The Partner

Kemmons Wilson School of Hospitality & Resort Management

Bridging the Gap: Industry and Academia

Education — where the business of hospitality began

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(Left) KWS Scholarship students, Sharon Beasley and Marisa Venable, pictured with Andrew Cosslett, Chief Executive of InterContinental Hotels Group at the 2006 Americas and Investors Leadership Conference in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

(Right) Stevan Porter, President of the Americas, InterContinental Hotels Group pictured with IHG scholarship recipients, Marisa Venable and Sharon Beasley.

(Left) Jorge Apaez and Felipe Rios at the IHG Mexican Delegations’ Investors and Managers Gala in the CN Towers with Marisa and Sharon.
October proved to be a very busy time as the semester kicked into full swing. In addition to our regular and rigorous class schedule, students had numerous outside learning opportunities. You will also note that for the fall newsletters we are combing the issue and will publish this October/November issue and then a November/December issue. And we’re off!

The month started with two of our InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) Scholarship winners, Marisa Venable and Sharon Beasley along with Professor O’Halloran, attending the InterContinental Hotels Group Annual Leadership Conference. The conference was held in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The students attended seminars and workshops with franchisees, met and learned from IHG corporate representatives and generally enjoyed the sights and sounds of Toronto.

The biggest event of the month was the field trip to Las Vegas coordinated by Dr. LaChelle Wilborn and the HPRM 3600 Entertainment Management class. Approximately twenty students went on the trip. The group stayed at the Luxor Hotel and had a busy schedule of site visits that included the Luxor, Fitzgerald’s, the Venetian, MGM Grand, the Mirage and more. I happened to be in Las Vegas as an invited speaker on a panel focusing on cases, (hospitality and tourism) writing and teaching at the International Society of Travel and Tourism Educators annual conference.

In Toronto with IHG

This semester, I received the InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) Scholarship. I had no idea traveling opportunities would also be included. On October 3, 2006, I had the opportunity to travel to Toronto, CN for the annual IHG convention. Besides volunteering at the US Foods Show at the Cook Convention Center, this was my first time to attend a real convention. There is only one word that could describe my experience in Toronto, wow! There were training classes, brand sessions, catered breakfast/lunches, cocktail parties, fancy dinners, a trade show, trips to the CN tower, and even a concert by Reba on our last night. I met Steve Porter, Bill Burton, and Vicki Gordon of IHG who sponsor my scholarship, as well as Kemmons Wilson Jr. Dr. O’Halloran also introduced me and Mrs. Beasley to a bunch of hotel people, but there were so many that I can’t remember their names. The two classes I attended were Global Sales and Make More Money. The Global Sales class was set up like family feud and eight people from the audience would volunteer to be asked a series of questions about global sales and issues discussed in the Brand Sessions. The first team to get all/most of the topics answered would win. The Make More Money class discussed ways a company and an employee can improve their profits. It wasn’t as entertaining as the Global Sales class, but if offered some useful tips that I could use in the future. I also learned about the future upgrades and current events of Holiday Inns during the Holiday Inn Brand Session. All these activities were fun and taught me about networking, leadership, sales/marketing, event planning, time-management, and even a few topics I’m learning about in my current classes. Overall, this trip was a great experience and I hope next year I’ll get the same opportunity as IHG heads to Dallas, TX.

As you can see, the pace was fast and opportunities to engage in the learning process were many. If you know someone who would like to join us, please have them contact us. Our strength is in our community of students, partners, staff and faculty. Thanks for being part of our successes!

In Toronto with IHG

By Marisa Venable
As a country-born ‘Cheesehead’, I was not quite sure what to expect when moving to Memphis, Tennessee. The heat, new surroundings and an assistant professor position in an urban university were potentially a dangerous combination. But after more than two months into my new position these concerns were inaccurate. I love my new home! The Kemmons Wilson School with its outstanding industry support, unparalleled opportunities and tremendous people is a great place to work. Drs. O’Halloran and Wilborn are teaching me a lot about being a faculty member and Mrs. Beasley … well we all know how she keeps us in line! And the students are an outstanding group that I look forward to seeing grow into the next generation of industry leaders. As to the city itself, with its attractions and idiosyncrasies, is keeping me and my new wife Anna (at least when I’m not on campus) very busy. Eating barbeque and listening to some of the best music in the world is almost a full time leisure activity. All in all, the decision to come to the University of Memphis was an excellent choice and I look forward to many years of contributing to the growth of our program.

Kemmons Wilson Hospitality Society on the Move

This semester so far has been a very exciting one, and the Society has a great deal planned for the month. During fall break Dr. Wilborn took a group of students to Las Vegas to study the operations of casinos and restaurants. The group toured the Venetian, Fitzgerald’s, MGM Grand, and the Mirage. Here is a list of some upcoming events.

November 15th: Society Meeting at 12:00 noon - Members of the Society who are interested in running for office will discuss their plans for the Society.

November 16th: KWS Undecided Major Day - The KWS and the Society will be hosting a reception for those students who have not declared a major and are interested in the Hospitality and Resort Management program.

November 18th: Site Visit at Erling Jensen’s - Time and dress code will be announced.

November 29th: Society Meeting at 12:00 noon - Elections for next semester’s officers will be held and plans for Senior Sendoff will be discussed.

All of the events mentioned will be posted on the board in front of the Kemmons Wilson School office. Students who are interested in joining the KW Hospitality Society can email the president, Lauren Jackson (ljacksn3@memphis.edu) or Dr. LaChelle Wilborn (lrwilbrn@memphis.edu).

A Day with Doug & the Ducks

Being chosen as Peabody Student of the Month was an honor in itself. I truly enjoyed the day. I was exposed to how business decisions of an outstanding hotel were made. Mr. Doug Browne was a great teacher as he shared his story on how to become successful in this industry. I was also presented with the opportunity to be an Honorary Duck Master. This allowed me to bring the ducks down from their penthouse to swim in the lobby fountain. This was an outstanding feeling. The meetings I attended were very detailed. The atmosphere was one of a loving family working to keep their business running. An environment of teamwork and individual ownership was stressed. Success is the key to the whole operation at the Peabody Hotel and I benefited from being a part of this winning team.

Experience of a Lifetime

I was given the opportunity as an InterContinental Hotels Group scholarship recipient to attend the Americas Investors and Leadership Conference in Toronto, Canada. I must admit that I felt like a child let loose in a candy store. I will write more on my experience next month in the November/December edition under the Non-traditional Student feature section. However, I would like to say thank you to Dr. O’Halloran for giving me the opportunity to represent the School; to Mr. Bill Burton for making it possible to attend an awesome conference; Ms. Vicki Gordon for your support that went beyond the call of duty; Mr. Steve Porter, Mr. Andy Cossett and the Wilson Family for all your expressions of support; and finally, to my family for your strong support, love and understanding. It made returning to college a lot easier!
What a month October has been. With classes in full swing, KWS had a few side projects that made for great reading; so enjoy our journey.

It all began in late September with The Peabody Associate Benefits/Health Fair. Teamed up with a group of K. W. Hospitality Society members and students from the Special Events class, we informed Peabody Hotel Group employees of the advantages of higher education and specifically the Kemmons Wilson School of Hospitality and Resort Management. We even got a chance to see Aubrey Gillespie (KWS Class of 2005) in action in her newly appointed position as Assistant Housekeeping Manager. Way to go Team!

From there...

October 5th presented KWS an opportunity to join the larger university at the Discover Your Major Day. Teamed with volunteers from the K. W. Hospitality Society, the Special Events class and the KWS, we were able to get almost 60 undecided major signed up. These prospective HPRM majors were given departmental information and will be invited to attend a more intimate gathering hosted by the KWS and K. W. Hospitality Society prior to Spring 07 registration. Free pizza, drinks, course information and change of major forms will be provided. The follow up event is scheduled for Thursday, November 16, 2006 at Noon in the KWS.

Friday, October 13th thru Tuesday, October 17th - Las Vegas, NV… read all about the trip in a more detailed article below.

Wednesday, October 18th called for a tour of the KWS and discussion on the program to a group of Kingsbury High School students currently enrolled in the high school’s culinary art program. A student prospective was given to the students from Senior Kathryn Downey-Smith. The students later toured campus and ate lunch at the Tiger Den.

Thursday, October 19th also called for a tour, but this time the focus was the Kemmons Wilson Gallery to a group of senior citizens from the Frayser-Raleigh Community Center. The group later dined at the Medallion Restaurant located in the Holiday Inn – University of Memphis.

Saturday, October 21st called for community service to a dozen Melrose High School students under the guidance of Ms. Charlotte Lewis. Armed with Senior Lauren Jackson and support from Senior Kathryn Downey-Smith and the skills of Banquet Captain, Rik Denton from the Holiday Inn - University of Memphis, dining etiquette was our mission. The tables were set for a five course meal including a full brigade of glassware. Needless to say, when the session was over, they were prepared to dine with the best!!

Tuesday, October 24th called for travel to Wooddale High School. KWS’ participation in the Tourism/Aviation Career Fair had been requested, so armed with Senior Kathryn Downey-Smith off we went. Speaking to an auditorium of high school students, the good news of career and educational opportunities within the hospitality/tourism field beginning at KWS was spread.

Wednesday, October 25th, a call came in from Barbara Stevenson, Academic Service Coordinator and Rebecca Bragdon, College Academic Advisor ~ the Fogelman College of Business & Economics indicating that Evangelical Christian School (ECS) was on campus and wanted to know if we, KWS, could stop by and speak to the students regarding our program. So off Professor Brey and I went, armed with the newly created brochures, Kemmons Wilson’s Top 20 List, and program materials.

Kemmons Wilson School of Hospitality and Resort Management
Entertainment Management’s (HPRM 3600) Las Vegas Site Visit
Friday, October 12th - Tuesday, October 17th

Planning for the HPRM Departmental trip to Las Vegas, Nevada began at the beginning of summer 2006. Students were asked to begin saving their earnings from their summer jobs and internships to cover the cost of the proposed trip. A call was placed to Meghan Rishel, Training Manager of the Gold Strike Casino, a MGM Mirage Property and current KWS Industry Support Faculty, seeking assistance regarding discounted room rates in Las Vegas and contact names of potential industry support persons and tour guides. Meghan Rishel came through like a champion providing a discounted lodging room rate and a list of excited and willing industry executives in Las Vegas that were willing and able to make the trip a wonderful learning experience.

It all began with our lodging accommodation at the MGM Mirage’s Luxor Las Vegas. The 4442 room property centers on an Egyptian theme. The pyramid shaped casino looked very familiar and welcoming to the Memphis KWS.
The morning of Friday, October 13th was spent with Gary McCreary, CMP Executive Director of Catering and Convention Services at the World famous Venetian Las Vegas, a property where “winding canals, floating gondolas, breathtaking architecture” give a new level of quality to the convention services and casino hotels and resorts. The property has been awarded numerous awards including, The Best of The Best, The Gold Platter “Elite” Award and Gold Key Award by Meetings and Conventions; The Pinnacle Award by Successful Meeting Magazine; Best Hotel Lobby, Best Hotel Theme, Best Hotel Rooms, Best Museum, and Best Art Gallery all by the Las Vegas Review Journal. The Venetian Las Vegas is also winner of Meetings and Conventions Magazine’s “Top 5 catering Departments in the World.”

Mr. McCreary stated that the $1.5 billion Four Diamond and Four Star resort hotel and casino complex has also been listed among the “Ultimate 10 Hotels in the World, by the Learning Channel; Top 100 Hotels in The Continental US and Canada by Travel and Leisure Magazine and boosts being the world’s largest hotel, casino and convention complex. Students were given a walking tour and the discussion of convention services and catering management as the magnitude continued. Currently The Venetian has 1.8 million square feet of meeting space and 4027 guest rooms. What a walk that was.

From there it was off to experience Fremont Street Experience to meet with June Smith, Training Manager with Fitzgerald's Casino and Hotels. While there is a Fitzgerald’s Casino and Hotel in the Tunica area, the Las Vegas property gave the team a chance to experience the older side of Las Vegas. The executive team of the Majestic Star and Fitzgerald’s casinos took great pride in the fact that they are led by Don Barden, the only African American Chairman and CEO of a casino. The Culture that has been instilled in the company by Don Barden has allowed the Majestic Star and Fitzgerald’s casinos to place great value on diversity and community service. Here the KWS Team received insight and tours from the directors and/or managers of Slots, Table Games, Corporate Sales, Banquets, and Database Marketing. They were a living textbook and Brad Stegman, Director of Slots is a U of M alumni. The Fitz rolled out the red carpet for the KWS Team and for this we thank them!!

The weekend found the team taking walking tours of Excalibur, Mandalay Bay, New York New York Hotel, Paris Las Vegas, Treasure Island, Caesars Palace, and the Flamingo. Meals were eaten at Circus Circus and the world famous Five Diamond Bellagio. The dinner at the Bellagio was co-sponsored by the Kemmons Wilson Hospitality Society. Following dinner students toured the gardens and watched the dancing fountains.

Monday greeted the Team bright and early … we were off to learn about MGM Mirage and the MGM Grand was our first stop. Opened in 1993 at the cost of $1 billion, the MGM Grand has 5005 rooms, of which 751 are suites. The casino floor spans 4 football fields in length. The property has 23 restaurants and 4 theatres and sits on 116 acres. Lusha Brown, Recruitment Specialist, was our host and what a fine job she did! The KWS Team met Lusha Brown in the administrative building. I guess the MGM’s 10,000 employees justifies such a facility. Ryan Flieger, General Program Manager for MGM Grand University presented a detailed outline of MGM Grand University’s Hospitality Internship Program (HIP) and the MGM Mirage Management Associate Program (MAP). The career opportunities presented were endless. Following the presentation, the Team went for a long walking tour. Thanks for the opportunity to gain first-hand insight on the largest property in Las Vegas.

From there we were off to grab a quick bite at the famous Fat Burger and hit the Las Vegas Strip again. Our second MGM Mirage property was The Mirage. We were hosted by Bobbie Barnes, Training Manager. Bobbie Barnes began with a wonderful power-point presentation on the history of the MGM Mirage and the brand marketing of each property within the larger parent company. Some fascinating facts from the Mirage presentation were as follows: they may have as many as 1,000 to 1,800 checks-ins/outs daily; front services moves 3,000 bags daily; at 100% occupancy, it takes 18,676 sheets to make all the beds; and approximately 4,800 calls are received daily. Some interesting F&B facts were that on a normal day, 30,000 meals were served to guest; 2,000 pounds of shrimp are used daily; and that their Pastry Shop produces over 50,000 pieces of fresh bread and pastries daily. That’s what makes Las Vegas hotel casinos so unique.

Following the presentation, students were placed in smaller teams to complete a property scavenger hunt. What a way to end the day. Tired and exhausted, the KWS Team returned to the Luxor to prepare for the return to Memphis.

It was a wonderful learning experience and I would encourage KWS students to take advantage of similar opportunities. The ability to see theory and practice combined on a world-class scale is priceless to one’s education and professional growth and development.
Thank You for Bridging the Gap Between Industry and Academia!

Sincere gratitude goes out the following individuals and or companies for making the Las Vegas, Nevada site visit an awesome learning experience for all parties involved. We would not have done it without you!!!

**Fitzgerald’s Casino & Hotel, Las Vegas**
June Smith, Training Manager  
Brad Stegman, Director of Slots (U of M Alumni)  
Michele Cervone, Slot Operations Manger  
Theo Smith, Director of Table Games  
Mae Russell, Database Marketing Manager  
Toni Blake, Corporate Sales Executive  
Lynn Lee, F & B Banquet Manager  
Mitch Holloway, Director of Hotel/Operations & Sales

**The Venetian Resort Hotel & Casino, Las Vegas**
Gary McCreary, CMP Executive Director of Catering & Convention Services

**The MGM Mirage**
Meghan Rishel, Training Manager, Gold Strike, Tunica, MS  
Ron Bailey, General Manager Luxor, Las Vegas  
Lusha Brown, Recruitment Specialist, MGM Grand, Las Vegas  
Ryan Flieger, General Program Manager, MGM Grand University, MGM Grand, Las Vegas  
Bobbie Barnes, Training Manager, The Mirage, Las Vegas

Burk Forester, Night Manager, Embassy Suites, Memphis, TN

Robert O’Halloran, Director of KWS, and Mrs. Sharon Beasley, KWS Administrative Coordinator

Thanks TEAM: you made the trip a wonderful learning experience. Thanks for your behavior, maturity, and sincere interest in your education and professional development!! Thank you also for being willing to invest your dollars in your education.

(Above) Fitzgerald and Luxor Casino Security Pictures

**Kemmons Wilson School of Hospitality and Resort Management’s Las Vegas Site Visit Attendees**

Sharon & Eric Beasley, Jerod Byrd, Sarah Cox, Patrick Culligan, Brian Dodson, Lindsey Donovan, Kathryn Downey-Smith & Peter Smith, Chris Gammel, Thomas Gentsch, Philip Haley, Lauren Jackson, Dat Ly, Elizabeth & Daniel Malone, Kimberly McVeigh, Chris Moody, Chris Poe, Jessica Riley, Michelle Webb and Barbara, Iyanla & Lachelle Wilborn.
Las Vegas was unforgettable! Between the property visits and nightlife, this trip topped the charts. All of the tours we went on were very comprehensive – I couldn’t have asked for more. After seeing the back-of-the-house and the manpower it takes to run these properties efficiently, I realized very quickly that the people who work in these organizations are the best of the best in this business, no matter what operational or managerial role they play. All of these folks have one thing in common though – they work long and hard, but that’s reality…these jobs don’t just jump up and hug you! It takes a lot of dedication to be successful and stay competitive in this market. As far as the nightlife went….well, you can’t unscramble scrambled eggs. What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas! But as the famous philosopher Michelle Webb once quoted, “Pictures can say a thousand words.”

Jerod Byrd

When I first learned we would be traveling to Las Vegas aka Sin City during the fall semester I was excited. I had heard how great Vegas was and was thinking that this would be a great experience to see the hospitality industry at its greatest. Upon arriving in Vegas, I was amazed by the lights and how everything was handled. Everyday I was there, there was something that surprised me or exceeded my expectations. I learned how much work goes into making Las Vegas what it is. I was really interested in Vegas because I am pursuing a career in event planning and I knew that if anywhere has event planning Vegas does. Event planning in Vegas is something I could not even imagine until touring the MGM Grand, the Venetian, Fitzgerald or the Mirage, among the others I toured on my own. These casinos are not just casinos; they always have some kind of event. In Las Vegas there are no normal business hours: time does not exist!

Kimberly McVeigh

The Las Vegas trip with the Kemmons Wilson School provided an inside scoop to the hospitality industry. The experience that I gained on the trip was amazing. We took a tour of the MGM Grand, The Mirage, Venetian, and Fitzgerald’s. Each tour was amazing, we learned about their operations and I was amazed at how everybody work together to run a 5,000 rooms hotel and casino. Job opportunities are endless and everyone had the same chance for growth within the organizations. Once I returned to Memphis, I realized the scale of properties in Las Vegas were hard to compare to the resorts and hotels in Tunica. Overall, the trip was awesome and I’ve learned a lot about the hospitality industry.

Dat Ly

The trip to Las Vegas was definitely an eye-opening experience for me. Having been there when I was 12, and then going back at 21, I was able to see the dramatic changes and growth of the city. My favorite tour that we had was at The Venetian. The hotel itself was decorated beautifully and we were able to meet with the Director of Catering and Convention Services. He showed us several of the ballrooms and other meeting spaces they had to offer. As an aspiring meeting planner, it was interesting to see how much space the hotels in Las Vegas had to work with. Overall, the trip to Las Vegas was very informative and it was very encouraging to hear about how many job opportunities are actually available.

Michelle Webb
We’re on the web!
Visit us at:
http://wilson.memphis.edu

KWS Faculty
Dr. Robert O’Halloran
901-678-5768
rohallrn@memphis.edu

Dr. LaChelle Wilborn
901-678-5504
lrwilbrn@memphis.edu

Dr. Eric Brey
901-678-4584
ericbrey@memphis.edu

KWS Industry Support Faculty
Mr. Chris Roan
901-678-8021
croan@mcvb.org

Mr. Doug Browne
901-678-8021
dbrowne@peabodymemphis.com

Mr. Mohamad Hakimian
901-678-8021
mhakimian@madisonhotelmemphis.com

Ms. Meghan Rishel
901-678-8021
MRishel@mrgmail.com

Do you have information that you would like us to consider for future newsletters? Email: hospitality@memphis.edu by the 10th of the month.

Editor: Sharon Hyman Beasley
sbeasley@memphis.edu
Publisher: Robert O’Halloran
rohallrn@memphis.edu
Photographers:
Mira Radu and Shweta Bhan

“Podners”