

## **Hospitality Industry Awards Shine Spotlight on Customer Services**

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Lee County hospitality industry awards shine spotlight on superb customer service

LEE COUNTY, FL – For dedication to exceptional customer service to achieve business success, 10 workers, along with two local residents, were saluted by receiving the Elaine McLaughlin Outstanding Hospitality Service Awards at a ceremony in Fort Myers today.

Sponsored by the Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau (VCB), the program acknowledges employees within the hospitality and allied industries who positively influence a visitor or resident's experience. The "E" Awards is a collaboration with various local businesses to increase public awareness of, and to encourage and support, the exceptional service excellence being provided by Lee County hospitality professionals.

From 352 nominations, those selected for their excellence in service and dedication included:

- Denise Desir, Sundial Beach & Golf Resort, Sanibel Island
- Terry and Keith Felder, SeaRocket USA, Fort Myers Beach
- Cheryl Zubrycky, HMS Host Marriott
- Daisy Villanueva, Miromar Outlets, Estero
- Carol Marshall, Pine Island Taxi, Pine Island
- Todd Smith, Colonial Bank, Bonita Springs
- Todd DeVries, Ron Seals, and Tim Wilton, Realmark Management Services, Cape Coral

For summaries on the individual stories of the above mentioned award recipients, log onto [http://www.eawards.org/2008\\_winners.htm](http://www.eawards.org/2008_winners.htm) .

The Honor of Distinction award for best overall representative of outstanding service for the year was given to Mitch and Myrna Howard of Alva.

Although these local residents do not work in the tourism industry, their generosity with someone in true need exemplified the spirit of hospitality.

On Dec. 8, 2007, Army Sgt. Daniel Beougher, 23, an Iraq War veteran who received 11 awards and medals, including a Purple Heart, was killed in a car crash in Cape Coral.

His wife, Lauren Beougher, was critically injured in the wreck. The Beoughers were traveling to meet family for the holidays after Daniel

returned home to North Fort Myers from the Middle East, where he served one tour of duty in Afghanistan and two tours in Iraq.

After a stay at Lee Memorial Hospital in Fort Myers, it was decided that Lauren needed the support of her family in Delaware, but transportation posed a serious financial hurdle. Hundreds of southwest Floridians offered assistance, but Mitch and Myrna Howard stepped forward and drove their 40-foot RV to the hospital to pick up the widow and comfortably deliver her to Delaware, so family could help her heal physically and emotionally.

Media coverage resulted in more than 200 calls and e-mails from people extending assistance. Even a jet equipped with a medical staff was presented, but Lauren's punctured lung prevented her from being transported by air. The Howards stated, "We're happy the Lord chose us."

Named for former Lee County VCB Executive Director Elaine McLaughlin, the "E" Awards exemplifies her core belief that providing outstanding customer service is one of the major cornerstones of success for all businesses. Nomination categories included: Accommodations, Attractions, Restaurants, Retail, Transportation, Good Samaritan and Other Services/Businesses. Winners were chosen by a steering committee of business representatives.

"High level customer service is essential to repeat business," said Suya Davenport, VCB executive director. "Whether they are visitors or local residents, the degree of service a business provides its customers is critical to the business' success or failure. The recognition these people earned is very well deserved."

Sponsors of this year's "E" Awards include The News-Press, Geraci Travel – Ports of Call Cruises & Tours, SunStream Hotels & Resorts, Getaway Marina, Key West Express, and The Veranda restaurant.

Summaries of 2008 E-Awards category winners' stories

**ACCOMMODATIONS:** Denise Desir, Sundial Beach & Golf Resort, Sanibel Island

As Denise Desir was leaving the Sundial Beach & Golf Resort after a day at work, an upset guest spoke with Denise explaining that her elderly father was missing and must have wandered off of the property. A search ensued by the police, fire department, hotel staff, and the family. On the way driving home, Desir spotted a disoriented man on the Sanibel Causeway who she believed was the missing gentleman. The man was sweating and clearly in distress, so Desir gave him water. She called the hotel to verify that the gentleman was in fact the lost family member. She brought him back to the hotel to be reunited with his family. Desir's care and compassion overwhelmed the family.

**ATTRACTIONS:** Terry and Keith Felder, SeaRocket USA, Fort Myers Beach

A day camp of 18 children from across the state visited Fort Myers Beach

specifically to see dolphins while riding aboard the 70 mph, cigarette-style powerboat, SeaRocket USA. Due to the number of children, the group had to be split into two separate excursions. The first group returned from their thrill ride ecstatic that they were entertained by plenty of dolphins. The second group returned clearly disappointed that they saw no dolphins. Although the high-speed boat uses a lot of fuel, SeaRocket USA operators the Felders didn't think twice about taking the group out again, determined to find dolphins to delight the children. This time, the dolphins performed. SeaRocket USA did not charge for the additional trip, having actually lost money due to the additional fuel. The Felders refused the group's offer of additional payment and voiced that seeing the elated children was compensation enough.

**GOOD SAMARITAN:** Todd DeVries, Ron Seals, and Tim Wilton, Realmark Management Services, Cape Coral

A visitor was tying up his boat in a marina when he gasped for breath and collapsed on the dock. A person nearby called 911. A maintenance man for Realmark Management Services who was working on a building roof witnessed the event and called a first-aid certified co-worker. They rushed to the scene, joined by another co-worker, trying to aid the victim with a portable defibrillator and CPR. Within nine minutes, an ambulance arrived. Through a combination of employee training, teamwork, and quick response in a life-threatening situation, the three nominees were true heroes and played a critical role in saving the gentleman's life.

**OTHER BUSINESSES/SERVICES:** Todd Smith, Colonial Bank, Bonita Springs

Todd Smith, an employee with Colonial Bank in Bonita Springs, became concerned and suspicious when an elderly customer missed a scheduled appointment. Smith decided to go the woman's home and with the help of a neighbor, managed to enter the home and discovered that she was lying in her bathtub for two days after suffering a mild heart attack. Smith and the neighbor helped the dehydrated woman sit upright in the bathtub and called for an ambulance. The modest bank employee never shared the story with any of his co-workers. In her nomination, the woman praised Smith for his care and compassion saying, "If not for my hero, who knows what would have happened."

**RESTAURANTS:** Cheryl Zubrycky, HMS Host Marriott

This example of excellence in customer service demonstrates the important element of consistency. Zubrycky's consideration and helpfulness to her restaurant guests was lauded in two examples. The first, she saw a customer in personal distress and offered a hug and pat while the customer got her emotions under control. In another example, Zubrycky was waiting on a table of patrons that included a child with special needs. The server showed the child extra attention by asking her if she would like to assist with operating the cash register to prepare the receipt. Zubrycky showed the little girl how to operate the register, which turned out to be an exciting experience for the child. After the server escorted the child back to the table, Zubrycky gave

the child a special \$2 bill and told her it was her tip for helping at the cash register. The family and the little girl were truly glowing after Zubrycky's display of care and kindness.

**RETAIL:** Daisy Villanueva, Miromar Outlets, Estero

This story illustrates how putting others first on the job equals extraordinary customer service. Villanueva was leaving work after her shift at a Miromar Outlets store when she noticed a Columbian couple in a difficult situation. Their cell phone was out of power and they needed to contact family to pick them up. Villanueva noticed that the couple's English wasn't very good, but fortunately, Villanueva was fluent in their language and generously offered use of her cell phone. Although Villanueva had clocked-out, she stayed with the couple until their family arrived to ensure that all would turn out well.

**TRANSPORTATION:** Carol Marshall, Pine Island Taxi, Pine Island

The nominator praised Carol Marshall's customer service skills as ". . . unselfish acts of kindness," and described her as ". . . an angel in disguise as a taxi driver."

A couple and their five children arrived in Lee County for vacation. One child, 2 years old, had a severe neurological disease and significant medical needs. The mother forgot to pack an important piece of medical equipment, a "G-tube extension," used for administering medication, resulting in a difficult flight for the child. While the airport's EMT personnel frantically made calls to locate this piece of equipment, taxi driver Marshall also made calls, remained calm, and assured the upset mother that the problem would be solved and the family would not miss the day's last ferry to North Captiva Island.

Marshall drove the family to a children's hospital to pick up the needed medical equipment, continuing to comfort and reassure the family that all would be fine and "everything will work out." Next stop was the grocery store, then on to the marina, where the family caught the ferry in time. Marshall refused any extra gratuity; instead, hugging the family and promising to take them back to the airport after their vacation.

Unfortunately, the child became increasingly sick with EMT personnel arriving on the island and determining she needed emergency room treatment. An ambulance met the father and child on the mainland. Amazingly, Marshall was there with the ambulance, ready to lend support. She even called the mother offering to come to the island to help with the other children, all under age nine. The mother declined the kind offer, but Marshall promised to bring the father and child back to the marina when they were finished at the hospital.

The child was discharged after 10 p.m., and Marshall not only picked up the family members at the hospital, but took them to a pharmacy to fill a prescription, then drove on to the marina. It was after midnight and the ferry

captain got out of bed to take the father and child to North Captiva. The ferry company also called the mother with reassurance that they would get the family wherever and whenever they needed to go. Even the ferry company would not accept payment, acting out of the goodness of their hearts.

The family made it through a long week; unfortunately, the sick child never became well enough to enjoy herself. On the ferry ride back to the mainland, the caring captain wished them well. Without being asked, Marshall was waiting for the family at the dock with literally open arms, ready to drive to the airport.

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