

# Masters of gratification

## Hotel staffers are prepared to meet golf guests' needs

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Hotel guests swoop in for Masters Week wanting two things from their stay:

1. A place to sleep
2. Unrestrained gratification.

The first one is easy. The second has required months of planning for Augusta hotels.

Bring in the fillets and lobsters tails. Pop the corks on high-dollar wines, and prepare for 3 a.m. Krispy Kreme runs.

These guests want pampering, and hotel employees hop into hyperspeed to do it. The guests, after all, are paying big bucks for the vacation of a lifetime.

Area hotels estimate that 15 to 20 percent of their yearly sales come from Masters Week alone.

That's reason for hotels to celebrate - but only after orchestrating the busiest week of the year.

Pass the pinot

For the Partridge Inn, it's all about the details.

A fish known for its rich flavor flown in from Hawaii. Twenty cases of pinot noir delivered straight from the vineyard.

A leather couch, poker table and big-screen television for a corporate client's room.

It's all worth it, because a valued customer will be back next year, General Manager David Jones reasons.

The century-old inn has no problems selling out its \$4,400, seven-night packages.

"It's an easy sell," Sales Manager Tijuana Jenkins said.

The 150-room hotel is still getting 20 calls a day inquiring about rooms. Alas, it's too late.

Those fortunate to secure rooms started the process by calling Ms. Jenkins, who coordinates packages year-round.

If it's a corporate client wanting a special event, Ms. Jenkins defers to Kathy Clendenning, the director of catering.

To aid in this process, Ms. Clendenning carts around "Kathy's Masters 2006 bible." Its contents include details for 76 events occurring this week at the hotel.

Events range from celebrity speakers to \$130-a-plate dinner galas.

With events come special requests. When one of her clients wanted a specific California wine, Ms. Clendenning found it herself.

"We had to actually call the vineyard," she said. "The distributor said they couldn't get it."

She could, and did.

She also made sure a cable cord got rerouted through the ceiling of their hospitality suite because the client wanted the big screen in a different spot.

She obliged.

Executive chef Bradley Czajka has been busy planning catering events and the menu for the hotel's Verandah Grill. To make a splash, he is shipping in gourmet foods such as fresh onaga, a fish from Hawaii.

To help, he has enlisted other gourmet chefs from around the country to join him in the kitchen. Even then, he will be working overtime.

"I will be lucky to get four hours of sleep a night," Mr. Czajka said.

Nearby, bartender Mary Elmy has to prepare the bars at the hotel. Liquor quadruples in quantity during Masters Week, she said.

"There's so much liquor brought in you can't even get in the liquor room," she said.

Tipping increases as well, said Ms. Elmy, who once carpeted her entire house using the money from Masters Week tips.

Housekeepers have been trained at the Partridge Inn to pick up on individual guest preferences.

"If we just put a fruit bowl in every room, that's lame," Mr. Jones explained. "If we know someone just likes bananas, we give them a bowl of bananas."

The niceties extend from common fruits, however. If a customer likes a specific kind of fig, they'll get a special kind of fig, he said.

If the guest should return next year, the preference will already be logged into the hotel's database. The preferences could make it into "Kathy's Masters 2007 bible."

### **Meat and potatoes**

During Masters Week, it's a man's world at the Augusta Towers Hotel and Convention Center.

And it would be nothing - nothing - without a Cohiba to smoke.

That's why General Manager Marty Matfess carries five of the Dominican Republic cigars in his pockets to dish out to the VIPs.

Mr. Matfess estimates that 99 percent of the hotel guests during Masters Week are men.

To prepare, the hotel orders the macho essentials - more than 200 pounds of steak, 350 pounds of crab legs and 200 lobster tails.

"They're guys, you know," said Lando Marzolf, the food and beverage manager.

It seems men aren't too picky, he said, so long as you fill their bellies with ample red meat, beer and choice liquors.

"The big ones are vodka, bourbon and Scotch," said Mr. Marzolf, who special-ordered a \$200 bottle of Johnny Walker Blue. Shots of the blue stuff costs \$25.

During Masters Week, the sold-out hotel doubles its liquor supply, he said.

It's all part of converting the Augusta Towers from a business hotel to a resort, Mr. Matfess said.

"It's the easiest week of the year. People are so happy to be here," he said.

Although the hotel is at capacity, employees get very few complaints because guests are so enthralled with the tournament and having a good time, he said.

That doesn't mean the guests don't want special treatment. They are, after all, paying \$425 to \$695 a night.

Some like to arrive in their room with the television already tuned to ESPN, said director of sales Susan Glenn. Others want soft rock playing as they enter the room for the "ambience," she said.

In the days leading up to the tournament, Ms. Glenn and her sales team make sure all such requests and details are ironed out.

Across the building, executive housekeeper Vernell Stevens is preparing for a 20 percent work increase for her cleaning staff.

During Masters Week, the washers and dryers operate from 9 a.m. until 11 p.m. to keep the sheets clean for all 179 rooms.

Though men aren't considered the tidier of the sexes, they don't dirty the rooms more than normal, Ms. Stevens said.

"There is a lot of sand and grass in their shoes," she said.

All in all, the guests behave themselves, Mr. Matfess said.

Not wanting to miss the next day's activities, most are in bed early.

Then again, sleep comes early, but so does the nightlife during Masters Week.

The bar at Augusta Towers opens early - at 1 p.m.

"If it's raining, we'll open it even earlier," Mr. Matfess said.

## Doughnut runs

Two hotels stand 1.4 miles from the front gate of Augusta National Golf Club. So close to the action, they've been sold out since October.

Best Western Garden City Inn and Amerihost Inn & Suites total more than 120 rooms. This year will be chockfull of international guests paying \$300 to \$355 a night, General Manager Jasmine Shah said.

Though considered limited-service hotels because both lack restaurants, they have ramped up efforts to impress the high-paying clients.

"We have three times the inventory for all of the rooms," Ms. Shah said.

For proof, peer inside owner Jugal Purohit's office. Boxes of towels, soap and even extra irons sit there.

"If a customer wants something, we want to have it right away," Ms. Shah said.

The hotel also has doubled its housekeeping staff to provide a "deep clean." To prepare, carpets have been scrubbed down and every little spot had to be cleaned - whether it was a stained lamp shade or a Coke stain in the corner.

Leading some of the cleaning efforts will be Joyce Dorsey, a cleaning supervisor.

She has never seen Augusta National, but she knows its guests need a lot of towels.

"They always want more towels," she said, wiping sweat from her brow between cleanings.

The hotel, though lacking a bar, has happy hour with complimentary beer, snacks and sodas all week in the lounge, where continental breakfasts normally are served, Ms. Shah said.

Though offerings aren't as gourmet as, say, Hawaiian fish, the hotel management will try to meet special demands.

During a past Masters Week, an elderly woman phoned Mr. Purohit at home at 3 a.m. She called requesting a doughnut at 5 a.m. It had to be Krispy Kreme. He provided it.

Preparations have not gone without last-minute challenges.

About 70 extended-stay guests at the hotel had to be relocated to accommodate Masters guests, Mr. Purohit said.

These guests have been put up at other hotels or apartment buildings until the tournament is over, he said.

While Mr. Purohit's staff finishes prepping for Masters 2006, he already has next year's Masters Tournament on the mind.

By that time, he will have an additional 157 rooms at his hotel complex with the opening of a Country Inn & Suites and a Staybridge Suites next door to his current hotels.

Masters attendees will receive brochures for these hotels for next year. And the planning begins again.