

CHECK IN



WINTER 2008

There are **472**
places she'd rather be

Denise Coll brings her natural style
of leadership to the hundreds of Starwood
properties across North America

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Starwood's Star Player
 SHA's board member Denise Coll heads the company's largest division

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CHECK IN

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 School of Hospitality Administration
 for alumni and friends

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From the **DEAN**

Dear Friends,

Your School is doing well—we now have approximately 400 students from around the country and the world. Their academic profile places them at the “head of the class” of students preparing for careers in hospitality.

We have added a new full-time faculty member, Dr. Zoe Ho, profiled in this edition of *Check In*. She is a most welcome addition, and I hope you meet her when you visit the School.

Our School's Advisory Board, chaired by Ed Fuller, president of Marriott International, has accepted the challenge to keep SHA on the cutting edge. Each member is participating on one of five committees: Fundraising, Career Services, Curriculum, Marketing, and Nominating. These committees will make specific recommendations to meet the needs of our students and to strengthen our School's reputation in the industry.

You, too, can help support the School of Hospitality Administration. We welcome your assistance in making vital financial contributions, mentoring our enthusiastic students, and participating in alumni events across the country.

Please contact our development officer, Tracey Sharp, at 617-353-1011 or tsharp@bu.edu to make your gift, arrange a tour of the building, inquire about reunions, or join the SHA Alumni Association. We look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

James T. Stamas

Dubai—Land of Opportunity

SHA alum thrives in the world's fastest-growing tourism destination.



By Corinne Kator

iStockphoto



The world's tallest building. The world's largest artificial islands. The world's longest arch bridge. The world's first luxury underwater hotel. They're all under construction in one city.

“There's so much going on here, and that's the charm and the beauty of Dubai,” says René Beil ('97, MET'04), who, after just nine months of living and working in this ever-changing city of superlatives, is considered an old-timer.

Life in Dubai? “There's nothing much you can compare it to,” he says. “The pace is like New York, only more intense—if you can imagine more intensity than in New York. The infrastructure is like Shanghai, but Shanghai has a longer history.”

Beil spends his 14-hour days on the 30th floor of Emirates Tower One—the 12th tallest building in the world. He is vice president of asset management for the real estate and hospitality division of Dubai Investment Group, the investment arm of Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum's government entity, Dubai Holding. His job, he says, is to take care of Dubai Holding's real estate and hotel asset portfolio, which includes Dubai's famous Burj Al Arab and New York's Essex House Hotel.

“The pace is like New York, only more intense—if you can imagine more intensity than in New York. The infrastructure is like Shanghai, but Shanghai has a longer history.”

Asset management is a fascinating career, Beil says, and he highly recommends it as a goal for ambitious SHA students and young alumni. Deep-pocketed investors and financial institutions, he explains, buy hotel properties and then seek asset managers to help maximize those investments. The asset managers select

the right hotel operators to run the hotels, monitor the operators' performance, control capital expenditures and budgeting, oversee any renovations, and help identify new investment opportunities.

“You represent the owner in every possible way,” says Beil. “It's like it's your business and your money. It's a lot of responsibility.” It's a responsibility that Beil, at 38, is well qualified to handle.

He understands the intricacies of business, having earned a master's degree in financial economics and launched a successful closely held start-up. He understands the complexities of running a hotel, having studied at SHA and worked in several hotels, including the Boston Four Seasons. He knows the importance of cultural sensitivity, having been born in Singapore and then having lived in Europe and North America.



And he speaks five languages: English (“It's the language of business”), Dutch (“I spent much of my childhood in Holland”), German (“I went to German schools”), French (he worked in hotels and restaurants in Switzerland, France, and Belgium before coming to SHA), and a little Spanish. He's also studying Arabic and hopes to be fluent within a year.

The Middle East, he says, is the most dynamic place in the world today. “The rest of the world is slowing down,” he says, “but over here, there is no stopping.”

“It's fascinating,” he continues. “I recommend to anybody who is in a position to do it to come to Dubai.”

But those who set their sights on this shining city in the Arabian Desert should be warned—sleep is a low priority here, and the burnout rate is high. Even so, Beil says, “I'm not going anywhere anytime soon. There's a lot of opportunity out there, and the more you learn about it, the more opportunity you see.” ■

Photo above courtesy of René Beil
 Photo of Burj Al Arab courtesy of Jumeirah Hotel Group

Stationery Allure

New accounting prof Zoe Ho explains how collecting hotel letterhead got her hooked on hospitality and why students shouldn't be scared of crunching numbers.

By Andrew Thurston

Postcards, envelopes, notepads, pencils—if there's a piece of free stationery to be had from a hotel, Zoe Ho probably has it. The School of Hospitality Administration's newest faculty member has been building a collection since her school days in Taiwan.

"My father got to travel a lot for business, and every time he came home, he brought back all this beautiful stationery from the hotels," says Ho. "I loved it so much, I said, 'Wow, I must work in the hotels where they can have this.' I still collect it."

Now, after a decade in the industry in Asia and the United States, and fresh from earning a doctorate in hospitality administration, she's joined SHA as an assistant professor. With a résumé that boasts managing at hotels in Taipei, auditing for Westin in Florida, and writing a dissertation study that put international hoteliers under the spotlight, Ho hopes her operations and overseas experience can help students launch hospitality careers of their own.

She teaches Financial Accounting and Managerial Accounting. According to Associate Professor Stan Buchin, students will benefit from a teacher with "outstanding accounting and financial skills," although Ho admits they are subjects that can cause some to run scared.

"I know a lot of students are afraid of numbers," says Ho. "They think, 'I can rely on computers for financial reports.' But the number alone won't tell you things. You need to have the judgment and management feel to know what this number means to you. For example, should you be happy if you make one million dollars? Not if the industry average is three million dollars."

While Financial Accounting will give students the basics of recording and summarizing business transactions, Managerial Accounting will enable them to take their study to the next level, teaching such topics as cost-volume-profit analysis, contribution-margin pricing, and budgeting.

Having spent the first part of her career in the hotel industry, Ho is keen to help students make the jump from their textbooks to the lobby. After watching countless hospitality rookies walk away after just a couple of weeks, she says her major challenge is to "bridge the gap between the classroom and the workplace." She thinks some new graduates get discouraged because they expect to be running hotels and restaurants from day one.

"They shouldn't give up so fast," she says. "Most fail when doing the entry-level jobs, but sometimes to become a manager, you need to have that experience. If you've never tried those jobs, how can you tell your employees to do the right thing?"

In fact, it was the years of watching students stumble, struggle, and moan their way through internships that first prompted Ho to take up teaching. She made her move in 2002, joining the De Lin Institute in Taiwan's capital, Taipei, before moving to the States and Texas Tech for her PhD.

"When I saw the interns, I wondered, 'What's going on in the education system? Why don't they like being in a hotel?' I decided it was time to transition from working in a hotel to teaching people how to work happily in the industry."

Ho may also be a handy source of advice for students looking to taste life in a different country. Her doctoral dissertation was based on what it takes to be what she calls a "hotel expatriate." She traveled the world speaking to executives who'd left their homes behind to work abroad, and found the "certain personality you need in order to be successful in an international climate."

"They shouldn't give up so fast. Most fail when doing the entry-level jobs, but sometimes to become a manager, you need to have that experience."

Ho says there are a "big-five set of personality traits" of those likely to succeed abroad—extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness. She also mentions a sixth factor more directly linked to the hospitality industry—something that might help explain why she's so eager for students to taste life on the lower rungs of the career ladder: "Professional orientation includes personal characteristics such as being hands-on and being focused on a hotel career."

For now, Ho's own career focus is being redirected. And while she admits she'll miss the daily ebb and flow of the hotel lobby—if not the demanding guests—the only other thing likely to suffer while she teaches is a stationery collection so big it has to be housed on two continents. ■

Curriculum Revisited

SHA has launched five new courses. They were unveiled following a curriculum review that took in benchmarking against rival schools, student focus groups, and a study of the latest scholarly thinking on course design. An advisory board of alumni and industry representatives also had a say in the new curriculum.

Changes include the introduction of three required courses in hospitality leadership, revenue management and technology, and lodging operations and technology, plus new electives in asset management and professional development.

"These are changes in direction to pick up on new issues and problems that have arisen in the industry," says Associate Professor Stan Buchin. "It'll give graduates some new skills, but we also reaffirmed that our major focus was to train people for operations positions with the ultimate objective that they could rise to lead their facilities."

How you can help

If you'd like to be involved in shaping the School's curriculum, contact shaalum@bu.edu.

SHA's Korean Connection

South Korea has the world's 13th largest economy but attracts just 6 million tourists a year. One of those hoping Korean tourism can begin to match the country's economic power is visiting academic and Senior Research Associate Eun-Gyu Lee. He's spending two years with SHA to look at ways of boosting the number of visitors to his hometown of Ulsan on Korea's southeast coast.

"Boston is similar to Ulsan and has the kind of tourist industry we'd like—our city has a river, faces the sea, and has many heritage sites linked to whales," says Lee, a fellow at the Ulsan Development Institute and an adjunct professor at the city's university. "We want to develop tourism around that cultural heritage with museums, aquariums, and whale-watching trips."

While in Boston, he's also sharing his findings with SHA and giving guest lectures. Lee is full of admiration for the School and hopes his visit is the first step in a lasting cultural exchange between Boston and Ulsan.

—AT

Starwood's

Star Player

A combination of business savvy and people skills make this SHA Advisory Board member an invaluable addition to Starwood's leadership team.

By Corinne Kator



Photo by Len Rubenstein Photography

Denise Coll made what was arguably the best strategic decision of her career during her sophomore year in college. "I started as a phys ed major with the intent to teach," she says, "but this was the mid 1970s, and teaching jobs were few and far between."

So the proud South Boston native abandoned the idea of teaching P.E. and started searching the University of Massachusetts, Amherst campus for a more promising career path. "I had worked for Howard Johnson while I was in high school," she says. "That led me to the hospitality program, and the rest is history."

Today Coll exercises her talents as a sharp business strategist and an intuitive manager as president of the North American division of Starwood Hotels and Resorts. She also serves on the School of Hospitality Administration's Advisory Board, helping connect SHA's students and faculty to the hospitality industry.

In the Corner Office

From her orderly office at Starwood headquarters in White Plains, N.Y., Coll oversees operations of more than 470 hotels under nine brand names in the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean. Hers is the largest division within Starwood, with \$14 billion in annual revenue. She is responsible for maintaining Starwood's market share, increasing profits, ensuring quality, and enlarging the company's footprint by developing new properties and signing new franchise agreements.

Some days she spends hours sitting around conference tables with other senior executives. "I don't see it so much as a lot of meetings," she says, "as a lot of working with teams."

Since Coll's promotion to division president in January, she and her teams have completed some impressive work. "One of the projects we just finished was a three-year strategic plan that includes a goal to grow to 700 hotels by 2011," she says.

"We've also done some work focused on understanding the efficiencies of our hotels," she adds. That project involved analyzing data from across the division to identify the hotels operating most efficiently. "We used our Six Sigma resources to work with the most efficient hotels," she says, "to document their best practices and then transfer those practices to the less efficient hotels."

In the Field

What Coll loves most about her job is the time she spends in the field visiting Starwood properties. The operations and budget reviews she conducts on property are important, she says, but the real purpose of her trips is communication. "My visits are less agenda-driven and more about getting to know our leadership teams, knowing the GMs personally, building relationships," she says.

And, according to her Starwood colleagues, this is where Coll shines.

"When she walks through a hotel, it's absolutely astounding how many of the associates know her and how many of the associates she knows by name," says Colleen Keating, general manager of the Westin Waltham-Boston.

"She's not only smart and has good business sense," adds Mark Anderson, general manager of the Sheraton Boston, "but she also has a way of making people around her feel special. She's approachable and warm—important traits for a senior leader."

Keating recalls a Starwood corporate volunteer day at a Massachusetts park when Coll was the regional vice president. "Denise was right there," she says, "in her jeans and sneakers, picking up trash along with the rest of us. I had never seen an SVP do that before."

Anderson and Keating both praise Coll's gift for pushing employees to improve without being overly critical, a management style that inspires employees to excel. "I wouldn't say Denise is easy to work for—that would be an insult," Keating says. "She's a pleasure to work for. You want to come through for her."

Want to Follow in Denise Coll's footsteps?

Here's her advice

Learn the fundamentals. Get an education and build a foundation of knowledge. "And think about an advanced degree. At the end of the day, these are big businesses and we need hoteliers who are solid business people."

Find mentors. "Ensure you are working for and with people who can teach you and are willing to teach you."

Take risks. Be willing to make some nontraditional career moves to broaden your experience.

Love the business. "The purpose of our business is to serve others. You have to get excited about that purpose."

A word to women in hospitality: "I don't believe that success is gender specific, particularly today. Women have the ability to set their sights on the work or the job they want to do, and it's achievable."

On a Firm Foundation

Coll has refined her special blend of business sense and people skills over 30 years in the hotel industry. After college, she got a job as a guest services agent at the Sheraton Boston. She spent the next 20 years with ITT Sheraton, alternating work in the field in Massachusetts, Colorado, and Utah with assignments at corporate headquarters. She worked in operations and human resources, and even spent several years in a technology role rebuilding the company's central reservation system.

"I always felt that broadening and building my foundation was as important as moving up," says Coll. "It's important to balance forward momentum with broadening momentum."

In 1998, ITT Sheraton was acquired by Starwood. Coll had recently completed her MBA and decided the acquisition was an opportune time to make a change—to broaden her experience beyond Sheraton.

She joined Boston's Seaport Companies as chief operating officer and was soon named managing director of the Seaport Hotel and World Trade Center, in addition to her other duties. "Working for an independent forced me to think differently from how I had inside a major corporation," she says. "I had to be more resourceful in how to get things done."

That lesson has served Coll well since her return to Starwood four years ago and is now invaluable, she says, as she leads Starwood's North American division through the current economic downturn. In fact, she says, grappling with economic issues has been her biggest challenge since her promotion to division president.

Coll wouldn't have to worry about maintaining profit margins in a down economy had she followed her original plan of becoming a physical education teacher, but she has no regrets about making the switch. "I love the service business," she says. "I love the activity, the diversity, and the challenge our business provides. I have never looked back." ■

People, Variety Make Hospitality Fun

By Patrick Kennedy

Choosing SHA was a “no-brainer,” says Jenny Back ('09), now a senior and co-chair of the 2009 Class Gift campaign. Business sense runs in her family, and “hospitality perfectly fits my personality,” she says. “It may be clichéd to say this, but it’s about the people. I like the people I get to work with in this industry.” Finally, being from the New York area, “I wanted to go to school in a city—not in a suburb, or in the middle of nowhere.”

“It’s about the people. I like the people I get to work with in this industry.”

Since enrolling at SHA, Back has worked in almost every facet of the business, and as far from home as she ever expected to find herself. In fall 2008, she traveled to Australia, where she worked in HR at the InterContinental Sydney. “It was so much fun,” she says. “I got to meet so many cool friends, from all over the place. I still keep in touch with them.”



This past summer—“maybe my best summer ever”—Back worked in operations at the New York City Sheraton, her third Starwood property. “I’ve been very loyal to Starwood,” she says.

One of her bigger projects was helping to develop a manual that management now uses to train front desk agents.

“I created quizzes and a scavenger hunt,” she says, the latter a fun way for rookies to learn their way around the 1,755-room hotel. “The property is so big, and when you’re at the front desk, these questions are thrown at you—‘Where is this restaurant? What are its hours?’” (Back learned that on a trial-by-fire first day behind the desk.) “And you need to know what you’re selling.”

“There’s no such thing as a typical day” in hospitality, she says. “It’s crazy! But that’s what’s fun about it: every day is different.” ■

Photo above: After working at the New York City Sheraton and the InterContinental in Sydney, Australia, student Jenny Back says she’s learned to love the unpredictability of the hotel industry. Photo courtesy of SHA.

Students Tell Us

What’s Hot

- Sedans
- Going green
- Bikram yoga
- High School Musical
- Gossip Girl
- Michael Phelps in Speedos
- Jonas Brothers
- Lil’ Wayne
- Rock Band
- iTunes
- Blu-ray
- Facebook
- iPhone
- High-waisted wide leg
- High boots
- Beer Connoisseur
- Papa John’s, using BU Convenience Points
- BoltBus

What’s Not

- SUVs
- Looking green
- Traditional yoga
- Grease
- Gossiping girls
- Arnold Schwarzenegger in Speedos
- Hanson
- 50 Cent
- Guitar Hero
- CDs
- DVD
- MySpace
- BlackBerry
- Too much leg
- Cowboy boots
- Wine Connoisseur
- Dominoes, using BU Convenience Points
- Fung Wah

Preparing for Launch



The elegant Mandarin Oriental opened its doors in Boston’s Back Bay in October with several SHA alumni on staff. During the hectic days before the hotel’s grand opening, three of them took a break to speak with *Check In*.

Heidi Blumhof ('00) CATERING SALES MANAGER

Responsibilities: Booking, detailing and supervising events, with a focus on weddings and other social gatherings
Hired: Seven months before opening day
First project: assisting with the creation of hotel banquet menus
Key to the job: “Working in events is all about relationship building. You’re helping people plan their weddings and anniversary parties, so you have to build trust and rapport.”
Favorite feature of the Mandarin: The cheese room at Asana, the hotel’s restaurant. “It’s full of beautiful cheeses from all over the world. They’re all kept at just the right temperature so they’ll be perfect when we serve them to our guests.”
Best SHA experience: Interviewing the HR director of Harvard Square’s Charles Hotel for a class project. “She later hired me to be a hostess at the hotel’s restaurant. I ended up working at the Charles for nine years.”
Long-term goal: “To start my own business someday in party and event planning.”



Mary Hull ('89) DIRECTOR OF CATERING

Responsibilities: Overseeing all catering functions of the hotel, from marketing and sales to detailing and executing events
Hired: Ten months before opening day
First project: I performed a complete marketing and pricing analysis of the community to understand our competitors.
Before the Mandarin: 17 years at the Westin Copley Place in Boston
Opening a new hotel: “It’s a little bit like your freshman year of college—a lot of people are thrown together to achieve a goal, and they create wonderful relationships and memories along the way.”
Favorite feature of the Mandarin: The ballroom. “It’s smartly designed, and it’s breathtaking. I can’t wait to host our first event there.”
Favorite SHA memory: Taking a food history course from legendary chef Jacques Pépin
Career advice: “You have to be passionate about what you do. If you love what you do, then the long hours don’t feel like work.”

Chris McAdam ('07) ASSISTANT EXECUTIVE HOUSEKEEPER

Responsibilities: “I’m the Number Two in the housekeeping department. I oversee 40 colleagues, prepare for VIP guest arrivals, and coordinate the day-to-day operations of housekeeping.”
Hired: Two months before opening day
First project: “They put a stack of résumés on my desk and said, ‘We need to fill 40 positions in the next few weeks.’”
Biggest challenge: Time management. “Recruiting, writing policies and training plans, setting up new technology systems, planning the minute details of the rooms—we’re juggling all of that at once.”
Favorite feature of the Mandarin: The bar and restaurant. “It’s going to be the hottest place in town—and that’s coming from a rooms person, not a food and beverage person!”
Most helpful SHA experience: Group projects. “They were horrendous, but they really did prepare me for being part of an opening team.”
After the grand opening: A sigh of relief, and then some sleep. ■

—CK

The New Face of SHA's Alumni Relations

By Patrick Kennedy

Tracey Sharp (COM'01) joined SHA last semester as Development Officer. She's now hard at work managing the School's fund-raising efforts and strengthening its alumni network. "I consider the students and alums to be my clients," Sharp says. "I'm



Tracey Sharp (COM'01), looks forward to strengthening SHA's alumni network in her new role as the School's development officer. Photo courtesy of SHA.

working to help them transition into the real world and then, hopefully, stay connected to the School while exploring the industry around the country and around the world."

This year, she says, "I most look forward to getting out and meeting alums—both on campus and on the road with Dean Stamas."

It's been a return to familiar ground for Sharp. While a student at the College of Communication, she took a SHA course, Intro to Hospitality, with Assistant Professor Mike Oshins, "and loved it," she says.

Following graduation, she worked in event planning at BU's Castle on Bay State Road. As Castle coordinator, "I lived and breathed special events," Sharp recalls. The elegant former mansion "is really *the* space on campus for University and social functions—I coordinated more than 100 weddings."

Next, Sharp managed catering sales for the Charles Hotel, in Harvard Square. "The hotel is essentially on Harvard's campus—I worked very closely with Harvard's alumni relations and development teams, managing reunions and other events." The position at SHA "is a perfect fit," Sharp says. "I'm quite a people person, and that's essential in this industry." ■

NEWS & NOTES Send us your news at shaalum@bu.edu

Geoff Gardner ('94) recently opened his third restaurant, Sel de la Terre on Boylston Street, adjacent to the new Mandarin Oriental, Boston.

Amy Thomas ('99) of Jersey City, N.J., is a patient-centered care specialist at New York-Presbyterian Hospital, guiding managers to improve patient experience. Thomas is also a part-time MBA student at Baruch College's Zicklin School of Business, concentrating in finance and entrepreneurship. She is currently chair of the New York City SHA Alumni Board. If you would like to join the Board or become a member of the NYC Alumni Network, send her an e-mail at thomasamy2@yahoo.com.

Melanie Downing-Jones ('01) of Boston, Mass., married Coilín Jones of Ashbourne, Ireland, on June 7, 2008, at Boston University's Marsh Chapel. Fellow alumni in attendance included **Melinda Zhu ('01)**, **Lesley Yung ('01)**, **Rachel Bouley (SAR'00, '02)**, **Elissa Kelley (SAR'01)**, **Christine Heller (COM'01)**, **Kristin Howley (CAS'02)**, **Heidi Scherbeck (COM'03)**, **Monica Arrigo (SAR'00, '02)**, and **Julie Koskey (SAR'01, '03)**. A reception followed at the Omni Parker House Hotel, where Downing-Jones works as business travel sales manager.

Andrew Vigue ('01) of Boston, Mass., was recently promoted to assistant director of conference services at Boston University, after serving four years as manager of conference operations. Vigue also chairs the SHA Boston Alumni Board.

Judith Rambo (Coward) Clark ('02) and Stephen Clark of Dedham, Mass., were married at the Codman Estate in Lincoln, Mass., on July 19, 2008. Bridesmaids included **Namita Raina-Haag (COM'02, SMG'09)** and **Lisa (Sullivan) Easterbooks (CAS'02, SED'07)**. Other BU alums were groomsmen **Michael Clark (CAS'07)**, **Paul Hanlon (COM'01)**, **Dan Leonard (COM'01)**, **Jeff Farrar (SMG'01)**, **Carl Tortola (COM'02)**, **Erica Manczuk (COM'01)**, and **Jennifer Close (CAS'03, GRS'03)**.

Shirley Chan ('03) of New York, N.Y., was promoted to financial analyst for Aramark at Goldman Sachs. Chan has worked with Aramark for three years and in her spare time volunteers for the American Red Cross of Greater New York on the Disaster Action Team and for the Starlight Starbright organization's Great Escapes Program.

Katie Finamore ('03) of Kenmore, N.Y., joined Niagara University as director of experiential operations in June 2008. In her new role she oversees alumni affairs for the College of Hospitality & Tourism Management and works with industry leaders to create internships and coordinate speaker series. You can e-mail Katie at kfinamore@niagara.edu.

Chelsea Howard ('04) relocated to New York City to join Citigroup Executive Services as a business analyst. She provides project management and support for Citigroup's global hospitality-related operations that cater to the firm's business requirements, including corporate dining, conferencing, event planning, and aviation.

Erin Bennett ('08) of Victor, N.Y., began her career as catering coordinator at The New York Palace Hotel in June 2008. She joins fellow alums **Jeffrey Selden ('91)**, **Megan Skura ('04)**, **Nicholas Farina ('08)**, and **Edward Duess ('08)** at the luxury property in Midtown Manhattan.

FIND A JOB—OR AN EMPLOYEE

SHA's Career Services Office is excited to announce the launch of its new career website, SHA Trak. Alumni are encouraged to use the site to search for job openings and to advertise available jobs or internships to SHA students and alumni.

REGISTER TODAY!

Job seekers: www.myinterfase.com/bu-hospitality/student
Employers: www.myinterfase.com/bu-hospitality/employer

Thank you!

Boston University School of Hospitality Administration extends a very special thank-you to those alumni, parents, and friends who made gifts from July 1, 2007, to June 30, 2008.

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