

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Produced by RESORT ASSOCIATION PARTNERS, LLC

April 2016

for MAUNA LANI RESORT ASSOCIATION

Meet your Mauna Lani neighbors...

The Mauna Lani community is comprised of diverse individuals from all walks of life. Get to know them a bit better through our series of **Member Spotlight** articles.



Kelley Cosgrove

“Our mission and our goal is to create memories for people. My job is to ensure that we’re providing everything we can to create that expression of wonder and excitement on the faces of our guests. Who wouldn’t want to enjoy all of that and make that happen on a daily basis?”

— Kelley Cosgrove

Kelley Cosgrove, General Manager Fairmont Orchid, Hawaii

Kelley Cosgrove realized she was onto something when, in her first year in the hospitality industry, helping to open a new Westin hotel in Canada, she was promoted to supervisor—at the tender age of 19. “I really got a charge out of the hotel experience,” says Cosgrove. “I deferred going back to school in the science world to continue to explore what would happen with hospitality. Then I joined the Fairmont and the same trend continued. Wonderful opportunities kept presenting themselves.”

Born and raised near Montreal, Cosgrove has been with Fairmont Hotels for 28 years, managing and opening properties in Ottawa, Whistler, Toronto, Vancouver, Dubai, Maui, Sonoma, and San Jose, garnering a number of impressive awards along the way before joining the Orchid in October of last year. She met her husband, Rick Rontiris, in 1983 while the two were working at the Westin Ottawa; they were married on Maui in 2004.

Cosgrove’s formative experience in the industry came while opening the Fairmont Chateau Whistler, a 343-room hotel and her second Fairmont property, in 1989. She arrived at the newly built property with no staff, a new computer system no one understood, and no front desk until 24 hours before opening. But the exhilaration of training new employees, “putting out fires left and right,” creating plans and strategy, living in a (then) remote location and, most importantly, working with an outstanding team of people, made her realize “there couldn’t possibly be a better industry out there.” Many of the team members who started with her at Whistler are now general managers at other Fairmont properties, including David Roberts, the first Fairmont general manager to take the helm of the Fairmont Orchid, and one of Cosgrove’s most influential mentors.

Cosgrove meets each challenge with humor and flexibility. One of her mantras comes from Eleanor Roosevelt: “You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face.” These words serve as a reminder to Cosgrove to see all difficulties as learning opportunities.

Cosgrove’s innovative and highly successful leadership approach has earned both herself and the organization prestigious awards. In 2014 she was named “General Manager of the Year” by the California Hotel & Lodging Association for

(Continued)

her work at the 805-room Fairmont San Jose, where she and her team repeatedly set new records for guest service and colleague engagement and achieved double digit revenue and occupancy growth and a nearly 50% profit growth. Under her leadership, the hotel was awarded Safety Hotel of the Year for zero lost-time accidents.

In 2013 Cosgrove was selected as a recipient of the YWCA Silicon Valley’s TWIN Award for women executives, in part for her work connecting the hotel with the wider community and raising money for the San Jose Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. “Hotels are major employers in the community,” says Cosgrove, who credits regional vice president Tom Klein with teaching her that “you need to get involved with your community. You need to get to know your community. You need to ask, ‘How can we help? How can we give back?’”

In putting forth her nomination for the TWIN Award, Fairmont cited Cosgrove’s “commitment to leading by example, imparting her success and consistently empowering those around her” as “pivotal in her rapid career rise.” Cosgrove explains, “Empowerment comes from having people believe that you trust them. Trust comes from relationship building, spending time getting to know people, understanding what’s important to them.” She does all she can to make her staff feel comfortable seeking her out when they need her help and recognize she is relying on them to help create an outstanding experience for guests. Cosgrove imparts two “key messages” to new employees at the hotel’s orientation: First, she publicly recognizes them for having been selected from a rigorous screening process and conveys the hotel’s respect for their skills, talents and experience. Second, she encourages them to let their personalities and natural talents shine through in genuine, unscripted interactions with guests.

Cosgrove is also known to colleagues for her passion and drive. When asked what makes her excited to come to work each day, she responds, “Our mission and our goal is to create memories for people. My job is to ensure that we’re providing everything we can to create that expression of wonder and excitement on the faces of our guests. Who wouldn’t want to enjoy all of that and make that happen on a daily basis?”

Not surprisingly, Cosgrove has big plans for the Orchid. Capital projects include renovation of public areas such as the restaurants and pool deck. She also plans to expand the Orchid’s connection with the wider community; to that end, she and sixty employees recently visited Waimea Middle School and did landscaping work, power washed the buildings and cleaned the cafeteria. She sees community

(Continued)



Kelley Cosgrove (right) and Roch Leblanc (left) present a colorful rainbow of slippers from Fairmont Orchid, Hawaii to Waimea School.

service as an opportunity for team building and connecting to the communities where the hotel's employees live and their children attend school. She understands the impact of the hotel's financial growth and stability on the community as well. "As a significant employer I'm counted on to keep the hotel economy robust and healthy so that we can keep people working," says Cosgrove. She'd also like to offer educational opportunities to prepare Hawaii high school students, both on- and off-island, who are considering careers in hospitality.

In addition to capital improvements she refers to as "enhancing the product," Cosgrove acknowledges sustainability as a major concern, especially for a Hawaii hotel; to that end, she plans to bring bees to the property to produce honey and assist with pollination of the resort's plants and flowers. She'd also like to capitalize on our island's clear skies to offer stargazing for members of the wider community.

Cosgrove credits much of her success to her father, who, in raising four daughters—of whom Kelley is the oldest—always told his girls they could achieve anything if they worked hard and learned from the people who were the best in their fields. Many of the individuals Cosgrove has sought out and learned from have been her colleagues and superiors.



Cosgrove (third from left) shares a group hug with sisters Tracy, Tara and Erin.



Cosgrove's loyal companion, Zeus

For up-and-coming leaders, especially young women, Cosgrove cautions against self-limiting attitudes. She elaborates, "Women are particularly hard on themselves. We're very critical of ourselves and how we do things. To be successful you have to accept who you are. You're unique, you've got your own talents, and you've got to learn to leverage those and not compare yourself to somebody who has different talents."

However, Cosgrove recognizes and emphasizes the other side of that coin: that those in hospitality need to remember their work is for the benefit of others. "We have a bigger responsibility than what we do on a day-to-day basis. It's the influence we have on everybody else that's really why we're here, ultimately. You don't think 'I' very often, you think 'we.'"

— By Gillian Culff

Gillian Culff is a writer, editor and creative writing teacher who has lived in North Hawaii for over twenty years. You can find her on Facebook and Twitter as well as her website: www.gillianculff.com