



Photos (3) by Steve Hoffman



Hire learning

An innovative component of the University of Delaware curriculum allows students in the Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Management Program to learn every facet of the hospitality industry by working at the university-owned Marriott hotel. The students have a competitive edge when they graduate and start looking for employment.

By Steve Hoffman
Staff Writer

Charles Graves, Leah Gourley, and Taylor Lightcap have spent months collecting the data that is compiled in a binder that is now 100 pages thick. There are statistics, analyses, charts, and demographic data. Perhaps the most interesting piece of information in the entire binder is this: The project they have been working on will cost \$86 million.

But that's okay. They have 100 pages of information to support why the Embassy Suites hotel that they want to build in Bloomington-Normal, Illinois is worth every cent of that \$86 million.

Given the assignment to find the best location for a hotel in Illinois, the three colleagues decided on Bloomington-Normal. Not Chicago. Chicago is already crowded with hotels, including ones that are similar to the proposed Embassy Suites.

"Bloomington-Normal is a very growing area," Taylor Lightcap explained.

Leah Gourley supports this point with these facts: there are four universities in the area, a shortage of hotel rooms, and a major Interstate—Route 66, no less—passes right through. And the area has desirable demographics, including a high average income.

In addition to all that information in the binder, there is a Power-Point presentation all ready to go. It won't be easy to convince the investors that the project is worth \$86 million, but all three are confident in their research.

Taylor Lightcap admits that he's surprised by the final cost, but all the data collected suggests that this is a good investment. They have analyzed the risks. They have financial statements. Now, they just have to get the investors on board.

Who are these daring developers who have a business plan to construct a hotel in Illinois?

They are students in the University of Delaware's Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Management Program. The assignment that they've undertaken is a small part of a unique training program that helps prepare students for what they will encounter when they embark on their careers. The lessons are already being learned.

As Leah Gourley explained, "I knew that there was a lot that went into the planning of a hotel, but this work really opens your eyes."

William Sullivan is the Managing Director of what is officially called the Courtyard Newark at the University of Delaware. A University of Delaware graduate with a degree in Business, he had a 31-year career at DuPont Company, which included a long stint as the General Manager of the

Hotel DuPont and the DuPont Country Club before accepting the challenge to serve as the managing director for this program.

This Courtyard by Marriott is a fully functioning hotel situated on New London Road in Newark, right next to the university's Clayton Hall. Just like any other Marriott

hotel, this one is run by a professionally trained staff. But this hotel also serves as a classroom where University of Delaware students receive hands-on instruction about every aspect of the hotel business.

"This hotel opened in November of 2004 and I started here in July of 2004," Sullivan explained. He was already an adjunct faculty member in the university's Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Management Program which had been started in 1996. This program is part of the university's College of Business.

Sullivan understood that the hotel on the Laird Campus was going to transform this already strong academic program by giving students practical experience in every aspect of running a hotel.

To ensure that students are receiving the most hands-on

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Photo by Steve Hoffman

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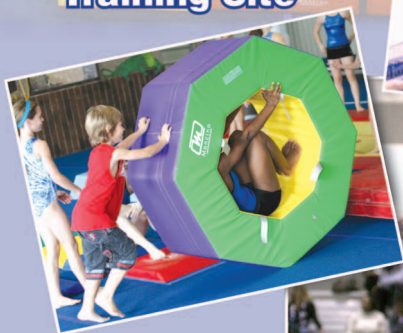
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Newark Education



Photo by Steve Hoffman
The immaculate Courtyard at the University of Delaware is run by a professional staff who also help train the students.

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training that they can get, the number of students admitted to the Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Program is limited to 425 students total. That's 100 students in each undergraduate class and another 25 students in the graduate program. Each semester 50 students participate in the lodging practicum where they work in the hotel under the guidance of the university faculty and the direction of the hotel staff. Each student receives training in every aspect of the business. The students' schedules at the hotel are built around their class schedules.

Explained Sullivan, "A lot of campuses have a hotel, but they don't engage the students to run them. Our students work at the front desk, they do the housekeeping work, the maintenance. They work with the marketing department and the accounting manager. They learn about technology and all the financial aspects of running a hotel. By doing every job, they have hands-on experience."

Greg Antonucci is one of the recent graduates of the program and is currently employed by this Marriott. Before entering the University of Delaware program, he considered culinary school. Once he saw what this program entailed, he had no doubts that the University of Delaware would be the better option.

"I did the practicum in the fall of 2007. There was a 25-hour project, a thesis on how to open a hotel, and a lot of hands-on work. You learn how to do everything. You get to be a Manager on Duty—you're in charge. Whatever happens, you have to accept responsibility."

"We teach them how Marriott runs a hotel," Sullivan explained. "The Marriott has been very supportive of our

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program. They provided a grant that allowed us to build a classroom in here. They also give us training materials for the students. It has really been a win-win situation for the program."

The students get to learn in a four-story, 126-room hotel with an indoor pool, exercise room, and a restaurant. A computerized learning center is used for classes during the practicum. The students emerge from the training with a much better understanding of what the job of running a hotel entails.

Particularly enlightening for students is the housekeeping work.

"It's not just going in and cleaning," Antonucci explained. "It's about the details. You have to check for scuff marks. You have to make sure that the hot water works. You have to make sure that the towels are really clean. Once you learn to clean a room, then you learn how to inspect it."

And all the housekeeping work must be accomplished in a timely fashion. Housekeepers can spend no more than 20 minutes getting a room ready. While cleaning a room may seem like a small job of questionable importance, it's not. In the hotel industry, cleanliness is

paramount and the Marriott, in particular, has unforgiving standards.

"Every survey ever done says that the most important thing about a hotel stay is cleanliness," explained Sullivan. "Housekeeping is very demanding work—it's an important job."

This hotel's clientele is equally divided between local business travelers and guests who are in town for events related to the university—parents, alumni, or professionals attending a conference. For the most part, the guests are well-behaved, but even here there are occasional incidents where management must step in and handle a difficult situation.

"It's great training because there will always be issues like that," Sullivan said.

An additional benefit to all these real-world experiences is that students learn whether they want to continue to pursue a career or not. Should a student find that a career in hotel management isn't in the offing, all is not wasted. The student still leaves the University of Delaware with a Business Degree from a respected and academically challenging school.

"This program is a little bit more specialized, but not so specialized that the students can't do other things. They all learn accounting skills and take business classes," Sullivan explained.

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Most students are like Antonucci: They finish their academic careers ready to enter the field that they have specialized in.

"I felt very well-prepared," Antonucci said.

Charles Graves and Leah Gourley do, too. They both want to manage a hotel one day. Taylor Lightcap thinks he will focus on the food and beverage industry. The program provides complete training.

"A lot of my friends don't get real-world experience until they do an internship. And even then, they don't know what they will do after graduation," Leah Gourley explained.

Word about the successes of the University of Delaware program has spread quickly. Officials from other universities have come here looking to see how this program is run. And for every one hundred students who are admitted into this program, there are between 600 and 700 applicants.

Sullivan offered his view of what this enhanced training will mean for the students once they graduate and are looking to enter the industry: "What distinguishes our program is that the students have a hands-on experience to compliment the academic work. Ultimately, that makes them more marketable. I know the students that have left here have had an edge in the employment market. They have the experience. It gives them something that is tangible. This program is unique in the way that we do it and our experience is that it works pretty well."

VITA NOVA

What's better than enjoying a great meal out? Enjoying a great meal out while simultaneously helping college students develop their culinary and hospitality skills.

An important component of the Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Management program is the Vita Nova restaurant. Like the hotel management program, an emphasis is placed on applied learning. Students rotate each day through 17 different positions that are necessary in the operation of a restaurant.

The dining experience at Vita Nova begins with an appetizer, specialty breads, wine samples, and a salad. The menu also features a variety of entrees, a selection of desserts, and specialty coffees.

The seating times at the restaurant are 11:30-12:30 for lunch each weekday and dinner from 5:30 p.m.-7:30 p.m. every Wednesday through Friday. The Vita Nova is located on the 2nd Floor of the Trabant University Center at 17 West Main Street in Newark. Reservations are required and can be made by calling 302-831-0500 or by e-mailing bmayer@udel.edu.

NEWARK LIFE

You Can Win \$100!

Photo Contest

Newark Life is holding its second annual local photography contest for anyone who can capture the best Newark scene. The photo may be indoors or outdoors, funny or serious—it's up to you, **but it must be about Newark.**

Anyone can participate, regardless of whether you are a professional or an amateur, a digital photographer, hobbyist or a film expert, an outdoor enthusiast or studio photographer.

You can submit as many photos as you want. Images will be judged on overall photographic and artistic quality. Best of all, this contest is free! There are absolutely no entry fees....**so enter today and you may win!**

The winner will have his or her photograph published in the Fall 2009 edition of Newark Life along with an optional biography.

Instructions:

E-mail digital photos to: photocontest@chestercounty.com or mail prints to Newark Life Magazine, P.O. Box 150, Kelton, Pa., 19346.

All entries must include name, address, phone number and date of birth.

The deadline for entries is September 30, 2009.

Good luck!

