

# THANK YOU

## North Florida Hotel & Lodging Association honors some of its own with the inaugural Rose Awards.

EVERY PERSON PLAYS THE ROLE OF CUSTOMER IN HIS OR HER DAILY LIFE, no matter the circumstance or occasion. Especially while staying at a hotel or dining at a restaurant, we expect to be greeted, served and complimented by random strangers—it is their job to please, after all. In a fancy form of role reversal, the region's best hospitality employees recently were catered to by those who wanted to show appreciation for their commitment to great customer service—their employers. The purpose: To recognize that excellent customer service makes their business shine. The North Florida Hotel & Lodging Association (NFHLA) presented the inaugural Recognition of Service Excellence (ROSE) Awards on February 5. Seventy-five nominations from 32 companies were submitted, and 17 individuals received top honors at a red-carpet affair hosted at the Omni Jacksonville Hotel. On the following pages, we highlight those whose job is to put others first.

### AND THE WINNERS ARE...



#### Mayor's Award

#### James "Slim" Allen

*Server, University Club*

Age: 49 • HOMETOWN: Jacksonville •  
ON THE JOB: 27 years

A native of Jacksonville who is known by many as "Slim," James has been perfecting his knack for fine-dining service for close to 27 years. He's fluctuated back and forth from cook to bartender, but says he's found his niche as a server. James has received more than 1,300 positive guest comment cards.



#### Best Customer Service, Airline Agent

#### Marian Hahn

*Airport Operations Crew Member,  
JetBlue Airways*

AGE: Undisclosed • HOMETOWN:  
Plainfield, New Jersey • ON THE JOB:  
2½ years

Marian is a woman described by customers as understanding and sensitive to the needs of others. Her employer says she delivers service in the most professional and caring manner, upholding two of JetBlue Airways' five values—caring and leadership.

Words by Liltera Williams • Photos by Bradley Stookey

# COME AGAIN

## Best Bartender

**Hugh Thompson**  
*Bartender, One Ocean Resort Hotel & Spa*

AGE: 42 • HOMETOWN: Beaumont, Texas • ON THE JOB: 9 years

Hugh "is the meaning of guest service," says his supervisor. Hugh says he sincerely loves his job and vowed that winning \$100 million dollars would not make him quit. He says he never forgets a name or face and forms a meaningful, ongoing relationship with each returning guest.

## Best Guest Service, Concierge

**Lydia Cobbert**

*Senior Team Leader for Jacksonville Ambassador, Downtown Vision Inc.*

AGE: 46 • HOMETOWN: Green Cove Springs • ON THE JOB: 7 years

According to her supervisor, Lydia has the utmost enthusiasm about Jacksonville and will go to great lengths to show visitors what a great city it is.

Like all city ambassadors should, she approaches visitors with an inviting smile and assists them with information and directions pertaining to their destination—but she does it with extra pizzazz.

## Best Server, Fast Food

**Dan Patel**

*Owner, Great Wraps*

AGE: 42 • HOMETOWN: Jacksonville • ON THE JOB: 12 years

Dan has been putting in double the work for almost 12 years as both owner and wrap-maker at Great Wraps. Dan says that he believes producing great food helps to attract customers, who frequently compliment him on the restaurant's cleanliness and fast, friendly service.

## Best Customer Service, Car Rental Agent

**Jovan Williams**

*Supervisor, Thrifty Rent A Car (Airport JAX)*

AGE: 28 • HOMETOWN: Cincinnati, Ohio • ON THE JOB: 4½ years

Jovan steps up when needed and puts in that extra effort to make sure the job is done right and fast, says his boss. He recently assisted with a time-sensitive car rental for the escort of a fallen U.S. Marine Corps Sergeant, which made a lasting impression on the officer's family.

## Best Guest Service, Front Desk

**Alicia Bennett**

*Front Desk Agent, Omni Jacksonville Hotel*

AGE: 25 • HOMETOWN: Jacksonville • ON THE JOB: 2½ years

Alicia says she treats guests how she wants to be treated and goes out of her way to make them feel special. On her way to becoming the front-office manager at the Omni, she plans to stick with hospitality until she completes the necessary requirements to become a dental hygienist.



**Best Guest Service,  
Bell Attendant**

**Phil  
"From Jacksonville"  
Patterson**

*Doorman, Hyatt Regency  
Jacksonville Riverfront*

AGE: 50 • HOMETOWN: Norfolk,  
Virginia • ON THE JOB: 4 years

A guy who "doesn't mind being kind," Phil is known for the unique greetings he offers to visitors and guests. He is described by his supervisor as "the statue of positive energy," because he is rarely seen without a smile on his face.

**Best Room Attendant/  
Engineer**

**Turinesh Negari**

*Mid-level Engineer, Hyatt  
Regency Jacksonville  
Riverfront*

AGE: 52 • HOMETOWN: Wollega,  
Ethiopia • ON THE JOB: 2 years

Praised for her exceptional attendance, performance and positive guest feedback, Turinesh's heavy accent often causes guests to ask her where she's from. She was born in Africa, but now calls Jacksonville home. At work, "I do everything," she says. She says she tries to make each guest feel important and valued. She was recently promoted and is the hotel's first female engineer.

**Best Guest Service,  
Valet**

**Bobby Flautt**

*Valet Parker, Parking  
Management Services*

AGE: 24 •  
HOMETOWN: Jacksonville •  
ON THE JOB: 2½ years

Bobby inspires his fellow associates by being a great leader who always has a smile to give and an ear to lend, his boss says. He continues to impress his boss, upper-level hotel management, and (most importantly) the customers with his friendly greetings and detailed knowledge about the city.

**Best Food Service,  
Kitchen Staff**

**Denise Jordan**

*Head Chef, Genesis Café  
& Catering*

AGE: 43 • HOMETOWN:  
New Orleans • ON THE  
JOB: 5 years

Denise was promoted to head chef after the unexpected death of the owner's husband, Johnnie Jones. Owner Cindy Jones says that without Denise's willingness and dedication, "the café would not be where it is today." Denise says she tries her best to keep Johnnie's memory alive by showcasing everything he taught her.

**Best Customer  
Service, Best  
Support Agent-Airline**

**Francois Beuse**

*Volunteer Airport  
Ambassador  
and Lost & Found  
Coordinator, Jacksonville  
Aviation Authority*

AGE: 61 • HOMETOWN:  
Martinique • ON THE JOB:  
3 years

Though his day usually begins at 4:30 AM and doesn't end until 5:30 PM, Francois insists that he doesn't mind the long hours because he is doing what he loves. He thanks travelers for visiting the city and always extends a warm welcome when they return.



## Visiting Jax?

Jacksonville certainly is no Vegas, but it's not Chugwater, Montana (population 234), either. According to Visit Jacksonville, the city's tourism bureau, more than 4.1 million travelers visited Duval County in 2007, spending \$2.4 billion locally. That same year, there were 122,300 employed in the hospitality industry. Interesting tidbit: Northeast Florida had the largest percentage of business travelers over any other region in the state at 31 percent.

### Best Server, Restaurant

#### Edward Darragjati

*Head Server, Benny's Steak & Seafood*

AGE: 39 • HOMETOWN: Albania •  
ON THE JOB: 5 years

Edward was born and raised in Albania and came to the United States speaking little English. While working at Benny's, he became infatuated with the idea of meeting new people and quickly adapted to his new surroundings. Edward is now the top server and, according to his boss, is loved by his co-workers and customers for his positive attitude.

### Best Server, Banquets/Catering

#### Donna Gail Ray

*Banquet Server, Holiday Inn Airport*

AGE: 66 • HOMETOWN: Douglas, Georgia •  
ON THE JOB: 13 years

A woman who has spent most of her life catering to the needs of others, Donna has worked in the hospitality industry for almost 50 years. She helps in each department of the hotel when needed and provides a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere for all, her boss says.

### Best Behind the Scenes

#### Darrell Marshall

*Receiving Agent, Crowne Plaza Jacksonville Riverfront*

AGE: 44 • HOMETOWN: Bronx, New York • ON THE JOB: 3 years

Darrell is described by his boss as "a man of many uniforms." He cooks and preps breakfast, handles incoming packages and assists with any other behind-the-scenes duty. "There is no such thing as 'it's not my job,'" he says. Darrell has been instrumental in starting up a Green Team for the Crowne Plaza and is a leading member of the hotel's Brand Champion Team.

### Best Server, Upscale/Fine Dining Restaurant

#### Henrietta Wilson

*Server, Ponte Vedra Inn & Club*

AGE: "Oh goodness, please don't ask me that." •  
HOMETOWN: Jacksonville •  
ON THE JOB: 33 years

Henrietta is a self-proclaimed "people person" who enjoys making her guests feel like VIPs. She says her Southern charm makes her a guest and member favorite. It is the ultimate compliment to her that customers ask to have her as their server or to work one of their functions.

### Best Driver, Ground Transportation

#### David Bragg

*Driver, Terry Transportation and Airport Shuttle*

AGE: 43 • HOMETOWN: Savannah, Georgia •  
ON THE JOB: 3 years

David must ensure on-time pick-up of individuals, groups, families and corporate executives on their way to catch a plane or arriving in town. He prides himself on his service to people and does not mind starting his workday as early as 3 AM.

