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April 16, 2011
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Boston University Alumni Association
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Hello Friends of SHA,

After a summer of eager anticipation, I arrived in Boston to begin my term as your new dean on Monday morning, August 23. I was given a great welcome by retiring Dean Jim Stamas and the entire staff and faculty, and then it was right to work. I spent my first few weeks on campus meeting as many people here at BU as possible. Without a doubt, the most fun was going out with our new first-year class for a high-speed Boston Harbor cruise on a monster speedboat named Codzilla—think theme park water ride, only with real salt water and no safety harness. In two words, it is best summed up as “wet” and “exhilarating.”

I discovered that this is an exceptional entering class for the School, and I feel honored to be arriving with these excellent students as a new “freshman.”

The next day I had the chance to meet many of our returning students as they arrived for their first classes. We offered them a quick grab-and-go refreshment break in exchange for a handshake and an introduction to me. I was impressed with the warm hospitality all of the students extended upon their return to campus. Quite a few hardy souls even stopped by the dean’s office to introduce themselves personally to me and to make me feel at home.

We are very excited to have more than 150 returning seniors, all of whom have been invited to join me for lunch in small groups throughout the semester. We’ve been heading up Comm. Ase. to T. Anthony’s for pizza and to share stories about their SHA and internship experiences. I can already tell that you’ll have some active alumni leaders joining you next year.

I enjoyed meeting many SHA alumni during Alumni Weekend and at our reception at the annual Hotel Show in New York City this fall. I look forward to getting to know many more of you in the coming months, and I invite you to stop by the School when you are in the neighborhood.

Always remember that without your continued support and personal involvement with the School, none of the incredible changes that have happened over the past 25-plus years would have been possible. It is your ongoing commitment of time and talent that gives our students such a strong sense of connection to the School and the industry. And it is through generous gifts to your Alma Mater, whether to the Annual Fund or to our endowment, that you have helped create this special place of hospitality.

Please contact our development officer, Tracey Sharp Rezendes, at 617-353-3101 or tsharpre@bu.edu to arrange a tour of the School, inquire about upcoming alumni events in your area, or to make a gift. Of course, she is always eager to help you join the SHA Alumni Association.

In just a short time, I have learned that I truly have the best job in hospitality management education. I can’t wait to meet you all in person to share our vision for the future.

Best regards,

Chris Muller
William James Topley
The Château Laurier in 1916 and in 2008 still among the city’s most recognizable
opened in Ottawa, Canada’s grand old railroad hotels, including the châteaus Laurier (having opened the Fairmont San Francisco in 1907), bought many of Canada’s old, distinguished, luxury brand,” and built the Queen Mary 2 in 2003. “The systems are completely modern, but the design and decor are completely traditional. It looks like an old-fashioned ocean liner.”

And it’s why Fairmont, itself no stranger to historic properties (having opened the Fairmont San Francisco in 1907), bought many of Canada’s grand old railroad hotels, including the châteaus Laurier and Frontenac.

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VALLING HISTORY

The potential impact of Hudson’s research is not merely academic; in the case of hotels, the maintenance of historic properties carries dollars-and-cents implications for the companies that own them. The Château Laurier has been renovated several times. “Once you take the interior walls off, you realize the plumbing needs to be replaced, the electrical needs to be replaced,” says Hudson. “I know from my experience in the industry that it is often more expensive and more trouble to renovate an old building than to tear it down and build a new one.”

However, to tear down a beloved icon would risk losing brand loyalists. That, in large part, is what Hudson will examine. “How does Fairmont use history in its marketing? Is there a payoff to it? Does it cost too much to maintain an old property, or is there (a compelling) benefit to doing it? And how can other hotel companies use this as a model for social responsibility and historic preservation?”

Indeed, the title of Hudson’s project (and the likely title of the journal article that should result) is “Brand Heritage, Architectural History, and Corporate Social Responsibility at Fairmont Hotels.”

Fairmont earns high marks as a socially responsible business partly for its environmental practices: the Laurier serves food raised by local farmers; the Frontenac offers free parking to hybrid cars. But the company also seems to recognize the value in maintaining an historic hotel as part of the fabric of its community. Ottawans hold weddings in the Laurier’s banquet rooms and prepare dishes from recipes its chefs share with the local papers. Once, after an ice storm that felled power lines and darkened homes, the hotel manager offered rooms to area residents for $40 a night. Until the Canadian Broadcasting Company centralized its divisions into one building in 2004, CBC Radio broadcast from the Château Laurier’s seventh floor.

To the city of Ottawa, the Laurier is more than just a business. Same with the Frontenac, whose website can confidently claim that “it is not merely a hotel located in the heart of Old Québec—it is the heart of it.”

“From the corporate social responsibility side,” Hudson says, “the idea is that these are old, historic properties that have an important place in our cultural identity and in our built environment.”

One of Hudson’s goals is to create a financial model for hotels considering preservation work. “I’d love for hotel companies to be able to pick up the article that I write and say, ‘Oh, we could use this formula to figure out whether or not we should save this hotel.’”

Perhaps it’s too early to say, but is Hudson’s sense that preserving an historic property is worth the effort and expense? “Well,” he admits, “I’m an enthusiast for this sort of thing. My supposition and hope is: of course it is.”

A prime minister once slid down the banister of the elegant hotel’s marble staircase. (The then-PM, Canada’s Pierre Trudeau, also dove clothed into its swimming pool.) At the same site, a photographer snatched a cigar from the mouth of another prime minister, Britain’s Winston Churchill, then snapped a now-famous picture of his half-sour, half-amused expression.

Politicians aren’t the only visitors to the Château Laurier in Ottawa, either. Royalty, athletes, entertainers have all stayed at the 429-room French-Gothic-style hotel overlooking Parliament and the Rideau Canal. Thousands of ordinary Canadians have also treated themselves to a night or two at the Laurier.

Americans, too. The son of a sociologist, Bradford Hudson (UN’07) stayed there with his family when he was nine years old. Built by The Grand Trunk Railway Company in the early 1900s, the château copies “a design style from France in the 1750s. It’s very fanciful and ornate, with a huge, impressive lobby, and I just thought it was extremely cool,” Hudson recalls. “I think that’s what got me started on hotels.”

Hudson is now an assistant professor of marketing at SHA and holds an appointment in BU’s School of Hospitality & Tourism Management. The Boston-area native has been a strategic consultant for companies with historic brands—including Cunard, Harley-Davidson, Nestlé, and Cadbury Schweppes—and holds a PhD in business history from BU’s interdisciplinary honors program. He’s been quoted in business stories in The Washington Post and Los Angeles Times, and his research has appeared in the European Journal of Marketing and Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly.

Next spring, Hudson will travel to Canada again, this time as a Fulbright scholar researching brand heritage. He will focus on the Château Laurier as well as the Château Frontenac, in Quebec City—both now Fairmont properties. He will hold the Fulbright Visiting Research Chair in Sustainable Commerce at the University of Guelph’s School of Hospitality & Tourism Management.

BRANDS WITH A PAST

Brand heritage, says Hudson, concerns the way a company with an historic brand—his former client, the cruise line Cunard, for example—can trade on its tradition. “There’s a distinct subset of consumers who are attracted to brands because of their history.” Many are “brand enthusiasts,” he says, adding that his dad used to “sharpenize about Cunard” in the way some men age fine baseball statistics from the 1960s. “An even better analogy is Civil War reenactors. They have a lot in common, psychologically, with consumers who are attracted to older brands.” And some consumers simply dig old stuff, instinctively appreciating a brand’s aesthetic without necessarily knowing its back story. “People don’t know who Waldorf is, but they walk into that hotel’s lobby and say, ‘This is cool.’”

That concept is why Carnival—a “modern company in the mid-scale of its industry,” says Hudson—bought Cunard, “an old, distinguished, luxury brand,” and built the Queen Mary 2 in 2003. “The systems are completely modern, but the design and decor are completely traditional. It looks like an old-fashioned ocean liner.”

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A SHA professor and Fulbright scholar examines a little-understood concept: why some consumers want a piece of the past, and how modern-day companies with old brands can sell it to them.
On Dean James Stamas’s desk this summer were the usual stacks of administrative paperwork, a photo taken with smiling young alumni at a recent reception, and a thick black binder labeled “Briefing Book for Chris Muller.”

The binder’s cover sheet was dated June 10, 2010—the day before BU formally announced the hiring of University of Central Florida Professor Christopher Muller to take over Stamas’s long-held deanship at SHA. The briefing book contained a history of the School, a draft of a new strategic plan, assessments of future opportunities, explanations of who does what. “A lot of boring stuff,” says Stamas, “but stuff he’d better know.”

The binder, the summerlong flow of emails and phone calls between Boston and Orlando, and the days Stamas and Muller spent together on campus in August are all evidence of Stamas’s devotion to SHA and to both men’s desire to maintain the School’s momentum through its first major leadership transition.

A 15-Year Legacy

Stamas announced his retirement plans in September 2009, giving BU nearly a year to conduct a search for his replacement. Deciding to step down as dean after more than a decade of productive and fulfilling leadership was difficult, he says, “but I think it’s just as important to decide when to leave a job as when to take it.”

Stamas was appointed the first-ever dean of BU’s School of Hospitality Administration in February 1995, when the School was a division of Metropolitan College. He had already retired from a career in hotel administration that included posts with Hotel Corporation of America and Omni Hotels. A longtime friend of BU’s hospitality program, he was serving as chair of the SHA Advisory Board when the University tapped him for the deanship.

“I came here with several goals,” Stamas says. First, to increase the School’s student body to 400 students. “That would enable us to move in the direction of being a freestanding school at the University.” Second, to move out of Metropolitan College—“that was the wrong positioning for the School”—and become an independent academic unit. Third, to have a facility “that looked as good as our students do.”

“In my arrogance, I thought it would take me three years to get it done,” he says, “but I found out that things don’t move that rapidly in the academic world.”

While the tasks took longer than expected, Stamas did achieve all three of his goals. Enrollment grew steadily under his leadership, and by 2004 SHA had become an independent school, no longer operating under the MET umbrella. The next year, Stamas announced plans to renovate the building at 928 Commonwealth Avenue to make it SHA’s new home.

“Jim is a combination of visionary and pragmatist,” says Irma Mann, who was chair of the SHA Advisory Board at the time. “I’m known that, if we were to be recognized as an outstanding hospitality school, we needed a new facility. The Fuller garage was not going to work.” Renovations were projected to cost mi-
As dean emeritus, Stamas expects to spend time pursuing his interest in World War II military history, serving on boards, continuing his involvement with the Massachusetts Lodging Association and other industry organizations, and—though he won’t retain an office or a faculty position at SHA—doing any work that he thinks SHA should also be doing.

These interactions with students, Stamas says, are what he’ll miss most about being dean. “It’s amazing to me how each year they seem to be smarter, more involved, better prepared to be successful,” he says of SHA students. “Just watching them grow—that’s where all the kicks are.”

Stamas will also miss SHA’s faculty and staff, whom he describes as incredibly loyal to the School and committed to their jobs.

The Path Ahead

That someone will be Christopher Muller, who officially became dean of SHA on August 23. After 15 years, Dean Stamas has left this place in stellar position,” says Muller, noting that his (unofficial) job is now to take a successful school and make it even better.

Muller agrees that graduate education and a larger research portfolio are important next steps for SHA. As a BU major research institution, he says, increasing SHA’s research activities will help the School become “a full partner in the University.” Muller himself has extensive research experience—his résumé lists 25 peer-reviewed journal articles published during his tenure at the Cornell School of Hotel Administration and at the University of Central Florida’s Rosen College of Hospitality Management. He also agrees that developing continuing education programs for hospitality professionals is important for bolstering SHA’s industry ties. “That’s one of the reasons, I think, that President Brown and the search committee were interested in me,” he says. “If I have a specialty, it’s educational.” Muller is a frequent speaker at industry conferences and seminars, and he founded and directed the Center for Multi-Unit Restaurant Management—an educational and research center—at the University of Central Florida.

Muller says BU President Robert Brown has also charged him with raising the profile of SHA on campus, in the nation, and in the world. New research programs—especially ones Muller envisions conducting in collaboration with sociologists, nutritionists, economists, and other academics from across BU—will go a long way in making SHA more prominent on campus, and Muller hopes to use his personal connections to bring the School recognition in the U.S. and around the globe. “I have a fairly high international profile,” he says, “and I’d like to be able to leverage that.” His list of recent conference speeches includes ones delivered at the Congress Nordico del Restaurant in Costa Rica, SEATRADE in Germany, and the European Foodservice Summit (a conference Muller helped launch in Switzerland).

Despite these new areas of focus, under-graduate teaching isn’t likely to suffer under Muller’s leadership. “Chris is an outstanding teacher,” he was Professor of the Year four years in a row at Cornell’s Hotel School,” says SHA Associate Professor Mike Oshins, who has known Muller since they attended high school together in the 1980s. Oshins says he believes the new dean will be a great mentor for his teaching colleagues.

“I think he’ll always be noted as Jim’s major accomplishment,” says EdReck of Marriott International, SHA’s current Advisory Board chair. But he thinks Stamas should also be recognized for strengthening the School’s ties with the hospitality industry and for the “breakfast at Tiffany’s” he gave to students.

Alumna Amy Thomas (’99) says that meeting Stamas while vising BU during her senior year in high school greatly influenced her decision to attend SHA. “He wants to get to know each student individually—to find out what qualifies, experiences, and leadership they will bring to the School,” she says. “He definitely recognized something in me and was instrumental in helping me have an amazing experience in my four years at BU and SHA.”

As dean emeritus, Stamas expects to spend time pursuing his interest in World War II military history, serving on boards, continuing his involvement with the Massachusetts Lodging Association and other industry organizations, and—though he won’t retain an office or a faculty position at SHA—doing anything he can help to bring the School forward. With a firm foundation in place, he says, the School is now poised to expand into research, graduate programs, and executive education. “I see great opportunity for the School”—but the tasks to be accomplished now and the years going to come a few years down the road, says Muller. “I think we’re going to have a great success and will look even better.”
Each year SHA's distinguished lecture series brings hospitality heavyweights to campus to share their stories and insights with SHA students. The spring-semester course draws roughly 100 students and its goal, says Associate Professor Stanley Buchin, is to allow them to learn about industry trends directly from industry leaders. “We also ask speakers to talk about their own careers,” says Buchin, “so students can see there are many paths to the top.”

We spoke to four recent lecturers and asked them to share their words of industry wisdom with Check In readers.

Paul English
Co-Founder and
Chief Technology Officer
Kayak.com

A computer programmer who’s written code for everything from video games to U.S. Airforce projects, Paul English caught the entrepreneurship bug in 1995. Since then he’s launched several technology startups, and in 2004 he helped create Kayak.com, now consistently rated among the top travel search sites on the web.

English offers three pieces of advice for fellow entrepreneurs:

1. Do whatever it takes to recruit the best in the world: “The difference between hiring an A team and an A- team is the difference between a company that makes a million in revenue and a company that makes a billion in revenue.” If you’re not motivated to do the scouring, interviewing, and following up that good recruiting requires, bring in a co-founder who is. “Every ounce of energy you can put into recruiting people who are stronger than you are pays back a million-fold.”

2. Focus on customer relationships: “Every ounce of energy you can put into identifying your customers, getting to know them, understanding the minds of your customers, and with passion. “No matter how popular Asian fusion is, you won’t know it’s not you.”

3. Identify a long-term plan and set short-term priorities: After hosting large-scale parties as a BU student, Seth Greenberg (CAS’92, SHK’92) moved on to promoting and then owning nightclubs (including M-80 on Commonwealth Avenue), and in 1997 he opened his first restaurant, Boston’s Mixtral. He later opened two Manhattan event spaces, Epoch and Capitol, which host exclusive parties for the likes of Louis Vuitton and Angelina Jolie. Greenberg’s latest venture is the Ames Hotel, which opened in downtown Boston in 2009 and for which he co-manages food and beverage operations.

Although his days as king of Boston nightlife are behind him, Greenberg still employs techniques he developed as a nightclub operator.

One of those is to recognize the promotional potential of every aspect of his business—including his employees. He strives to hire people who are promotable and are good promoters themselves. “If you find someone who’s a beautiful model who’s very social, then you want to hire that person to be a host or hostess at your place,” he says. He also issues business cards to his waiters and bartenders so they can help spread the word.

Another technique: invest in creative marketing rather than advertising: “When I first opened Mixtral, instead of putting ads in newspapers or magazines, we decided to put the money on a driver who had a sedan and would take our guests back and forth to area hotels.” The car, he says, made it easy for hotel concierges to recommend Mixtral to guests—and today Mixtral management often uses it to provide rides home as a courtesy for loyal local clients.

Richard Carbone
Chief Executive Officer
Collegiate Hospitality

A 40-year veteran of the hotel industry, Richard Carbone spent two decades working in Hyatt and then Hilton properties around the country before returning to his native Massachusetts to manage The Inn at Harvard for Hilton. In 2004, he established his own company, Collegiate Hospitality, and in 2005 Harvard University awarded him the contracts to manager the Harvard Square Hotel and The Inn at Harvard, where he continues to serve as general manager.

Carbone offers this advice to recent grads just beginning their hotel careers: “Don’t underestimate how valuable you are to a company.” A good general manager is always open to new ideas and knows many of those ideas will come from enthusiastic young employees who see the business through fresh eyes.

Another tip for young hoteliers: don’t be afraid to call a local general manager and ask for a 30-minute informational interview to discuss your career path. “They’re so busy; they’re not going to make time for me,” but a lot of people will open the door to do that.

Carbone advises fellow GMs, “You’ve got to be constantly listening.” Listen to your front-desk staff, the housekeepers, the laundry person, the dishwasher—they often have ideas for improving operations. And spend time listening to your guests, as well. Carbone’s desk is the inn is in the lobby, where he can hear his guests’ front-desk questions (Is parking included? Is Internet included?), which helps him better understand their needs.

By CORINNE STEINBRENNER

Seth Greenberg
Developer
Ames Hotel, Boston

Barbara Lynch
Chef/Owner
Barbara Lynch Gruppe

Barbara Lynch trained under premier Boston chefs Todd English and Michelle Larson (CAS’72) and then opened her own restaurant, No. 9 Park, on Boston’s Beacon Hill in 1998. Now a premier Boston chef herself, Lynch currently oversees eight business ventures—five restaurants (including award-winning B&G Oysters and the newly opened Menton)—a bar, a demonstration kitchen/cookbook store, and a catering company.

The key to successfully balancing so many businesses, says Lynch, is building great teams to help her run them. Once those teams are in place, she does all she can to nurture and retain that talent. “We’ve set up our company to offer our employees as many opportunities to grow and develop professionally as they’re willing to take,” she says. Before opening Menton, for example, she sent the restaurant’s executive chef—who joined Lynch years ago as an intern—to Paris to hone his techniques in Michelin-starred kitchens.

Another secret to her success, says Lynch, is sticking to what she knows and loves—to the type of food she can prepare authentically and with passion. “No matter how popular Asian fusion is, you won’t see me opening that type of restaurant,” she says. “It’s not me.”

Her ultimate tip for running a great restaurant: “Don’t be afraid of change.” She’s constantly thinking about how to tweak and adjust a concept, she says, and of ways to make each of her businesses run better.
Phoenix Porcelli (’11) faced many challenges during her summer 2010 internship in Paris, but the hardest part, she says, was coming home. “The food there is divine. It’s a culture shock to be back,” she says.

Placed with Meadix, a French event-planning company that organizes international meetings, Porcelli stepped off the plane and right into the thick of things. “I arrived at 7:30 p.m. pretty much every day.” Despite the busy schedule, Porcelli managed to make time to try the fireworks on Bastille Day.

Refusing to let the language barrier stop her, she threw herself into event planning, making jokes to break the ice, and it’s hard to be anything but ethic, that people don’t work hard or often, she says. “While in Paris last spring, Scholarship Tuition (CGS’08).”

REFUSING TO LET THE LANGUAGE BARRIER STOP her, she threw herself into event planning, making jokes to break the ice, and it’s hard to be anything but ethic, that people don’t work hard or often, she says. “While in Paris last spring, Scholarship Tuition (CGS’08).”
If you’re looking for a fabulous hotel, you might try the Four Seasons Hong Kong. “It’s the best hotel I’ve ever stayed in,” says Justin Yu (’07), who has seen his share of gorgeous hotels in recent years. Yu began working for Four Seasons Santa Barbara—a 26-acre seaside resort—as a management trainee after his SHA graduation. While there, he made weekend getaways to Four Seasons’ properties in Los Angeles (“an incredible spa”) and Beverly Hills (“great for Sunday brunch”).

Yu has also made excellent use of his employee benefits, recently cashing in complimentary nights at the Four Seasons properties in Cairo, Alexandria, Sharm El Sheikh, and Hong Kong. While the Sharm El Sheikh property was beautiful and relaxing, “it’s a dry heat,” he writes. Email him at ddonofrio@ralcorp.com.

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