

Hilton Jackson snares Hotel of the Year

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Financial performance, community involvement and perfect scores in housekeeping helped the Hilton Jackson and Convention Center win Hotel of the Year.

Memphis-based Wright Investment Properties, which manages the Hilton Jackson, chose the hotel for factors including revenue achievement, physical condition of the property, promoting from within and training team members so they can move up within the company.

"They do a wonderful job for us," said Wright Investment president Larry Wright.

The 13-story hotel has been an anchor of County Line Road since the mid-1980s. It was renovated and converted into Hilton Jackson in 1997. The next year, Hilton named the hotel Newcomer of the Year over all of its properties both domestically and internationally, said Wright. The hotel has also been named Hotel of the Year three years in a row by its peers in the industry in the Jackson metro area. Huntington's Grille, next door to the hotel, was named Restaurant of the Year this year. The hotel and restaurant are owned by Southern Farm Bureau Life Insurance and Southern Farm Bureau Casualty Insurance.

"To be recognized on this level is just

outstanding," said general manager Steve Bohannon of the Wright Investment award.

The Hilton Jackson has 273 guest rooms and 17 meeting rooms with 30,000 square feet of meeting space. Two meeting rooms are amphitheater rooms and six are dedicated executive board rooms.

Business travel at the hotel lightens during the holidays, but this is eclipsed by families who travel and groups that book meeting space for holiday parties, said hotel marketing director Karen Cadle. With so many hotels in the Jackson area, it is safe to say competition for guests is tough. According to the Star Report, Jackson hotel occupancy from January to September was just 61% for hotel properties which participate in the report. The Star Report is compiled by Smith Travel Research and is an analysis of how well a hotel property competes within the entire Jackson market.

To stay competitive, the Hilton Jackson regularly updates the property and adds new features. The hotel offers guests high-speed Internet access, airport shuttle, valet and laundry service and three executive-level floors with a private lounge. In the next few weeks, the hotel will spend more than \$1 million on new carpet in all of the guest rooms and hallways, remodeled meeting rooms and high quality bedding on execu-

tive level floors. The hotel will be one of the first Hilton hotel brands in Mississippi to offer the "Bed by Hilton" program that outfits rooms with pillow top mattresses, jumbo, touch-of-down pillows and triple sheets. The renovations will not interrupt hotel operations and should be finished by early 2005.

The hotel also recently finished installing brighter lighting in the parking lot for guest safety. "You could play a football game in our parking lot," said Cadle.

Security is a high priority for the Hilton. Last year, the hotel beefed up its surveillance with 29 new cameras — 16 on the exterior and 13 on the interior. The hotel also upgraded parking lot lighting to 1,000 white light lumens.

When guests leave or enter the Hilton, they can request that a security guard walk with them. The hotel has 24-hour on-site security, and all exterior doors except the front door are locked at night. Extra security is called in during special events like receptions and banquets.

Cadle credits the Hilton Jackson's success to the owners and Wright Investment, who takes pride in the property and have always been proactive, rather than reactive. Another factor in the success is the hotel's 267 employees. Good security and a clean facility are important, but according to Cadle, "The No. 1 way

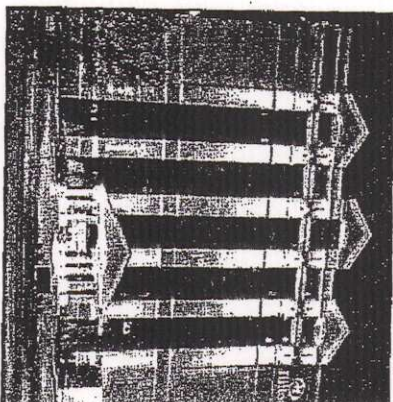
you build customer relationships is service, service, service."

Wright also awarded Janie Collins, director of housekeeping, the Executive Housekeeper of the Year for her back-to-back scores of 100% on inspections.

Lacey Horton, corporate sales manager was named company-wide Sales Manager of the Year for her outstanding sales performance, community involvement and customer accommodation letters, which included the White House.

"It's a premier property, but it's the people inside of it that are truly making it what it is," said Gary Tigges, Wright regional vice president. "We're looking forward to a fourth year as Hotel of the Year."

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