholarship Foundation



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BLAST FROM THE PAST

Alumni News



Aileen Laracuate

A Breath of Fresh Air in the Windy City

Aileen Laracuate is the Director of Sales of the Chicago office of the Puerto Rico Convention Bureau and is in charge of all sales covering the U.S. Midwest and the West Coast. She supervises a staff of two and is instrumental to the success of the Chicago office. Aileen began her studies at the University of Puerto Rico in Mayagüez as a marketing major. She graduated cum laude in 1993 and began work at the Beside the Pointe Guest House and the Sandy Beach Surf Club in Rincón, where she rose to the position of office manager.

With help from the Scholarship Foundation, Aileen entered Florida International University in August 1997 to begin a Master's degree in hotel and food service management. She completed her Master's in 1999 and graduated magna laude with a 4.0 GPA. While in Miami, Aileen did an internship at the Intercontinental Hotel and Resort. Upon graduation from FIU, Aileen worked as Conference Service Coordinator at the Sonesta Beach Resort in Key Biscayne, Florida. She also worked as Assistant Director of Operations for American Meetings & Conventions. In October 2000, Aileen moved to Chicago to become a Sales Account Executive for the Puerto Rico Convention Bureau. After two years on the job, Aileen was promoted to Regional Sales Manager covering the Midwest and the West. She later became Associate Director of Sales, a position she held for only one year before becoming Director of Sales in 2006.

As busy as she is, Aileen is active in several professional organizations and community projects. She currently chairs the Women's Leadership Conference Committee for Meeting Professionals International and is also a member of the Leadership Committee. She has received two awards from the Chicago chapter of Meeting Professionals International; the President's Award and the Rising Star Award in 2002-2003. She is on the Board of Directors of the Segundo Ruiz Belvis Cultural Center that helps promote Puerto Rican culture and educate Puerto Ricans living in the Chicago area.

Aileen says that the Scholarship Foundation was instrumental in helping her to "further her professional and educational goals and that she could not have done it without the help of the Foundation." Aileen recommends the hospitality industry to young students, saying that it is "a great industry when you want to make a difference in the economy of a destination since you can see results every time a guest visits and has a great experience."

Chicago is fortunate to have Aileen heading the Puerto Rico Convention Bureau's Sales office.

We wish her continued success!

SMORGASBORD

News from the Board of Directors

Carl W. Kortum Rejoins Foundation Board

The Board of Directors of the Scholarship Foundation for Hotel & Tourism Studies welcomes **Carl W. Kortum** as a new Board member. Carl was originally on the Foundation Board when it began in 1989. He left Puerto Rico in 1995 to become Executive Vice President of Swissôtel Hotels and Resorts with full responsibility for seven luxury hotel properties in North America. Carl currently is President and Chief Executive Officer of the International Hospitality Group, Inc., Casino del Sol.



Recently, Carl opened the new Casino del Mar at the Renaissance La Concha Hotel. In spite of his busy schedule, Carl finds time to organize the very successful Luis Torregrosa Inter Casino Golf Tournament, which raised \$100,000 for the Foundation in 2008. Carl brings with him a myriad of experience in finance and casino management.

Board Awards Casino Scholarships

For the first time, the Board of Directors of the Scholarship Foundation awarded scholarships to three casino executives to attend the "Executive Development Program" at the University of Nevada in Reno. Vladimir Fernández, Casino Director at the Embassy Suites Hotel & Casino; Isabel Barrios, Controller at the Holiday Inn & Tropical Casino in Ponce; and Guillermo Márquez, Casino General Manager at Casino del Sol, Courtyard by Marriott Isla Verde, all benefited greatly from this program, now in its 18th year and attracting casino executives from all over the world. Students were divided up into groups and each group had to prepare a case study of an integrated resort casino. The three students from Puerto Rico were on different teams but finished first, second and third out of nine teams for their concept and presentation. The Foundation would like to see more casino employees seeking Bachelor's or Master's degrees in casino management, finance, accounting or related fields.

Scholarship Recipients Home for the Holidays

A Christmas lunch at Jam Bistro in the Condado honored our scholarship recipients for the 2008 - 2009 academic year.



Present were Frances Matos, Gretchen Mulero, Raiza Robles, Claudia Soto and Angélica Sotomayor. Scholarship President Jim Finn enjoyed hearing about their experiences in universities such as Florida International, the Culinary Institute of America, Universidad Interamericana and Johnson & Wales.

Plaza Cellars Hosts 4th Annual Alumni Cocktail

Plaza Cellars hosted the 4th Annual Alumni cocktail on Monday, February 2 and it proved to be a marvelous opportunity for our alumni to enjoy each other's company and mingle with members of the Foundation's Board of Directors. Students at the UPR's School of Hotel & Restaurant Administration, Carolina campus, along with their professor and former scholarship recipient, Alan Rodríguez, prepared delicious hors d'oeuvres to accompany the great wines chosen by Plaza Cellars especially for this occasion. Alumni representative on our Board, Luis Rodríguez, addressed the alumni and announced the formation of a Facebook page dedicated to Foundation alumni news. Plaza Cellars' Amarylís Dávila spoke about the wines and their origin. All in all it was a fun evening full of warm camaraderie.



THE VIEW From my Corner

News from the Executive Administrator

Marga Raffucci graduated on the Dean's list of the Culinary Institute of America from the Associate's Degree program in culinary arts in October 2008. She is currently working in Boston at Sorellina restaurant, one of the five Columbus Restaurant Group's successful restaurants headed by Chef Jamie Mammano. Marga had done her internship under Chef Mammano when he was the Executive Chef at the Four Seasons Boston. We look forward to Marga's return to the island so we can all benefit from her culinary expertise. **Axel Ortiz**, also a graduate from the Culinary Institute of America, has accepted a position in Wilo Benet's new restaurant, Varita, at the Condado Plaza Hotel & Casino.



Marga Raffucci

Andrea Machado is the new Senior Catering Manager at the Embassy Suites Dorado del Mar Beach & Golf Resort. With a scholarship, Andrea earned her Master's degree in finance from Universidad Interamericana. **Chef Enrique Piñeiro** has begun a new season on the very successful Telemundo "Operación Chef," while Ricardo Castro has been named Director of the Culinary School at the Art Institute in Tampa, Florida. Both Enrique and Ricardo received scholarship assistance for Bachelor's degree studies at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, NY.



Axel Ortiz

Gretchen Mulero, who just finished her first year in culinary arts at the Culinary Institute of America, had the opportunity to do her externship at Thomas Keller's Bouchon restaurant in Las Vegas. She had quite an experience and has now returned to the CIA for her second year of culinary studies.



Andrea Machado

The Scholarship Foundation is once again launching the Alumni Giving Program. This program asks our graduates to donate \$1 for every year the Foundation has been working. For 2009 the donation will be \$19, a double donation, \$38 and a triple donation, \$57. Last year we raised over \$1,500 from alumni donations and we hope to reach \$2,000 this year. Alumni donors from 2008 included Omar Pagán, Luis Rodríguez, Carol Reyes, Anayanzi Medina, Javier Santos, Eminely Rivera, Daniel Bermúdez, Miguel García, Desirée Cuin, Celynette Serrano, Mabel Sanabria and Aileen Laracuenté.



Chef Enrique Piñeiro

I invite all alumni to participate with us in our 2009 Alumni Giving Program. Your donation is important and enables others to benefit from our program of scholarship assistance.