

inbusiness

The Local's Hotel

Radisson offers just as much to locals as it does tourists

By Mike Prokopeak



In a tourist town like Flagstaff, hotels are often the domain of the traveler passing through. Radisson Woodlands Hotel is trying to break that stereotype. And with their two restaurants on site, extensive banquet and meeting facilities and community-oriented services, the hotel has the muscle to accomplish just that.

"We really are a local hotel, even though we carry a national name," says Radisson General Manager Lloyd Shelton. Although the hotel is owned by Uniwell, a California-based company, it is operated at the local level and the staff is entirely local.

Radisson is local in its service orientation as well. They have seven different meeting rooms and 6,000 total square feet of space to accommodate community events, business meetings, group meetings and a grand ballroom for weddings and other large events. They're also capable of serving meals for up to 500 people.

The hotel also employs a full-time wedding planner whose job it is to work with local people.

"She takes them through every step of the process," Shelton says, from helping to set a date and ordering food, to finding a photographer.

"Weddings are very intensive," he continues. "It's a very special day of their life. We wanted one person to be the point of contact from beginning to end."

Radisson also recently renovated 73 of their 183 guest rooms, and expects to have all of the rooms renovated by next year. "After Sept. 11, a lot of properties had renovation plans in the works and cancelled them," Shelton says, citing the downturn the tour and travel industry took at that time. "Our owners did not."

"They have a real love of the property," he continues. "They wanted to see it maintained and improved in every aspect."

That commitment to the quality of the hotel also spills over into their commitment to the community. Radisson sponsors local non-profit groups, and provided discounted rooms to several families during last summer's Rodeo-Chediski Fire and to the family of Monty Price, the Texas pastor whose plane crashed on the San Francisco Peaks last month.

The two restaurants located at Radisson, Sakura and Woodlands Cafe, add to the hotel's local appeal. Both restaurants enjoy a reputation for fine dining and service in a casual, yet sophisticated, setting.

"We're elegant, but we're very real," says Rod Bartlett, Radisson

director of food and beverage.

Despite their elegance and reputation, both restaurants are competitively priced and pride themselves on their welcoming nature. "We're nice, but we're not snobbish," Bartlett says.

Woodlands Cafe, specializing in southwestern cuisine, serves breakfast, lunch and dinner in a casual dining atmosphere. While often overshadowed by its more exotic companion restaurant, Woodlands offers a fine dining experience in its own right.

"The cafe restaurant is one of the best-kept secrets in Flag," Shelton says. "The quality of food is very, very good."

That quality is attributable to the chefs Radisson recruits. "The chefs that I have are probably as fine of chefs as you can find in northern Arizona," Bartlett says.

Sakura serves traditional Japanese cuisine for lunch and dinner, and features a full sushi bar and several teppanyaki tables. "Sakura is Flagstaff's own unique Japanese restaurant and Flagstaff's original sushi bar," Bartlett says.

"We're driven by trying to provide Flagstaff with the authenticity of the art of sushi," he continues. "We've taken people who would have called raw fish bait, and turned them into sushi eaters."

In teppanyaki dining, the chef prepares and cooks customers' food directly at the table in a kind of culinary performance art. Teppan dining is family style, with groups of customers sitting at the same table.

"It's an event," Bartlett says. "It's not just a night out dining."

At peak times, teppanyaki can be a raucous dining experience, with chefs entertaining patrons in addition to nourishing them. "Everybody will be in a festive mood," Bartlett says. "Everybody's having a good time. That's what it's all about."

Serving the local customers is something both Shelton and Bartlett stress in their respective work at the Radisson, noting that word of mouth advertising is the most effective way to be successful.

"We'd like to be the local hotel of Flagstaff," Bartlett says. "Once you've endeared yourself to locals, they're pretty much your marketing tools."

And what is that marketing message they're trying to get out to people? "Affordable luxury at its finest," Bartlett says. "That's the best way to describe our hotel." |mlm

Head teppan chef Mike Burris fires up the grill for a table of diners at Sakura. (Photo by Greg Bryan)