



Delicious Tradition Of Gourmet Dinners Returns To UNH In March

Hospitality Management Department Honors Tom Walsh With Hotelier Of The Year Award

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DURHAM, N.H. -- Students at the nation's second-oldest hospitality management program will put their classroom and on-the-job knowledge and skills to a very public test this March with the return of the University of New Hampshire's popular Gourmet Dinners Friday, March 3, and Saturday, March 4, 2006.

The Department of Hospitality Management at the Whittemore School of Business and Economics will welcome alumni, hospitality leaders and friends to campus for a weekend-long grand revival of the department's capstone course, an event that will conclude with the presentation of the UNH's first Hotelier of the Year Award to Thomas Walsh, founder of Ocean Properties.

"The Gourmet Dinners represent the hotel management student's ability to take the classroom and operational knowledge from working in the hospitality industry and apply it to creating, marketing, planning, managing, and executing a successful event," said Doug Ridge, '85, general manager of the Chicago Marriott Downtown.

The Gourmet Dinners Friday, March 3, and Saturday, March 4, begin at 6 p.m. in Huddleston Hall with a cocktail hour, and dinner starting at 7 p.m. The Hotelier of the Year Award will be presented following the Saturday dinner March 4.

Prior to Saturday's dinner, the university will host two professional development sessions, a lunch reception and networking opportunity with senior managers and executives from leading hospitality businesses. Lynne Dougherty '78, senior vice president, franchise at Starwood Hotels, and Craig Mance, vice president, brand performance and franchise development, Hilton Hotels, will present sessions on franchising. A silent auction also will be held each evening.

Raymond Goodman, professor of hospitality management and chair of the UNH Hospitality Management Department, said alumni were instrumental in bringing the Gourmet Dinners back to UNH. "When we talk to our alumni, all of them tell us that their most memorable undergraduate experience was the Gourmet Dinners. The Gourmet Dinner course had been a key element in the curriculum, and the combination of the support of David May, director of University Hospitality Services, and the availability of Huddleston Hall as an elegant event center allowed us to resurrect these spectacular evenings," Goodman said.

For students, the Gourmet Dinners create lifelong friendships with hospitality management

classmates generated by the camaraderie and personal gratification of putting on such a large, high-profile event. "You channel all your energy that semester on putting on the Gourmet Dinner, and after the kitchen is cleaned and the dining room cleared, you are totally exhausted and ready to check yourself in to the infirmary...but not until after the traditional Gourmet Dinner Party," Ridge said.

Walsh, founder of Ocean Properties Limited, will be accepting the university's highest honor for a hospitality professional, the newly established Hotelier of the Year award, which recognizes outstanding achievement in and contributions to the hospitality industry. Ocean Properties, Ltd. is one of the largest privately held hotel operating and development companies in the United States, owning and/or operating more than 100 hotels and approximately 20,000 guest rooms in the United States and Canada.

"Ocean Properties/Ocean Management and the Walsh Family have been fantastic partners with and generous donors to the Hospitality Management program over the years. The company has consistently hired many of our graduating seniors, giving them senior executive positions early in their managerial careers. This is aided in part because students enrolled for the degree in hospitality management have the opportunity to work in one of three Ocean Properties hotels in the New Hampshire seacoast," Goodman said.

A resident of North Hampton, N.H., Walsh began his career establishing a small warehouse in Bangor, Maine, the Maine Motel Supply, after working door-to-door with his father, Paddy, who came to America from Ireland at the age of 12 after stowing away on a ship. Walsh built his first hotel in Brewer, Maine, in the late 1960s, The Plaza Hotel, and a popular seasonal motel and restaurant on the Maine seacoast, The Lobster House. He built Maine's first franchised Holiday Inn and continued to develop hotels in Maine and Eastern Canada.

In 1975, Walsh formed Ocean Properties, Ltd., and purchased five hotels in Florida. In the succeeding 30 years, Ocean Properties developed and operated more than 100 hotels in Florida and throughout North America as well as numerous commercial shopping centers, apartment complexes, residential housing developments and the only private Cruiseport on the east coast in Key West Florida. Walsh was first to introduce the all-inclusive "mini vacation." He took a 27-acre island 10 minutes off Key West and developed it into the Sunset Key Cottages resort. Ocean Properties also bought and restored the 125-year-old Wentworth by the Sea Hotel in New Hampshire that had been closed for 25 years.

The seven-course dinner is being presented under the student leadership of Laura Spofford Kenny, '07. "The pressure on these students is intense as always but will be magnified 10-fold with the high-profile executives who will be attending this dinner, including the University System of New Hampshire Board of Trustees, the Whittemore School dean's executive board, and key industry leaders and alums," Goodman said.

Tickets for the dinner are \$50 a person and 10-seat sponsor tables are \$5,000. Tickets go on sale to the public Feb. 10, 2006, and may be ordered at the MUB ticket office. Call 603-862-2290. The MUB Ticket Office is open Monday through Friday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. To purchase a sponsor table, contact Donna Stickney at 603-862-3303 or Donna.Stickney@unh.edu.

NEWS EDITORS: If you are planning to attend and cover the Gourmet Dinners, please RSVP to Lori Wright at lori.wright@unh.edu.

