



## 2008 Chef Concierge of the Year Nominees



**THOMAS MECKL**



**DAVID MORENO**



**RAPHAEL PALLAIS**



**MICHAEL ROMEI**



**KAREN SHOR**

### THOMAS MECKL

The Helmsley Park Lane Hotel

**Years of Service:** 22

**Organizational Affiliations:** Les Clefs d'Or USA, NYCAHC

#### How and when did I become a Concierge?

I began as a social worker in child welfare, and though it was rewarding, I needed a change. The Garden City Hotel offered three possibilities. These were my responses: First, Assistant Executive Housekeeper, "I don't even make my own bed every day." Second, Lifeguard, "Though I can swim, if I don't move my arms vigorously, I sink to the bottom." Third, Concierge, "If you tell me what it is and what it does and I like it and think I can do it, I'm your man." After some laughter, training at Toronto's King Edward Hotel with Eugenio Chinigo and months of preparation, I was Chef Concierge. Since then I worked 9 1/2 years at the Omni Berkshire Place and currently I'm at The Helmsley Park Lane for 11 1/2 years.

#### What does "being a Concierge" mean to me?

Being a Concierge is about responsibility. My hotel entrusts to me the care of its most valuable asset—our guests. What I do can retain this asset through guest loyalty, or even increase its value when we are recommended to their family, friends and business associates. My hotel's need to make sure the guest is satisfied dovetails with my desire to make people happy by making their stay successful, wonderful, spectacular, uplifting, stress-free and/or memorable. It can be a common challenge, such as obtaining reservations at a booked restaurant or sold-out ticket, or consoling a lonely guest, attending a funeral, making someone laugh or even telling that silly story about how Staten Island got its name. Whatever the need, I try to find some way to meet it and once in a while maybe make someone's dream come true.

### DAVID MORENO

Gramercy Park Hotel

**Years of Service:** 17

**Organizational Affiliations:** Les Clefs d'Or USA, NYCAHC, NYC & Company

#### How and when did I become a Concierge?

After working in the international banking profession for seven years I decided to make a career change. In between banking jobs I had some hotel experience as a junior Concierge at The Grand Bay Hotel, working with one of the founders of Les Clefs d'Or USA, Giorgio Finocchiaro. It was in 1992 when I threw myself into the hotel business and became a Concierge at The Macklowe Hotel (now Millennium Broadway). After a few years there I was asked to become a member of the Concierge team at The Mark Hotel where I was once again in the company of Giorgio Finocchiaro who took me under his wing. In 2002, when Giorgio retired, I became Chef Concierge at the Mark Hotel and stayed there for three years. While on vacation in Chile I received a very compelling phone call from Ian Schragger's assistant asking if I would be interested in the opportunity to be a part of the grand reopening of the newly redesigned Gramercy

Park Hotel. I was very intrigued and that's why you find me here two and a half years later.

#### What does "being a Concierge" mean to me?

To me the Concierge is the soul of a hotel. Beautiful paintings, beautiful rooms and grand entrances mean nothing to our guests without the human touch that we as Concierges provide. The human aspect of this profession is really what draws me to it. To me, being a Concierge means never forgetting that no matter how famous, popular or rich someone is, they are still human beings who want to feel welcome and sincerely cared for. At the end of the day, guests will want to return to a hotel because they felt comfortable and at home. Being a really good Concierge means being able to read, in a few seconds, a guest's personality, needs and wants and be able to effectively execute these tasks in a genuinely warm and caring way using our knowledge and talents.

### RAPHAEL PALLAIS

The Plaza

**Years of Service:** 19

**Organizational Affiliations:** Les Clefs d'Or USA, NYCAHC

#### How and when did I become a Concierge?

Sheer serendipity. I had just liquidated my French-Italian furniture importing business in New Orleans when a friend advised that they were hiring at the Le Meridien (then owned and operated by Air France). I interviewed and, upon meeting, the General Manager said I would make a good Concierge and made me his acting Chef Concierge on the spot! After that, he was transferred to the Parker Meridien in New York and asked if I would follow him. I gladly accepted and was Chef Concierge there for nearly nine years. After several stints in Paris, at The New York Palace Hotel, at The Peninsula and at the Ritz-Carlton New York, Central Park, I finally accepted the Chef Concierge position at the fabulous Plaza Hotel.

#### What does "being a Concierge" mean to me?

There is something so uniquely "human" about our profession that makes it incomparable to any other profession, unless we speak of priests or perhaps torturers. Our jobs require us to dig deep into our own souls to try and understand what our guests "really" want—often, they themselves do not know and we have to elicit it or "spoon" it out of them. The skills we need to develop to do this well are quite interesting. They include an insatiable curiosity, a penchant for adventurous travel, whereby you learn all those neat tricks for getting upgrades and better seats on airplanes, among others, and an unusually strong ability to empathize and put yourself in other people's shoes, whatever their condition may currently be. Thus we enrich ourselves through direct guest contact.

### MICHAEL ROMEI

The Waldorf Towers

**Years of Service:** 19

**Organizational Affiliations:** Les Clefs d'Or USA; Assistant

General Secretary, UICH (International Executive Board, Les Clefs d'Or); NYCAHC; South Florida Concierge Association (Past President and Honorary Member); Faculty Member, New York University Continuing Education Program; Visiting Professor, Merici College, Quebec, Canada; Frequent Lecturer, Cunard Cruise Lines and Regent Seven Seas Cruise Lines

#### How and when did I become a Concierge?

After a seven-year career as an analyst for the Royal Dutch/Shell Group companies, I left New York City to live in South Florida. I felt the hospitality industry seemed logical to pursue in Florida, so I entered The Boca Raton Resort & Club and accepted an entry-level position in the front office which led me to various management positions. Eventually, I became the Chef Concierge of the hotel.

#### What does "being a Concierge" mean to me?

Being a Concierge has allowed me to truly express my "real" self. There are many definitions of the word Concierge; we have heard several recitations over the years but the big difference and the real passion of the profession comes from within. I believe it is truly developed and nurtured within us unconsciously, for it is a true passion to care for another human being and to really want to help someone and make a difference—that is something untaught. Therefore, being a Concierge is not really a job nor a profession but a way of life that is everlasting!

### KAREN SHOR

The Madison Hotel

**Years of Service:** 26

**Organizational Affiliations:** NYCAHC

#### How and when did I become a Concierge?

I had been working for eleven years as an international flight attendant out of New York when my son was born and I decided to leave the "high life" behind. When the Madison Hotel opened in Morristown and I was offered the Concierge position, I just knew this is where I should be. My new career could have easily been short-lived, however, as this was the early 1980s and the suburbs and I was definitely navigating uncharted waters. Twenty-six years later, I can honestly say that this has been the best trip of my life! My membership in Les Clefs d'Or and the NYCAHC, as well as a supportive ownership, have enabled me to make Concierge services an important part of the guest's experience at the hotel.

#### What does "being a Concierge" mean to me?

I feel the Concierge position is a unique one within the hotel, because it is truly the heart of the hotel where the emphasis is on people and offering that personal touch as opposed to thread counts and the bottom line. What gets me to my desk at 7 a.m. every day is a sense of adventure and knowing I am empowered to make a real difference in the guest's stay.