Event Planner of the Year

Carley Clark
Event Sales Manager - Clancy's Hospitality

I am proud to nominate Carley Clark for Event Planner of the Year. Carley represents the very best of hospitality and has become an integral part of the continued growth of Clancy's Hospitality's private events business. She understands that a successful event is about more than coordinating a room, menu, and timeline—it is about creating an experience guests remember long after the event is over. Her results speak for themselves. Over the past year, The Fountain Room has achieved 10% revenue growth over the previous year, while Carley has helped generate more than $1 million in private event bookings through Triple seat across Clancy's Hospitality concepts. Her ability to build relationships, convert inquiries into business, and execute events at an exceptional level has made private events an increasingly important part of our organization. Carley has earned the trust of some of the most respected companies and organizations in Indianapolis and beyond, working on events for Eli Lilly, the Indianapolis Colts, Ice Miller, Salesforce, and Excel Sports Management. One of the best examples of Carley's leadership came during the WNBA All-Star festivities in Indianapolis, when she coordinated a full buyout of The Fountain Room for Excel Sports Management. Following the event, the client praised Carley for having "executed a flawless event." That feedback perfectly captures what she consistently delivers: exceptional organization behind the scenes and an effortless experience for the guest. What truly separates Carley is her ability to combine strong business performance with genuine hospitality. She listens to her clients, understands their vision, and works closely with our culinary, service, and management teams to bring that vision to life. Carley doesn't simply book events—she builds relationships that turn clients into repeat guests and long-term advocates for our restaurants. Generating more than $1 million in private event business is an impressive accomplishment, but Carley has achieved those results without losing sight of what our industry is ultimately about: taking exceptional care of people. For her measurable business impact, professionalism, attention to detail, and unwavering commitment to hospitality, Carley Clark is
incredibly deserving of recognition as Event Planner of the Year.

Maddie Fields
Bottleworks Hotel

Maddie is the ultimate Event Planner of the year! Her expertise in detailing, creativity, and her natural ability to build strong relationships with clients and vendors makes her the outstanding planner she is.

She goes above and beyond to ensure that every event goes smoothly for the client but also for the employees working behind the scenes. Her dedication, organization (you should see her email inbox) and the passion she has for creating memorable experiences are noticeable in everything she does.

Through out her time at Bottleworks, Maddie has elevated our events program by building meaningful partnerships with local businesses as well as create impacts in the community. She understands the importances of having strong connections with our preferred vendors who truly enjoy working with her and are always ready to help in a bind.

Maddie takes the event and turns it into and experience. She works with her clients to create new ways to exceed their expectations. Maddie loves working with returning clients and finding new opportunities to personalize their experiences through custom menu items, room setups, personalized amenities, and a huge hug to welcome them back to Bottleworks.

Maddie's commitment to set the bar for events is what makes her the outstanding event planner she is. She is an invaluable part of the Bottleworks team and is truly deserving of Event Planner of the Year Award!

Amaya Knoll

Dual Event Manager -Indianapolis Marriott Downtown

Amaya joined Marriott Indy Place upon graduating from Purdue University in 2023. Over the past few years, she has excelled at everything she has done. With the departure of an Event Manager at the start of the 2026 year, Amaya was challenged to take larger and more complex groups. Last year, she was our queen of small groups and this year she continues that trait on larger, multi-day, complex conferences. Don't let that fool you, she still is managing to handle over 100 groups for 2026.Amaya is the most genuine, kind person you will ever meet, and our clients adore her. She will go above and beyond with everyone to ensure they have a successful event. This year she handled her first Indian wedding and absolutely crushed it. As we all know, there are so many details and moving parts to a wedding. Amaya made sure she was asking all the right questions to be able to set up each department for success. She was so dedicated to ensuring the weekend wedding events went off without a hitch and it really showed, the comments from the Khushbu & Colin survey speaks for itself! (see last survey). As Amaya continues to grow, she continues to shine like the "star" that she is. We are so incredibly lucky to have her on our team and can't wait to see what she knocks out of the park next year. Amaya has received 22 surveys this year all at 100%

Katie Simon

Director of Sales - Hampton Inn & Suites Keystone

Katie joined our Keystone team in January 2023, bringing years of hospitality experience and a strong operational and sales background. Transitioning from the Westfield market to Keystone required her to adapt her sales strategy and learn a very different market. In Westfield, leads often translated directly into revenue. At Keystone, Katie learned to evaluate each opportunity strategically understanding when accepting business made sense and when waiting for a stronger opportunity was the better decision. She embraced the challenge, quickly developing a strong understanding of our market and revenue strategy while continually seeking opportunities to grow our business. Although much of Katie's work happens behind the scenes, she never limits herself to her job description. When the front desk needs assistance, Katie steps out of her office without hesitation. She understands that hospitality is a team effort and is always willing to help wherever needed. Katie demonstrates Respect by treating others with kindness and professionalism. She demonstrates Integrity through honesty, transparency, and consistency. Service comes naturally to her she is empathetic, flexible, a great listener, and genuinely invested in the well-being of our guests and team. When it comes to Excellence, Katie is our cheerleader. Her creativity, enthusiasm, and positive energy help create memorable experiences and strengthen our hotel culture. Her commitment to service also extends into our community. In 2026, Katie volunteered with Crooked Creek Food Pantry, Indy Humane, and SERVE Village Noblesville. Katie is loyal, humble, creative, and committed to personal and professional development. She leads by example, brings people together, and makes others feel valued. Katie Simon represents the very best of hospitality: caring for people, building strong teams, serving the community, and striving for excellence every day.

Ciara Tyndall
Private Dining - Manager the Lawrence

Ciara Tyndall stepped into the Private Dining Manager role at The Lawrence in West Lafayette in April 2026 during a departmental transition and immediately made an impact. Drawing on her experience as Event Manager at Commission Row, she organized neglected leads, strengthened follow-up, and transformed opportunities into results. From July 2026 through April 2027, Ciara has booked 172 events in Triple seat, generating an estimated $500,000 in revenue. Beyond the numbers, Ciara has strengthened The Lawrence's relationships with key community partners, including Purdue University, the Purdue Research Foundation, and Beck's Hybrids. These partnerships are foundational to West Lafayette, and Ciara has helped establish The Lawrence as a trusted destination for gathering, celebrating, and doing business. Ciara's preparation and leadership elevate every event. She ensures team members understand their responsibilities and are equipped to deliver exceptional service. The impact is clear: Purdue representatives have specifically requested certain servers for their events because of the meaningful connections and outstanding hospitality those team members provide. Ciara's leadership was especially evident during a complex wedding spanning The Lawrence's indoor and outdoor spaces. When challenges arose

with the wedding planner, Ciara stepped beyond her responsibilities to coordinate ceremony logistics, outdoor festivities, vendors, rentals, setup, and breakdown. Despite the pressure and moving parts, she remained calm, professional, and positive, ensuring the couple and their guests experienced the celebration they deserved. Ciara embodies true ownership. Rather than focusing on job boundaries, she focuses on solutions, her team, and the guest experience. She leads with accountability, humility, and grace, bringing CRG's core values to life through her actions. In a short time, Ciara has built an organized, dependable private dining operation, delivered significant revenue, strengthened community partnerships, and demonstrated exceptional leadership under pressure. Her ability to combine measurable business results with genuine hospitality makes her an outstanding nominee for Hospitality Indiana's 2026 Event Planner of the Year.

Amanda Zimanski
Dual Senior Event Manager - JW Marriott Indianapolis

Amanda joined the team in 2022 as an Event Manager and quickly excelled in the position. She was then promoted to senior event manager two years later. Amanda is one of our silent assassin type senior event managers. She is incredibly organized, stays calm in any situation and does not mess around with the due dates she gives clients. We do not think Amanda has ever missed a deadline for an event order or resume to go out. We do not know how she does it but is always so impressive. Amanda quickly grew as a senior event manager and now can handle any group that is sent her way. From handling fabulous, fun Awards night one weekend to welcoming 1,200 high schoolers the next, Amanda has done it all. Most recently, we welcomed back a Gala of 800 to the JW Marriott Indianapolis and Amanda ensured it was smooth sailing for her client every step of the way. They were blown away by her diligence and enthusiasm for the event, making it their most successful fundraiser to date! Not only is Amanda great with her clients, but she is also someone that we can rely on to step up and help in the department as well. She most recently served as a mentor with our newest event manager team member as they completed their Manager in Training program. Amanda is a strong leader, and we know we can always count on her when we need her. Amanda currently has 100% intent to recommend on her event satisfaction score.

Alsco Nomination

Hospitality Supporting Role of the Year

Ashley Daniels
People & Culture Generalist II - Ironworks/Bottleworks District

We would like to nominate our People & Culture Generalist, Ashley Daniels, for her incredible impact on not only Ironworks Hotel's success, but also the success of Bottleworks Hotel and Hendricks Commercial Properties. She is a true champion for our people and is always willing to provide guidance, advice, and support whenever it's needed. She leads our Leadership Meetings, creating valuable opportunities for supervisors and managers to learn, grow, and develop their skills within the hospitality industry. Her dedication to helping others succeed, fostering a positive culture, and being a trusted resource for our team makes a lasting difference every day. Beyond her role, she has also shown incredible compassion during some of our most difficult moments. When we recently lost one of our managers in a tragic motorcycle accident, she became an open door and a source of support for everyone who was grieving. She continues to help keep his memory alive within our team and ensures that he is not forgotten. That kind of care, compassion, and genuine commitment to our people is truly special. She truly goes above and beyond for our people and our organization, and we are incredibly fortunate to have her as part of our team!

Nicole Graham
Dual Credit Manager- Marriott Indy Place

Nicole's dedication to Marriott Indy Place has been shown time and again throughout her 10 years as Credit Manager. Each year she reads over 1,500 contracts that have been signed by our Sales team to ensure that billing can be completed accurately and timely for the clients. She works closely with both our Sales and Events teams to answer any questions regarding the billing processes as well as assist with any issues that might arise during the billing process. Nicole is always willing to go above and beyond for clients. Examples include hand typing a 500-page bill into excel format because our PMS system is unable to export in that format, but the client insisted, they need it that way. Other examples include working her normal shift, 9AM-5PM, and then staying all the way into and through the night to complete billing because a client has requested a faster billing turnaround timeline. When Nicole is asked why she works the way she does, she simply says "because that's what we're here for". She always seems to find a way to make things work, and get things done on time. Nicole has a team of 7 associates who she supports and coaches every day. I often hear her explaining the "why" behind a certain process or policy so that the associate can better understand their role. She works hard to make sure her team keeps up with the hundreds of bills they must process every month, on top of handling customer service calls. Nicole's organizational skills and persistent follow-up on everything that comes her way helps the entire hotel be successful in pulling through a fantastic experience for each client.

Brent Harrison
Director of Facilities - Huse Culinary

Since taking over the facilities department, Brent Harrison has made a tremendous impact on Huse Culinary. Through improved communication, proactive planning, and a genuine commitment to supporting our restaurants, he has become a trusted partner to our leadership teams and a valued resource across the organization. Brent has established regular meetings with Executive Chefs and General Managers to address immediate needs, plan long-term projects, and improve preventive maintenance. His organization and transparency help teams plan, understand upcoming expenses, and avoid surprises. He is a strong financial partner who looks beyond quick fixes to find practical, lasting solutions that benefit our restaurants. Just as importantly, Brent understands that hospitality extends beyond our guests. He treats fellow stewards and vendor partners with respect, consistently living out our commitment to "treat our vendors like our guests." He makes vendors feel welcome in our restaurants and maintains calm, respectful communication even when challenges arise. Brent's can-do attitude is especially evident when the unexpected happens. Whether coordinating support during an emergency or helping troubleshoot equipment issues behind the scenes, he approaches challenges with a steady, solutions-focused mindset. During a recent flooding incident, he provided consistent support and encouragement throughout the day, helping the team navigate a difficult situation. His involvement in the opening of Harry & Izzy's Paradise Valley also demonstrated his willingness to go beyond his day-to-day responsibilities to support the success of our restaurants. From coordinating vendors and following up on repairs to strengthening preventive maintenance programs, Brent works diligently behind the scenes so restaurant teams can stay focused on what matters most: taking care of our guests. Beyond his expertise and organization, Brent brings a friendly, approachable presence that makes him a pleasure to work with. He has strengthened our facilities operations while building trust and strong relationships throughout the company. His commitment to our people, our restaurants, and our long-term success makes him highly deserving of recognition as a Star of the Industry.

Luke Holsapple
Facility Manager - Cunningham Restaurant Group

Across nearly 50 Cunningham Restaurant Group locations, one person helps ensure our restaurants can open on time, serve their guests, and keep moving when equipment fails. Since joining CRG's Facilities team in 2021, Luke has transformed his strong mechanical and trade skills into specialized restaurant expertise. Although he had no prior restaurant experience, he took the initiative to learn the unique demands of our kitchens and dining rooms. He is the person our teams count on when something breaks, an emergency arises, or a restaurant needs immediate support. Luke's defining quality is simple: whatever it takes. He starts at 5 a.m. to prepare a restaurant for opening, works overnight when necessary, and responds to emergencies around the clock. Nights,

weekends, and holidays are no exception. As his team describes it, Luke's response time is "Immediate." When our restaurants need him, he shows up. His impact is especially evident in his work with commercial grills, essential equipment across many of our concepts. While outside service providers may need a day or two to respond to a failure, Luke has taught himself to dismantle grills, replace internal components, and restore them to operation in hours. He keeps parts available so he can resolve problems quickly, minimizing downtime and allowing our teams to continue serving guests. That initiative reflects what makes Luke exceptional. He does not simply respond to problems; he anticipates needs, develops new skills, and finds solutions that keep our restaurants operating. His resourcefulness saves valuable time and helps protect the guest experience across our organization. Much of Luke's work happens behind the scenes, far from the dining room and outside the spotlight. Yet his impact is felt every day, in kitchens that keep running, restaurants that open on schedule, and teams that can focus on hospitality instead of equipment failures. Luke makes all our restaurants stronger through his skill, dependability, and extraordinary commitment to our people. He embodies the very best of a supporting role: making everyone around him more successful. It is our pleasure to nominate him for the 2026 Hospitality Indiana Supporting Role of the Year Award.

Sally Mayrose Jones
Accounting Manager - Hyatt Regency Indianapolis

There are positions in hospitality you absolutely need but may still dread getting a call from. Budgets. Receipts. Billing. Approvals. Accountability. No one loves hearing, "Can you explain this expense?" Yet every successful operation depends on someone willing to ask the questions others would rather avoid. Sally is that person for us. She is detail-oriented enough to question every penny yet experienced enough to understand the larger financial picture behind each decision. She double-checks. She asks follow-up questions. She pushes back when something does not make sense. She is direct, pragmatic, and always thinking beyond today's emergency to what that decision means for the month, the quarter, and the year. And her reach extends to virtually every department in the hotel. She supports Events with billing, Engineering with repair and maintenance tracking and budgeting, Sales with commissions and rebates, and leadership with accruals and financial accountability. If money moves through the building, Sally has likely touched it, tracked it, questioned it, reconciled it, or made certain someone else did. Her commitment was especially evident during our transition to Opera Cloud. Sally was instrumental in ensuring the financial side of the migration went according to plan. She built checklists, verified details repeatedly, worked overnight and through weekends, and at one point worked approximately 36 hours straight to keep the transition moving. During another period, she carried the accounting operation largely on her own for months. "Whatever it takes" can become an empty phrase in hospitality. With Sally, it is

simply how she works. Accounting may happen behind the scenes, but Sally's impact is visible everywhere. Every department is stronger because she holds the details accountable, protects the bigger picture, and takes extraordinary pride in getting it right.

Lodging Front of House Award

Naw Thein "Cherry" Aye
Front Desk Agent - JW Marriott Indianapolis

Cherry began her journey with us as a J-1 International Intern and has grown into one of the most outstanding associates on our team. Over the past three years, she has become proficient in all Rooms Operations positions and is consistently willing to step into any role needed to support the operation. Her professionalism, leadership, and reliability have earned the respect of both management and associates, making her a true role model. Cherry is deeply committed to personal and professional growth. She has continuously strengthened her English fluency, enhanced her guest service skills, and is able to handle challenging guest situations with poise and care. Whether working at the Front Desk, handling face-to-face guest interactions, or At Your Service, answering questions or assisting guests over the phone, she approaches every interaction with a warm smile, positive attitude, and dedication to creating exceptional guest experiences. Beyond her own responsibilities, Cherry is always ready to support her teammates, offering guidance, encouragement, and assistance whenever needed. Her strong work ethic, attention to detail, and commitment to excellence inspire those around her and contribute to a positive team culture. Her impact is demonstrated not only through her leadership but also through her results. Cherry has become a leader in upsell revenue and Bonvoy enrollments, all while maintaining a guest first approach. Her combination of efficiency, positivity, and genuine care for others makes her an invaluable member of our team and highly deserving of recognition as a Star of the Industry.

Sandra "Sandy" Bowman
Front Desk Agent - Courtyard/Spring Hill Suites Downtown Indianapolis

Sandra "Sandy" joined our team 9 months ago. In that time, she has made countless connections with our guests. As a Front Desk Agent, mainly working the PM shift, she is responsible for our guest's arrival experience to both the hotel and Indianapolis. Sandy takes the time to get to know each guest at the hotel. One stands out was when we had a family arrive that had been displaced by the floods in August. A family of four (very soon to be five) arrived with what could be salvaged from their house. Sandy built rapport with this family, especially Mom, who was 8 months pregnant at that the time. Seeing the stress of the unknown for this family and having a close connection with

Santa, Sandy arranged a special visit from the North Pole to the Spring Hill Suites lobby. Complete with toys for the kids and a few items for mom to treat herself, Sandy also built the confidence of the kids that no matter where they will be, Santa will know and be back to visit in December. This is just one special of example of Sandy going above and beyond for our guests and making an impact. She exemplifies “Hoosier Hospitality” and we are so grateful to have her on our team.

Jorge Gideon Castro
Bottleworks Hotel

Some employees provide excellent service. Others go above and beyond. And then there are individuals who make everyone around them better simply by showing up, working hard, and genuinely caring. Jorge Gideon Castro is one of those people.

For more than two years, Jorge has been an invaluable member of the Bottleworks Hotel team as a banquet server and banquet setup assistant. In that time, he has never arrived late, called off work, or missed a time punch. His remarkable reliability reflects the pride he takes in his work and his commitment to his team.

But what truly sets Jorge apart is how he shows up: with a smile, a positive attitude, and a genuine passion for hospitality.

Jorge notices the little things that make guests feel valued. When guests arrive carrying decorations for an event, he steps in before anyone asks. If he notices someone especially enjoys an hors d’oeuvre, he finds more and personally brings it back. His thoughtful service has earned recognition from multiple groups, including Pile CPAs, whose attendees specifically praised him to management after their multi-day event in July.

His generosity extends behind the scenes. Once, Jorge spotted the Director of Rooms moving heavy boxes of wine. Though it wasn’t his responsibility, he immediately stopped to help and moved every box. When last-minute event changes require rearranging a room or moving 100 chairs after a long shift, Jorge jumps in without complaint.

Whether helping a guest, coworker, or manager, his response is almost always the same: “Right now, I’m on it.”

Those words capture Jorge perfectly. He doesn’t seek credit or wait to be asked. He simply sees what needs to be done and does it with care.

Jorge’s dependability strengthens our team, and his kindness creates memorable guest experiences. He embodies the very best of hospitality: making people feel welcome, supported, and genuinely cared for.

For his outstanding service, selfless teamwork, and unwavering dedication, we are proud to nominate Jorge Gideon Castro for the Stars of the Industry Lodging Front of the House Award.

Yolimar Chambers
Banquet Captain - the Westin Indianapolis

For nearly 20 years, Yolimar "Yoli" Chambers has brought dedication, care, and a remarkable work ethic to The Westin Indianapolis. As a Banquet Captain, she understands that a successful event depends on both attentive service and a team working well together. She leads by example, provides clear direction, and works alongside her banquet servers to ensure our clients and their guests feel welcomed and cared for. One of the most meaningful reflections of Yoli's impact is the recognition she receives directly from our group contacts. Over the past year, she has earned the coveted Lucky Bamboo Award several times—an award presented by group contacts to recognize team members who make a difference in their experience. Receiving this honor repeatedly speaks to the trust she builds and the personal attention she brings to each event. Yoli's commitment extends beyond her own responsibilities. During transitions, she willingly takes on additional duties to support her team and maintain consistent service. She also helps in other departments, bringing the same energy and willingness to contribute wherever she is needed. Her colleagues know they can count on her to follow through, offer guidance, and help get the work done. Yoli represents hospitality through her everyday actions: caring for guests, supporting colleagues, and taking pride in the experience, we deliver together. Her nearly two decades of service, repeated recognition from clients, and trusted leadership make her a deserving nominee for Stars of the Industry.

Audrey Hall
Night Auditor - Courtyard by Marriott at Horizon Convention Center

Audrey Hall consistently goes above and beyond to ensure our guests have a positive experience, regardless of the circumstances surrounding their stay. As a Night Auditor, Audrey is often one of the few team members available to assist guests during the overnight hours, and she takes that responsibility seriously. She communicates exceptionally well, listens to guests' needs, and makes a genuine effort to find solutions rather than simply completing the minimum requirements of her position. One of the best examples of Audrey's commitment to our guests occurred during a major power outage at the hotel. With only one houseman and herself on property, Audrey remained calm, focused, and attentive to the needs of our guests while helping manage the situation. Rather than leaving when her scheduled shift ended, she stayed behind to make sure everything was okay and that the hotel and its guests were taken care of. Her willingness to remain until she knew the situation was under control demonstrates the level of ownership, she takes in providing exceptional service. Audrey's commitment to our guests extends beyond challenging situations. Even on the

slowest nights, when guests are not actively seeking assistance, she remains productive and looks for ways to contribute. She regularly assists the Bistro, despite it being another department, whenever additional help is needed. She also looks for opportunities to support administrative needs that help the hotel operate more effectively. What makes Audrey stand out is that her exceptional service is consistent. She does not wait for someone to tell her what needs to be done. She actively looks for ways to help, whether that means assisting a guest, supporting a coworker, helping another department, or taking care of an operational need. Audrey's professionalism, communication skills, teamwork, and genuine concern for our guests make her an outstanding example of what it means to go beyond the call of duty.

Maya Houston
Front Desk Agent - Indianapolis Marriott Downtown

Maya Houston exemplifies what it means to deliver exceptional front-of-house hospitality. She understands that every guest interaction is an opportunity to create a memorable experience, and she approaches each one with genuine care, attentiveness, and professionalism. By taking the time to listen to guests, understand the purpose of their visit, and anticipate their needs, Maya consistently goes above and beyond to ensure every stay is personalized, meaningful, and unforgettable. What truly sets Maya apart is her ability to extend the same level of care and hospitality to her teammates that she provides to guests. She is a trusted and dependable presence within the hotel, always willing to support her colleagues, offer guidance, and lend a helping hand wherever needed. Her positive attitude and genuine concern for others create a welcoming and engaging work environment that directly influences the culture of the entire team. Maya has a unique ability to make those around her feel valued, respected, and supported, which strengthens both morale and collaboration across departments. Maya is also a critical contributor to the success and development of our front office team. She serves as a go-to resource for new hires, helping them build confidence and develop the skills necessary to excel in their roles. She is deeply committed to ensuring every new team member is trained to standard and fully prepared to represent our hotel with excellence. Her investment in others has elevated team performance and helped create consistency in the guest experience. Through her dedication, dependability, and unwavering commitment to both guests and team members, Maya consistently embodies the highest standards of hospitality. She creates exceptional experiences, strengthens our culture, and positively impacts everyone she encounters. For these reasons, Maya Houston is highly deserving of the Lodging Front of the House Award.

Kristy Parr

Front Desk Agent - Hampton Inn, Corydon

From her General Manager: Kristy Parr! She is truly heaven sent! With every obstacle that we have faced she has been right there with a helping hand every step of the way. Her fearless work ethic is indescribable. Our spectacular front desk associate but will jump to support housekeeping, management, and even breakfast staff in a heartbeat. The way she gives warm welcomes through over the phone reservations to giving all the knowledge and old tales about small town Corydon Indiana to our new customers. At times when Kristy notices that I'm not myself she will say "Hey let me help you with something today Ms. Boss lady". She deserves it all and more. A true Gem! From her co-workers: The Experience I have with my partner Kristy is conscious responsible worker with a good heart and excellent customer service. A very honest hardworking warrior capable of really managing anything. She is a person that knows how to handle staff and make our guest smile. Kristy is such a hard worker and helps everyone at the hotel. She sees what needs to be done and will just do it. I love working with her. She is kind and tolerant. She makes my day brighter and I look forward to working with her every day.

Amanda Ryan
Night Auditor - Sheraton Indianapolis City Centre

When the managers and guests are asleep, you can find Amanda Ryan being a core part of running the hotel overnight. Amanda joined our 378-room hotel two years ago as a Front Desk Agent, where her positive attitude and guest service quickly set her apart. After about a year, she earned a promotion to Night Auditor, and she has since made the 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. shift her own. Amanda is not a manager, yet she serves as our overnight Manager on Duty. It is a role, not a title: for eight hours every night, a non-management associate is responsible for the entire property, including every decision that can't wait until morning. Amanda has earned that trust; management doesn't get calls at night when she is working. She also leads our night audit team in every Front Office metric: Marriott Bonvoy enrollments, revenue upsells, and guest name mentions. It's a running joke at our hotel: every time Amanda picks up a 2nd shift, a guest name mention follows, because she is exposed to more guests where her kind and caring nature is center stage and felt by all. She earned two on her most recent 2nd shift alone. Communication is Amanda's greatest strength. Her shift reports are thorough and detailed, and she often follows up with separate emails to managers explaining complex issues with her recommended solutions. She is quick to acknowledge and fix mistakes, handles what needs doing without being asked, and shares insight specific to her shift that daytime managers may not see. Amanda is the ultimate team player. She trains our new Night Auditors and covers 2nd shift when we are short-staffed, adjusting her difficult sleep schedule to do it. Her attendance is virtually perfect, and she arrives every shift with a smile. Amanda proves that leadership is not about holding a title; it is about taking responsibility, supporting others, and

setting a positive example. She represents the best of front-of-house hospitality in Indiana, and we are proud to nominate her for Stars of the Industry recognition.

Alex Sanchez
Night Auditor - Ironworks Hotel Indy

I am proud to nominate Alex for the STAR Award in recognition of his dedication, tremendous professional growth, and commitment to exceptional guest service. As a valued member of our team from the beginning, Alex has consistently demonstrated his loyalty to our hotel and his willingness to go above and beyond for our guests. Throughout his time with us, Alex has shown a strong sense of ownership in his role. He is especially dependable when assisting our overnight guests, often handling challenging situations independently while ensuring our guests feel heard and cared for. His dedication has not gone unnoticed. In a recent guest survey, a guest specifically recognized Alex for his handling of a difficult situation involving other guests. Despite the disruption, the guest expressed their intention to return and gave all credit to Alex's handling of their concerns in a professional manner, demonstrating the positive impact of Alex expertise to our guest experience. Alex's commitment also extends beyond traditional guest service. One memorable example was his willingness to chase down an illegal drone that disturbed guests and patrons, and he was able to provide authorities with enough information to ensure a swift resolution to the incident. This is just one example of his resourcefulness and willingness to step outside his normal responsibilities to support our property. What makes Alex deserving of this recognition is his consistent reliability, dedication, and genuine care for both our guests and our hotel. I truly value his contributions and am proud of the professional he has become. Alex has earned this recognition through his hard work, continued growth, and commitment to making Ironworks a better place for our guests and team alike.

Mary Stone
Cook - Hilton Garden Inn Jeffersonville / Fuzzy's the 15th Club

We consider Mary Stone to be "Friend to our Guests." Many of our guests continue to ask for Mary by name as she is known to cook and serve for us in our Fuzzy's Restaurant, clean rooms for us, pull linen from the guest floors for us as well as clean our lobby. All that takes place outside our kitchen where her main jobs are, she simply wants to her fellow team members. If she sees we need help in other departments, she will contact me and ask if her help is needed. Mary is the first to step up when needed. She does it with a smile, positive attitude and a will to make our guests happy! There isn't any one job at the property that she will not only do and always excels at accomplishing each task. Our guests not only know her name but often mention her at the front desk on their way out. We have our morning standup at 10 AM every day and as guests come off the elevator ready to

depart, they will usually recognize Mary in the group and thank her in front of our staff for what she had done for them during the days of their stay. They usually end up saying "she needs a raise" or "don't lose that one!" It is amazing how many know her by name, and she most times knows their name in return. We have one guest, Miss Kay, who is elderly and visits the area 4 or 5 times a year. She has been a regular for over 4 years. She has a hard time getting around without huge effort and Mary will call her on her own each morning and ask if she would like breakfast. Mary will then cook the special order, put it together, and then deliver it to the door herself. She is the matriarch of her family: Grandmother, Mother, Sister, Friend as well as a spiritual leader with her church family, Mary wears many hats and does it with an ease that truly boggles the mind.

Crystal Vicha
Front Desk Agent - Crowne Plaza Indianapolis Downtown Union Station

There isn't one single grand story that explains what makes Crystal so special. It is hundreds of little ones. Crystal genuinely wants every person who walks through our doors to love our hotel, but she also wants them to fall in love with Indianapolis. She talks about our historic property and our city with so much pride and excitement. She doesn't simply hand someone a list of restaurants or point toward an attraction. She learns what they enjoy, tells them about places she loves, and gets genuinely excited about what they are going to experience. She doesn't just give directions. She creates a connection. And our guests feel it. Her name appears repeatedly in guest surveys. Guests have sent her gifts, taken pictures with her, and remembered her long after checkout. She has even run into former guests while out in Indianapolis on her own time and been greeted like an old friend. People remember Crystal because Crystal remembers people. When Crystal sees families with children staying in our historic train car rooms, she sees an opportunity to create a memory. She sets up special amenities and helps the children feel like they are embarking on their own train adventure. Her enthusiasm is genuine, and the children light up because of it. Crystal's kindness isn't limited to guests. Crystal learned that one of our international interns had a birthday coming up and knew he was thousands of miles away from family and friends. Crystal took him out for a meal because she didn't want him spending his birthday alone. There was no guest survey attached to that moment. No manager asked her to do it. There was no recognition to earn. She simply cared! That may be the best description of Crystal. Hospitality isn't something she turns on when her shift begins and turns off when clocking out. It is part of who she is. Whether you are a first-time visitor to Indianapolis, a returning guest, an excited child, or a coworker far away from home, Crystal has this incredible ability to make you feel like you matter.

Trish Walker
Guest Services/Front Desk - Holiday Inn Indianapolis Airport

Trish Walker has demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to the Holiday Inn Indianapolis Airport and to the hospitality industry for nearly 12 years. Trish helped open the hotel, beginning her career here as a bartender. Through her dedication, leadership, and genuine care for guests and associates, she advanced to Director of Food & Beverage and eventually became General Manager of the hotel she had helped open. In 2024, Trish made the difficult decision to step down as General Manager so she could devote more time to helping raise her grandson. However, stepping away from leadership did not mean stepping away from the hotel. Trish chose to remain with us in a part-time front desk position. To me, that decision perfectly demonstrates what it means to go above and beyond. After serving as General Manager, Trish was willing to return to the front desk—welcoming guests, answering phones, solving problems, supporting her coworkers, and doing whatever was needed to help the hotel succeed. For Trish, it has never been about a title; it has always been about the people. During my first year as General Manager, I have been fortunate to have Trish on my team. Her experience and knowledge are invaluable, but what stands out most is her willingness to help wherever she is needed. Trish's title may have changed over the years, but her commitment to hospitality never has.

Lodging Heart of the House Award

Daniel Barrett
Security Guard - Hilton Indianapolis Hotel & Suites

For the past seven years, Daniel Barrett, Security Officer at Hilton Indianapolis Hotel & Suites, has been a constant source of safety, stability, and dependability for our hotel. While much of his work occurs behind the scenes, his impact is felt every day by guests, team members, and hotel leadership alike. Working the overnight shift requires exceptional dedication, professionalism, and self-reliance. Night after night, Daniel serves as far more than a Security Officer. He routinely assumes many responsibilities of the Overnight Manager on Duty, helping ensure hotel operations run smoothly while maintaining a safe, secure, and welcoming environment for everyone in the building. Whether assisting guests in distress, resolving unexpected issues, supporting team members, or managing emergencies, he consistently handles each situation with calm professionalism, confidence, and genuine hospitality. His ability to remain composed under pressure has earned the trust and respect of both guests and colleagues. In addition to his security responsibilities, Daniel serves as the hotel's Safety Specialist, playing a critical role in protecting guests, team members, and property assets. His knowledge of safety procedures, attention to detail, and commitment to preparedness make him an invaluable resource throughout the hotel. Beyond his own responsibilities, he actively trains and mentors fellow Security Officers and Safety Specialists, helping build a stronger, more capable team while ensuring the highest standards of

safety and service are maintained. Daniel's commitment to excellence has been recognized through his selection as Team Member of the Month, an honor that reflects the respect and admiration he has earned across the organization. Yet what truly distinguishes him is his willingness to go above and beyond without seeking recognition. He consistently puts the needs of the hotel, its guests, and his fellow team members ahead of his own. Through his leadership during overnight operations, dedication to safety, commitment to developing others, and unwavering reliability, Daniel Barrett truly represents the Heart of the House. His contributions over the past seven years have strengthened our hotel, supported countless guests and team members, and left a lasting impact on our property. He is exceptionally deserving of this recognition.

Tara Burgdorf
Night Auditor - Fairfield Inn & Suites, Jasper

Tara is the kind of hospitality professional who consistently goes above and beyond, not because she is asked to, but because she genuinely cares about her guests, her coworkers, and the success of our hotel. As a Night Auditor, Tara plays an important role in keeping our hotel running smoothly during the overnight hours. However, what makes Tara truly exceptional is that her commitment to our hotel does not stop with her job description. Tara is always willing to step in wherever she is needed. When we need additional help covering breakfast shifts, Tara makes sure our guests receive the service they expect. When the hotel needs help preparing rooms, she rolls up her sleeves and cleans rooms. She takes on whatever is necessary to help the team succeed. One of the things that stands out most about Tara is her willingness to help others learn and grow. She takes the time to train new employees on our hotel systems, patiently sharing her knowledge and helping new team members become comfortable and confident in their roles. Her willingness to teach others is a tremendous asset to our team. Tara never approaches a task with the attitude of "That's not my job." Instead, her attitude is, "How can I help?" That simple mindset has a tremendous impact on our hotel. She understands that hospitality is a team effort and that every position plays a part in creating a positive experience for our guests. Her dedication is especially meaningful because much of her work happens behind the scenes and during overnight hours when it may go unnoticed. Tara represents the very best qualities of a hospitality professional: dependability, teamwork, flexibility, kindness, and a genuine willingness to serve others. She makes the people around her better and ensures that our guests receive the level of service they deserve. Tara Burgdorf is not simply an employee who comes in and performs her assigned duties. She is someone we can count on to step up, fill the gaps, help her coworkers, train others, and do whatever is necessary to make our hotel successful.

Darling “Maria” Escobar

Bottleworks Hotel

I would like to nominate Darling “Maria” Escobar for the Lodging Heart of House award. Maria truly embodies the heart in heart of house, equally focused on guest satisfaction as much as she is on the well being of her fellow co-workers. There isn’t a request, no matter how last minute or inconvenient, that won’t be met with a “no problem!” and executed to perfection. Beyond that, she has a welcoming spirit, always there to lend a hand when needed, working as an advocate for her fellow co-workers when they need help speaking up, and making sure that she is helping to create the type of culture where everyone can enjoy coming to work. The heart of the house beats much louder when Maria is around!

Juan Esteban
Maintenance Technician - Fairfield Inn & Suites, Whitestown

Juan Esteban is an outstanding example of what it means to work behind the scenes while still making a direct and positive impact on every guest and team member. Although his primary responsibility is maintenance, Juan consistently goes beyond his job duties to help wherever he is needed. Juan takes pride in making sure the hotel is safe, functional, and welcoming. Whether a guest is having trouble with a television, something in their room is not working properly, or an unexpected maintenance issue arises, Juan makes it a priority to respond quickly and ensure the problem is corrected. He understands that even a small maintenance issue can affect a guest’s stay, so he works hard to resolve concerns efficiently and professionally. His teamwork is equally exceptional. Juan is always willing to ask, “Is there anything else that needs to be done?” He regularly assists the front desk by making sure equipment and hotel features are working properly, helps the breakfast attendant when needed, and supports housekeeping with tasks that help them complete their work. He never limits himself to only what is listed in his job description. If he sees that another department needs assistance, he steps in. Juan also tries to interact with every guest he encounters. He greets guests, asks if they need assistance, and extends the same hospitality to visitors using our meeting room and other hotel spaces. Juan is dependable, professional, hardworking, and truly team oriented. His willingness to help others, attention to the condition of the property, and genuine care for our guests make him an important part of our hotel and an excellent candidate for the Lodging Heart of House Award.

Areli Martinez
Flores Room Inspector - Hyatt Regency Indianapolis

In life, we try to avoid having “favorites.” Favorite child. Favorite student. Favorite boss. Favorite ice cream. And while all ice creams are delicious, we each still have one we hold dear—the go-to we know will never let us down. For some, that’s a vanilla cone. For others, a double scoop of Superman. Around our hotel, Areli is our chocolate chip cookie dough with extra hot fudge, in a waffle cone, with a cherry on top. First and foremost, Areli is a worker. If early cleans need to be completed, she is on it. If someone calls off, she is one of the first to take on extra rooms. If additional shifts need coverage, she steps in. But Areli is not simply willing to work—she is exceptional at what she does. Areli also serves as an inspector, a role requiring tremendous professionalism and tact. Inspectors must identify where standards are not being met without making coworkers feel criticized or diminished. Areli instead approaches the role as an advocate. She watches, remembers, and works alongside associates who need additional support. When concerns need management attention, she communicates them clearly and specifically. With her peers, she addresses opportunities for improvement with warmth and respect, always focused on building people up rather than tearing them down. Most importantly, Areli genuinely loves her team. During our annual Housekeeping Appreciation Week, at an event specifically designed to celebrate her department, Areli arrived with something of her own: a small care package for every member of the team, each beautifully wrapped in an organza bag. She did not do it because recognition was lacking; the day was already filled with prizes and gifts. She did it because she wanted each coworker to know how much she appreciated being part of their team. We may try not to have favorites, but through her professionalism, generosity, teamwork, and unwavering willingness to serve others, Areli makes it very difficult. She is proudly our nominee for the Lodging Heart of the House Star of the Industry.

Jose Gomez
Maintenance Engineer - Crowne Plaza Indianapolis Airport

If you looked up "teamwork" in the dictionary, you would find a picture of José Gomez. José is always the first to volunteer, whether for a special project or an urgent repair, and he arrives every time in a clean uniform with his nametag on, proud to represent the Crowne Plaza Airport. He is patient with our newest team members, working alongside them until they feel confident in their roles. When any department needs a helping hand, José is the go-to person, and he always brings a smile. His positive attitude reaches the whole team. Through gentle encouragement, he helps struggling associates change their perspective and improve their outlook. His gratitude is contagious. Guests and associates regularly comment on how kind and helpful José is. You'll often find him helping a housekeeper push her cart up an incline or holding the door for a guest. We are a better team because of José Gomez.

Carmen Gonzalez
Breakfast Attendant - Homewood Suites Carmel

I am honored to nominate Carmen Gonzalez for the Stars of the Industry award. Carmen is an incredibly hardworking and dependable team member who consistently goes above and beyond to help our hotel succeed. Carmen is always willing to step in wherever she is needed, whether that means helping in breakfast, assisting housekeeping, or taking on additional responsibilities when we are short staffed. She never hesitates to help her team. If we need extra coverage, Carmen is willing to start later, stay longer, and work overtime to make sure everything gets done and our guests continue to receive the level of service they deserve. What makes Carmen especially deserving of this recognition is the determination and perseverance she has shown throughout her journey. She has overcome many obstacles and worked extremely hard to get where she is today. Despite the challenges she has faced, Carmen continues to show up with a positive attitude, a strong work ethic, and a willingness to help others. Carmen is the kind of employee every hotel hopes to have. She is dependable, dedicated, hardworking, and always willing to put the needs of the team first. Her commitment does not go unnoticed, and she truly makes a difference in the daily operation of our hotel. For her outstanding work ethic, dedication, perseverance, and commitment to her team and our guests, I believe Carmen is very deserving of the Stars of the Industry award.

Ariel Green
Housekeeping Supervisor - Bottleworks Hotel

Ariel has been an invaluable member of the Bottleworks Hotel team since June 2025, and in that short time, she has already been promoted twice. It is easy to see why—Ariel consistently excels at everything she puts her mind to and continually looks for ways to grow, improve, and make those around her better. Within just a few months, Ariel exceeded expectations and began training others. She approaches challenges with confidence, problem-solves quickly, and makes a point to include and support her teammates. She is equally committed to improving herself and strengthening the department. From the beginning, Ariel has demonstrated a genuine desire to understand leadership. She asks thoughtful questions about why processes are in place, how departments work together, and how to effectively navigate difficult conversations. She has even stayed after her shifts to learn more about the behind-the-scenes operations of the hotel and how other departments contribute to the overall guest experience. Ariel is the kind of leader who never hesitates to step in wherever she is needed. She makes sure her team is settled at the end of the day and willingly jumps in to assist with any task. Recently, when she became aware that a coworker was in need, Ariel stepped in to help, even though it was completely outside the scope of her job.

This is just one example of the compassion, teamwork, and initiative she demonstrates every day. Her dedication to excellence is reflected in her impressive 92.48% inspection score. Beyond the numbers, Ariel consistently demonstrates exceptional guest service and will stop what she is doing to guide a guest, answer a question, or help whenever needed. Ariel is a remarkable leader, teammate, and asset to Bottleworks Hotel. We are incredibly lucky to have her on our team and excited to see all that she will accomplish in the future.

Herminia Juarez
Room Attendant - TRU by Hilton Lawrence

Herminia has been a constant and steady employee who started with us shortly after the hotel opened in 2022. She started here as a Room Attendant and quickly caught on to the Hilton standard of cleaning rooms for Hilton. She would always go above and beyond, wanting to be cross trained in not only other day to day housekeeping functions but laundry too. She always puts in 100% when she is here and is always willing to help other housekeepers that are not as fast as her to complete the job. I could not ask for a better employee.

Leonard King
Maintenance Engineer - Sheraton Indianapolis City Centre

Guests at the Sheraton Indianapolis City Centre feel Leonard King's work in every well-kept room, clean hallway, and cleared front drive, and many mention him by name in their reviews. For twelve years, Leonard has been the backbone of engineering at our 378-room downtown hotel, representing the best of what behind-the-scenes hospitality workers bring to this industry. As our most senior engineer, Leonard holds over a decade of knowledge about our building's history, invaluable when diagnosing problems and planning repairs. He is the team's expert in drywall, wallpaper, and ceiling texture, and he has personally trained every engineer on these complicated, detailed projects, raising the skill level of the entire team. Leonard treats the hotel's resources as his own. His skills allow us to complete major repairs in house, and he maintains his tools and painting supplies so carefully that it reduces purchasing costs. He reports every day as scheduled, contributes ideas in our daily meetings, and takes pride in his work. One moment from last winter captures who Leonard is. When heavy snow buried the hotel's front drive and guests' vehicles were getting stuck, Leonard volunteered his own snow blower without anyone asking. He loaded it onto his truck, brought it in at 5 a.m., and spent two full days, working 8-hour shifts, in the freezing cold clearing the drive so guests could arrive and depart safely. That is hospitality in its truest form: seeing a guest in need and taking it personally. Leonard leads by example through his work ethic, and he shows the same hospitality to his co-workers that he shows our guests; you'll find him in the employee cafeteria cracking jokes and engaging with every associate who comes in. He works extra

days when needed to finish projects on time. He has been named our hotel's Associate of the Month on several occasions, and we would like to elevate his recognition for the twelve years he has contributed to Indiana's hospitality industry. Leonard is a true Star of the Industry, and we are proud to nominate him.

Jill Lydick
Breakfast Attendant - Springhill Suites Terre Haute

For the past 4 years and 6 months, Jill Lydick has demonstrated what it means to provide exceptional hospitality. As our Breakfast Attendant, Jill goes far beyond simply preparing and maintaining the breakfast area. She creates a welcoming experience for our guests and makes it a priority to ensure each person feels cared for and valued. Our breakfast area consistently receives more positive guest reviews than any other department, and Jill is a major reason why. She is always attentive to what is happening around her, making sure food and supplies are available, the dining area is clean and inviting, and guests have everything they need to start their day. She doesn't wait for guests to ask for assistance; she walks the breakfast area checking on guests. Jill takes tremendous pride in cleanliness and consistently maintains the breakfast kitchen and service areas to the highest standard. She understands the importance of cleanliness in food service and is diligent about keeping her workspace spotless, organized, and ready for every guest. Her attention to detail helps ensure that our breakfast operation is both welcoming and maintained to a high professional standard. What truly sets Jill apart is the way she interacts with our guests. She takes the time to talk with them, listen to their needs, and make genuine connections. Whether she is answering a question, helping someone find what they need, or simply taking a moment to engage in conversation, Jill makes guests feel welcome and cared for. Jill also demonstrates exceptional professionalism and teamwork. Her positive attitude, dependability, and willingness to go above and beyond contribute to the success of the breakfast operation and the overall guest experience. The consistently positive feedback we receive about our breakfast area speaks to the impact Jill has every day. Her dedication, genuine care, attention to cleanliness, and commitment to outstanding service make her truly deserving of the Heart of the House Award.

Maria Membreno
Housekeeping Supervisor - Indianapolis Marriott Downtown

I am proud to nominate Maria Membreno for recognition of her outstanding contributions to our housekeeping team. Maria's journey is a wonderful example of how hard work, dedication, and a

positive attitude can lead to tremendous growth and success. Maria began her career with us as a Guest Room Attendant before transitioning to the laundry department and eventually earning a promotion to Housekeeping Supervisor. Because she has worked in multiple areas of the department, she brings a unique perspective and a deep understanding of our operation. She knows firsthand the challenges our team faces and uses that experience to support her colleagues, improve processes, and help us deliver an exceptional experience for our guests. What stands out most about Maria is her willingness to do whatever is needed to help the team succeed. On busy days, you can often find her helping clean rooms, assisting in laundry, or stepping in wherever support is needed. She leads by example and has earned the respect of her team because she never asks others to do something she isn't willing to do herself. Her hands-on approach creates a culture of teamwork, accountability, and mutual support. Maria is also dedicated to her own professional growth. Through mentoring and development opportunities, she has continued expanding her leadership skills and learning the operational responsibilities of managing the department. Whether overseeing daily operations, assisting with guest concerns, or supporting the management team, she consistently demonstrates a willingness to learn and take on new challenges. What makes Maria truly deserving of this recognition is not just what she accomplishes, but how she accomplishes it. She is dependable, hardworking, humble, and genuinely cares about her team and our guests. We are incredibly fortunate to have Maria on our team, and her dedication, leadership, and commitment to excellence make her highly deserving of this honor.

Lindsay Monroe
Head Housekeeper - Fairfield Inn Evansville West

I am honored to nominate Lindsay, our Head Housekeeper, for this recognition. Lindsay is one of those people who makes a difference every day, often without receiving the recognition she deserves. Housekeeping is one of the most important departments in a hotel, and Lindsay takes tremendous pride in making sure our guests have a clean, comfortable, and welcoming place to stay. As our Head Housekeeper, Lindsay has a great deal of responsibility. She helps oversee the housekeeping department, makes sure rooms are prepared for arriving guests, maintains our cleanliness standards, and supports her team throughout the day. She is dependable, hardworking, and willing to step in whenever and wherever she is needed. What stands out most to me about Lindsay is how much she genuinely cares. She cares about our guests, our hotel, and especially the people she works alongside. She leads by example and understands that teamwork is essential to a successful hotel. One thing that truly says a lot about Lindsay is her willingness to go above and beyond, even when she is no longer on the clock. If the hotel needs her after hours, she will come back to the property to help. Whether it is an unexpected housekeeping need, a last-minute room that needs attention, or simply helping the team through a busy situation, Lindsay does not hesitate to come back when she knows she is needed. That kind of dedication is not something you can

teach—it comes from genuinely caring about your job and the people around you. The work of housekeeping often happens behind the scenes, but it has a tremendous impact on the guest experience. Lindsay understands that every detail matters and takes pride in making sure our guests receive the experience they deserve. I believe Lindsay represents the heart of hospitality: hard work, dependability, teamwork, and genuine care for others. Her work may happen behind the scenes, but her impact is felt throughout our hotel every day. I am truly grateful to have Lindsay on our team and proud to call her part of the Fairfield Inn Evansville West family

Damaris Padilla
Laundry Attendant and Breakfast Attendant - Homewood Suites Lafayette

It is my sincere pleasure to nominate Damaris Padilla as a Star of the Industry in the category of Lodging Heart of the House. What makes Damaris special is not simply the work she does, but the HEART she puts into doing it. She is the person who shows up each day, oftentimes behind the scenes, and makes sure our hotel is ready to welcome our guests. Her dedication, dependability, and willingness to help others make a meaningful difference to our entire team. Damaris wears many different hats at the hotel, including laundry attendant and breakfast attendant. When she is doing laundry, she understands that clean, fresh linens are an integral part of the guest experience. She works hard, stays focused, and continues to get the job done even when her workload is demanding. When Damaris works in breakfast, she helps set the tone for our guests' day. A friendly greeting, a clean dining area, a fully stocked breakfast, or simply taking a moment to help a guest can make a lasting impression. What I appreciate the most about Damaris is her willingness to help wherever she is needed. At times, the hotel is short staffed, and before any member of management asks for help, Damaris is ALWAYS the one to jump in and do what is needed. She consistently shows care for our guests and takes ownership of her responsibilities. Her positive attitude and genuine hospitality reflect what we want every guest to experience when they stay with us. She brings warmth and kindness to the hotel every day, and that is something that should be recognized and celebrated. Damaris has multiple responsibilities at the hotel, but one thing that stands out about her is she cares. She cares about our guests, her co-workers, and about doing her job well. Most importantly, she is reliable and dependable. As a hotel leader, I am incredibly grateful to have Damaris as an employee! She is an integral part of what makes our hotel successful, and I believe she deserves to know how much her hard work is appreciated.

Samantha Pelot

Banquet Set Up Supervisor - JW Marriott Indianapolis

Samantha is the kind of leader every team hopes to have. While guests may never see the countless details that go into preparing a flawless event, they experience the results of Samantha's hard work every day. From intimate meetings to large-scale banquets and elegant ballroom events, she ensures every space is perfectly prepared, every detail is accounted for, and every event is set up for success. What makes Samantha truly stand out is her ability to lead by example. She is never afraid to roll up her sleeves and work alongside her team, whether that means setting up meeting rooms, refreshing event spaces, operating equipment, or handling last-minute changes with professionalism and a calm demeanor. Her strong organizational skills, attention to detail, and ability to adapt under pressure ensure that even the most complex events are executed seamlessly. Beyond her operational expertise, Samantha is deeply committed to her team. She trains and develops associates, promotes a culture of safety and accountability, and creates an environment where people feel supported and valued. She takes pride in recognizing the contributions of others, fostering teamwork, and helping associates grow professionally. What we admire most about Samantha is her genuine ownership of the operation. She treats every event as if it were her own and approaches every challenge with a positive attitude and a solutions-focused mindset. Her dedication to our guests, her commitment to her team, and her passion for excellence make a lasting impact on our hotel every day.

Thomas Robinson
Maintenance Tech - Hampton Inn Lafayette

Tom is truly the heart of our hotel. At 76 years old and retired, Tom works with us part-time, yet his dedication often exceeds that of someone working full-time. He does not have to be here, but time and again, he chooses to be because he cares deeply about our hotel, our employees, and the success of our entire team. His commitment was recognized when he was named our 2025 Employee of the Year. Tom consistently goes above and beyond without ever needing to be asked. He comes in on his days off simply to make sure the hotel is taken care of and that his coworkers, including myself, are not overwhelmed. From February through July, when we did not have a maintenance employee, Tom voluntarily stepped in and worked full-time hours. He did this not because it was required of him, but because he saw what the hotel and his fellow employees needed and wanted to help. His dedication extends far beyond his regular responsibilities. Tom is involved in every employee celebration and recognition event. He cooks for our staff, participates in our activities, stays afterward to help clean up, and makes sure everyone feels supported and appreciated. He is dependable, respectful, thoughtful, and consistently puts the needs of the team ahead of his own. While much of Tom’s work happens behind the scenes, his impact reaches every guest who walks through our doors. By helping ensure the hotel is maintained, employees are

supported, and operations continue smoothly, he directly supports the level of service our guests receive. Om does not seek recognition for what he does. He simply sees a need and steps in to help. His loyalty, work ethics, compassion, and commitment are unmatched. I cannot think of anyone more deserving of the Lodging Heart of the House Award.

Alex Ruiz
Laundry Attendant - Hampton Inn & Suites, Munster

I am honored to nominate Alexandra Ruiz (Alex) for an Award of Recognition for her outstanding dedication, compassion, and commitment to going above and beyond in her role as a Laundry Attendant. Working in hospitality requires teamwork, dependability, and a willingness to do whatever is needed to ensure our guests receive the best possible experience. Alex consistently demonstrates all these qualities. During a recent storm that took power out at our hotel, Alex stepped up and when our power was restored, she came into work during the evenings to get our linen back in service. Alex takes great pride in her work and understanding that the laundry department plays an important role in the overall success of the hotel. Whether it is making sure linens are clean and prepared on time, keeping her work area organized, or stepping in to help wherever needed, Alex approaches every responsibility with a positive attitude and a strong work ethic. What makes Alex especially deserving of recognition is that her dedication extends far beyond her job responsibilities. She has shown extraordinary kindness and compassion toward a fellow team member by helping that teammate get back and forth to work. This generous act demonstrates the kind of person Alex is not only a dependable employee, but also someone who genuinely cares about the people she works alongside. Alex's willingness to help a coworker maintain reliable transportation allows that teammate to come to work consistently and be part of our team. Alex gives her time and effort without expecting recognition in return. This is a true example of teamwork and of the hospitality spirit we strive to provide not only to our guests, but to one another.

Renato Sousa
Room Attendant - Fairfield Inn & Suites, Franklin

As a Room Attendant, Renato Sousa plays an essential role in creating a welcoming, clean, and comfortable environment for our guests. His work goes far beyond cleaning guest rooms. He helps shape the overall guest experience and represents the high standards of service and hospitality that our hotel strives to provide every day. Renato understands that attention to detail makes a difference. His commitment to maintaining clean, well-presented guest rooms contributes directly to guest satisfaction and reflects the pride he takes in his work. His role is one that often happens behind the scenes, but its impact is felt by every guest who walks through our doors. What makes

Renato deserving of this recognition is the value he brings to our team through his reliability, dedication, and willingness to contribute to the success of our hotel. Room attendants are the backbone of hotel operations, and Renato exemplifies the importance of this role through his daily efforts. The hospitality industry is built on people who genuinely care about the experience they provide, and Renato is an example of the hard work and commitment that keep our industry thriving. His contributions deserve to be recognized and celebrated. Renato Sousa is truly a star in our industry, and I am proud to nominate him for the Indiana Stars of the Industry Award.

Helen Walker
Laundry Attendant - Holiday Inn Terre Haute

Helen Walker truly represents the heart of the house. With an incredible 38 years in the hospitality industry, including the past 9 years at Holiday Inn, Terre Haute. Helen had dedicated her career to serving others with professionalism, kindness, and an unwavering commitment to hard work. As a Laundry Attendant, Helen plays an essential role in creating a positive experience for every guest. She takes great pride in her work and understands that the details behind the scenes are just as important as the guest-facing experience. Her dedication, reliability and attention to detail help ensure that our hotel maintains the high standards our guests expect. Helen is also an exceptional team member. She is always willing to help, works well with others, and sets an example through her strong work ethic. Her professionalism and positive attitude are evident in everything she does. She is wonderful with guest interactions and consistently makes people feel welcome and appreciated. Helen's dedication is reflected in her accomplishments. She has received Employee of the Month at least once every year for nine years she has been at Holiday Inn, Terre Haute. This year, she also achieved perfect attendance – a true testament to her reliability and commitment. Helen is a simple, humble person who has dedicated her life to hard work and family. When asked what she enjoys most about hospitality, her answer is simple: the guest and positive work environment. Helen's genuine care for people, commitment to her team and years of service make her an outstanding example of what it means to be Heart of House.

Lodging Manager of the Year (100 rooms or less)

Mayra Castillo
Housekeeping Supervisor - TownePlace Suites Indianapolis Airport

Mayra is a hands-on leader who leads by example. She takes tremendous pride in her housekeeping team and understands that cleanliness is one of the most important foundations of hospitality. Under her leadership, her team has achieved an 82% guest satisfaction score for

cleanliness (8 percentage points above brand benchmark). This accomplishment reflects not only Mayra's high standards, but also her ability to coach, motivate, and inspire her team to consistently deliver excellent results. What truly sets Mayra apart, however, is that she does not limit herself to her job description. When our breakfast operation began struggling and guest satisfaction scores declined, Mayra recognized the hotel needed additional support. Without hesitation, she stepped up to help lead breakfast operations. Her involvement made an immediate, measurable difference. In just one month, breakfast satisfaction improved from 11% to 65%, a remarkable 54-percentage-point increase. The resulting score was 10 points above brand benchmark. Mayra took on a challenge outside her primary area of responsibility, learned what was needed, and helped turn a struggling operation into one that exceeded expectations. She understands that every department contributes to the overall guest experience and that the success of one department affects every other area. Mayra saw an opportunity to help and she delivered results. She works alongside her team, provides direction and encouragement, and is willing to step in wherever she is needed. Her employees know they can depend on her, and her example encourages them to take ownership of their responsibilities and pride in the service they provide. Mayra also understands that the details matter. A clean guest room, a welcoming breakfast experience, a quick response to a guest need, or an employee who feels supported may each seem like a small part of the operation. Mayra understands that, together, those details define a guest's perception of the entire hotel. Mayra demonstrates that leadership is not defined by a title. It is defined by initiative, accountability, service, and the willingness to step forward when your team and your guests need you. She does this while demonstrating the genuine care and dedication that make hospitality special.

Patrick Durbin
GM - Residence Inn/Springhill Suites Keystone

Lodging Manager of the Year (more than 100 rooms)

Kellie Adams
General Manager - Home2 Suites by Hilton Indianapolis North at Intech Park

With more than a decade of hospitality experience, Kellie Adams understands that great leadership is built through hard work, consistency, and a willingness to step up when it matters most. In just a year and a half with Ivy Hospitality, Kellie has distinguished herself as that kind of leader, earning her recent promotion to General Manager of the Home2 Suites Intech. Kellie joined Ivy in April 2025 as Assistant General Manager at the Home2 Suites Carmel and quickly became an invaluable member of the leadership team. She brought significant industry experience to the role, but what set her apart was her drive to keep learning, take on greater responsibility, and make a difference

wherever needed. She never hesitated to roll up her sleeves, support her team, or take ownership of a challenge. Her progression within Ivy reflects the confidence she has earned from those around her. Kellie has strengthened her operational expertise, embraced feedback, and demonstrated the judgment and leadership necessary to take the next step in her career. When the opportunity came to lead a property of her own, she had proven she was ready. Her promotion to General Manager is an exciting milestone and a testament to the work she has put in to prepare for this opportunity. It reflects Kellie's accomplishments and the confidence others have in her ability to lead a team, take ownership of a property, and build on the strong foundation she has established. Kellie leads through action. She works hard, supports her team, accepts challenges, and continually raises the expectations she sets for herself. In a short time with Ivy Hospitality, she has made a lasting impression and earned the opportunity to lead. Kellie's story is one of experience meeting opportunity—and being ready when that opportunity arrived. Her advancement to General Manager reflects years of dedication to hospitality and the impact she has made since joining Ivy. As she takes this next step in her career, Kellie represents the strength of Hoosier Hospitality today and the leadership that will continue moving the industry forward.

Anthony Armstrong
Dual Purchasing Manager - JW Marriott Indianapolis

Anthony is an exceptional hospitality professional whose impact extends far beyond his role. His combination of culinary expertise, leadership, professionalism, genuine care for others, and commitment to the Indianapolis hospitality community makes him deserve of this recognition. Before becoming a Purchasing Manager, he built his career as an Executive Chef. That experience gives him a unique perspective and an exceptional understanding of quality, products, menus, and the operational challenges faced by our culinary teams. Chefs throughout the hotel and our community regularly seek his advice and feedback when evaluating menu concepts, products, and quality. His recommendations are always thoughtful, practical, and rooted in his genuine passion for delivering an exceptional guest experience. He manages purchasing for JW Indy while also providing support to Marriott Indy, helping develop and strengthen the teams across both properties. He has earned the respect and trust of colleagues at every level through his calm demeanor, professionalism, articulate communication, and wonderful sense of humor. He is someone people genuinely enjoy working with, but more importantly, he is someone people trust. What truly sets him apart is how deeply he cares. He cares about his team, his hotels, his colleagues, and the quality of what we provide to our guests. He takes pride in developing people, finding the right products, supporting our culinary teams, and building strong relationships with our local vendors and partners. Those vendor relationships are built on mutual respect and trust, and they directly benefit our operation. His influence reaches beyond the walls of the hotel. He has a deep passion for the arts and is an active member of the Indiana creative community. He owns and

operates an art gallery and is also a professional photographer. These passions speak to the creativity, curiosity, and appreciation for excellence that he brings to everything he does. His career reflects: leadership, excellence, service, mentorship, and a lasting commitment to the hospitality industry and the community he calls home. He is not simply a Purchasing Manager—he is a mentor, a leader, a trusted resource, an advocate for quality, and an ambassador for JW Indy and Indianapolis.

Chef James Bryant
Executive Chef - Sheraton Indianapolis City Centre

Since 2005, Executive Chef James Bryant has been a foundational leader of the Sheraton Indianapolis City Centre, guiding our culinary operation through 21 years of change. French trained, Chef James pairs classic technique with a talent for high-volume banquet production, delivering quality at scale. While hotel kitchens are often the loudest and most stressful place in the building, his is the quietest and most family-oriented, and you will find him laughing and having fun with his team every day. Chef James is one of our most visible leaders. His tall white chef hat can be found touching tables daily in every outlet, at the omelet station in the center of Circle Cafe, and on the lobby marble greeting guests as they arrive and depart. That tall white chef hat is his calling card, his signature, and his lasting impression on our guests. This past year, Chef James significantly grew revenue in every outlet and in banquets. He brought back In-Room Dining for the first time since COVID and introduced Poolside Dining on our ninth-floor pool deck overlooking Monument Circle. He also grew sales at Monumental Coffee, the hotel's coffee shop, by adding breakfast and lunch sandwiches. James's greatest legacy may be the leaders he develops. He has mentored his two sous chefs for 35 and 11 years. Sous Chef John says, "Chef took a chance on me 35 years ago when I was 21 and a dishwasher at Marriott East. He's been a big brother to me my entire adult life." Sous Chef Stacey says, "James has taught me what it truly means to be a chef," and calls him a father figure. That loyalty reflects a manager who invests in his people as much as his menus. Chef James combines culinary excellence, strong financial results, and genuine care for his team and our guests, who leave our hotel remembering the chef in the tall white hat. For two decades of leadership that has shaped our hotel and contributed to Indiana's hospitality industry, we are proud to nominate him for Lodging Manager of the Year.

Kristan Cain
Assistant General Manager - Fairfield Inn Carmel

Kristan's story is why I am so proud to nominate her for Lodging Manager of the Year. She began her hospitality career 11 years ago as a part-time breakfast attendant after being a stay-at-home mom. From there, she continued to grow, taking on front desk responsibilities, gaining experience in hotel operations, and joining our property in 2021. She later entered our MIT Program, and when I became General Manager, one of my first decisions was to make Kristan my Assistant General Manager. I had only met Kristan once before making that decision. Sometimes you meet someone and immediately know they know what they are doing. That was Kristan. She knew the hotel, understood the operation, cared about the team, and carried herself like someone ready for more. Since stepping into the AGM role, she has proven that decision right. Kristan leads alongside her team. If breakfast is short, she is here bright and early to serve it. If laundry is backed up, she jumps in. If the front desk needs help, she is there. No task is beneath her because of her title. She is exceptional at training and developing employees. She takes time to explain things, answer questions, and help people build confidence in themselves. Shortly after becoming AGM, our hotel went through a major systems cutover. I told her we would be working more than 24 hours over two days, and she never hesitated. She showed up, stayed focused, and worked through every challenge beside me. I am a first-time General Manager, and Kristan is a first-time AGM. Our leadership dynamic simply works. We balance each other, communicate well, and share the same expectations for our hotel and team. Her dedication to our employees and her dedication to our hotel is unmatched. She has worked her way from part-time breakfast attendant to Assistant General Manager over 11 years, earning every step. I am proud to work beside her and proud to nominate her for Lodging Manager of the Year.

Billy Dean
Assistant Director of Operations - Hyatt Regency Indianapolis

You hear it said that we all have the same 24 hours. Statistically, you are either at work or should be sleeping for about two-thirds of them—which makes it remarkable that Billy Dean chooses to dedicate nearly three additional hours each day simply traveling to and from our hotel. But that is Billy. He shows up. Billy has spent more than 30 years mastering the craft of hospitality across the country: breakfast service in San Diego, Front Desk in Minneapolis, Housekeeping in Dallas, and now Assistant Director of Operations in Indianapolis. Yet despite decades of experience, Billy has never become someone who simply rests on what he already knows. His day begins around 4:00 a.m. After tending to his dog and ducks, checking on the early-morning wildlife, and grabbing his first cup of coffee, he begins the 90-minute commute to work. Once he arrives, he is constantly moving. He leads Housekeeping, deploying the team to turn the day's rooms. He oversees Front Desk operations, coaching associates on service and sharing lessons earned through decades in hospitality. Yet no task is beneath him. Billy will clear a table, adjust pillows in a guest room, or

personally welcome a guest waiting to check in. His leadership is equally personal. In one-on-one meetings, he combines operational data with experience to provide specific, actionable feedback. New managers seek him out as a mentor. Associates seek him out for advice, encouragement, translation assistance, and guest-recovery guidance. And Billy understands that caring for employees goes beyond coaching performance. When a team member is expecting a baby, Billy is often the one organizing the shower—coordinating the gifts, food, cake, games, and every blue or pink decoration. Need a translator? Call Billy. Need help recovering a guest experience? Find Billy. Need a fresh idea to energize your team? Ask Billy. For more than 30 years, he has made hospitality his craft—and each day, he still shows up ready to serve.

Kendra Hines
General Manager - Hilton

Kendra Hines is the kind of hospitality leader who understands that taking care of people is at the heart of taking care of business. Throughout her 17-year hospitality career, Kendra has consistently brought a hands-on, positive approach to leadership, building relationships and creating an environment where people feel valued and supported. What makes Kendra especially deserving of a Stars of the Industry nomination is the intentional way she invests in her team. She looks beyond the traditional definition of employee recognition and finds meaningful ways to show her staff that she sees them as people, not simply employees. One example is her initiative to put together school supply-filled book bags for team members with school-aged children. It is a simple gesture, but one that demonstrates an understanding of what matters to her employees outside of the workplace and reminds them that their family's matter, too. Kendra also creates opportunities for her team to connect and celebrate together, from staff appreciation efforts to fun team experiences. Her leadership is rooted in gratitude, encouragement and genuine relationships. Her recent transition into the General Manager role at DoubleTree by Hilton Evansville is a natural next step for someone who has spent years investing in both the hospitality industry and the people within it. Kendra represents the best of hospitality leadership: someone who takes care of her people, celebrates their contributions and understands that when employees feel valued, they are empowered to create exceptional experiences for guests. She doesn't just lead a hotel; she is helping build a culture where people want to belong, grow and succeed.

Laura Koenker
Area General Manager - Hampton Inn & Suites Muncie and Home2 Muncie

Laura Koenker's hospitality career began at 18 years old behind the front desk. More than two decades of General Manager experience later, she is now an Area General Manager whose leadership reaches across six hotels. Her journey is a testament to hard work, perseverance, and a

genuine passion for hospitality—and she has never forgotten where she started. Laura directly leads two hotels while providing leadership and operational support to four additional properties. What makes her impact remarkable is that she never treats those additional hotels as simply another responsibility. She invests in their General Managers, helps them navigate operational and financial challenges, supports leadership transitions, and shares the knowledge she has gained throughout her career. When a hotel or leader needs help, Laura shows up. That same spirit of service extends well beyond her hotels. Laura has made community involvement part of the culture she creates, leading her teams in quarterly service projects supporting local shelters, food banks, and other organizations. She has also helped champion Hampton Halloween, a longstanding tradition at Hampton Inn & Suites Muncie that creates a safe and accessible Halloween experience for individuals with special needs and their families. It is a meaningful example of Laura's belief that hospitality is not confined to the guests who walk through the hotel doors. Laura truly embodies Ivy Hospitality's values in how she leads and serves. She is a leader who remembers what it was like to be the 18-year-old front desk agent, and she uses that perspective to develop, encourage, and create opportunities for others. Laura's success can be measured in strong hotels, but her greatest impact is found in the people, leaders, and communities she has made better along the way. That lasting impact is what makes Laura Koenker a true example of Hoosier Hospitality and an exceptional candidate for Hospitality Indiana's 2026 Lodging Manager of the Year.

Bryce Miller
Director of Sales - Home2 Suites Indianapolis North at Intech Park

If you've worked with Bryce Miller, you know why his teammates call him "B-Money." He has a knack for building relationships, finding opportunities, and turning them into business. Just as importantly, he cares about the people behind those room nights. Bryce's focused sales efforts helped drive 15.4% year-over-year RevPAR growth, more than 6,200 additional room nights, and over $635,000 in room revenue growth. His hotel ranked first in occupancy, ADR, and RevPAR on its STR report. When a major project account's work came to an end, Bryce helped bring in new extended stay business to replace it. The new account delivers stays averaging about 55 nights at a rate $14 higher than the previous account. Bryce understood what the incoming team needed and found an opportunity that supported both occupancy and rate. Bryce also understands that a great client experience takes the whole hotel. He keeps his teammates informed and focused on delivering what was promised. When operations need a hand, he jumps in—even helping inspect rooms. Earlier this year, Bryce received Ivy Hospitality's Most Improved Sales award. I'm proud to nominate him because of the way he achieved those results: with professionalism, genuine care for clients, and a willingness to help his teammates succeed.

Justin Nichols F&B Director Intercontinental Hotel Indianapolis

Dhruv Patel
Owner - Lumina Hospitality, LLC

Since taking over the Fairfield Inn Evansville West in December 2025, Dhruv Patel has gone far beyond the responsibilities of a hotel owner. He has transformed not only the property, but also the culture and spirit of the team. When Dhruv took over the hotel, the property needed significant attention and improvement. Rather than managing from a distance, he immediately rolled up his sleeves and became personally involved in the day-to-day operation. Although Dhruv lives in Chicago, he temporarily relocated to Evansville when he took over the property so he could be present and oversee operations firsthand. Since then, he has been at the hotel virtually every single day—including weekends—working alongside his team and stepping in wherever he is needed. Whether it is helping with operations, supporting the front desk, assisting housekeeping, addressing guest needs, or simply being there for his employees, Dhruv leads by example. What makes Dhruv truly exceptional is the way he treats his employees. He has created an environment where staff members feel like family rather than simply coworkers. He takes the time to listen, support, encourage, and recognize his team. His dedication has helped build a stronger, more positive workplace culture that directly translates into better service for guests. I have never seen a more dedicated hotel owner. Dhruv does not simply own the property—he is invested in its people, its guests, and its success. He has demonstrated that outstanding hospitality starts with taking care of your team, and his team, in turn, takes care of the guests. Dhruv Patel is a true example of servant leadership and an individual who has gone above and beyond to make a lasting difference in the hospitality industry.

Bryan Phelps
Executive Steward - Hilton Indianapolis Hotel & Suites

For more than 25 years, Bryan Phelps, Executive Steward at Hilton Indianapolis Hotel & Suites, has exemplified the highest standards of hospitality leadership through operational excellence, servant leadership, and an unwavering commitment to developing others. Throughout his career, Bryan has been a driving force behind the success of the hotel, consistently demonstrating professionalism, integrity, and dedication while positively influencing team members, hotel operations, and the overall guest experience. Bryan's commitment to operational excellence is evident in every aspect of his leadership. He has maintained exceptional standards in cleanliness, sanitation, and food safety, contributing to consistently outstanding Eco Sure inspection results, often achieving near-perfect scores. His success stems not only from compliance with standards but from his ability to create a culture of accountability, preparation, and pride. Over the course of his career, he has

recruited, trained, mentored, and developed countless hospitality professionals, helping them build successful careers within the industry. Many team members who began under his guidance have advanced into supervisory and management positions, carrying forward the leadership values and operational standards he instilled in them. His ability to build high-performing teams is reflected in measurable results. More than 30 members of his team have earned Team Member of the Month recognition during his tenure, a remarkable achievement that demonstrates his talent for inspiring excellence, fostering engagement, and creating an environment where people feel supported and empowered to succeed. Bryan's own contributions have been recognized multiple times through Department Manager of the Quarter honors, reflecting both his operational expertise and the respect he has earned from fellow leaders and team members. Known for his humility, accountability, and collaborative spirit, he leads by example and consistently supports the success of every department within the hotel. For more than two decades, Bryan has elevated operational standards, strengthened teams, and positively impacted countless careers. For his exceptional leadership, dedication to employee development, sustained operational excellence, and lasting contributions to the hospitality profession, Bryan Phelps is highly deserving of recognition as Lodging Manager of the Year. His legacy of excellence continues to influence Hilton Indianapolis Hotel & Suites and the people he serves every day.

Michelle Sbai
General Manager - Courtyard by Marriott Fishers

Michelle Sbai exemplifies what it means to be an exceptional General Manager and is truly deserving of the title Lodging Manager of the Year. Five years ago, Michelle joined Dunn Hospitality Group to open the Courtyard by Marriott Fishers. From day one, she built a team around her vision, high standards, and commitment to excellence. The results have been extraordinary. Within 90 days, the hotel achieved its fair share of occupancy, and within six months, it reached #1 in RevPAR among its competitive set—a position it has maintained ever since. Her leadership and the property's outstanding performance earned the hotel Marriott's Courtyard Best New Hotel Opening Award. Michelle's greatest strength, however, is her ability to lead through change while never losing sight of operational excellence or the guest experience. This year, she guided her team through a significant property management system conversion with minimal disruption. She also successfully navigated a major ownership transition that brought new processes, reporting requirements, and operational priorities. Michelle embraced each challenge with professionalism, precision, and an unwavering commitment to success. Her impact was so immediate that the new ownership has jokingly asked if she could be "cloned" for its other properties. Michelle's response to every challenge says it all: "I'm not scared. "Michelle is also a rare combination of analytical expertise and compassionate leadership. Her passion for revenue strategy has produced an exceptional 12-month rolling RevPAR Index of 167.7. Yet her greatest accomplishment may be the

culture she has created. Through support, accountability, camaraderie, and genuine investment in her people, Michelle has built a team where employees thrive, grow, and want to stay—resulting in one of the lowest turnover rates in the company. Michelle doesn't simply manage a hotel; she inspires people, delivers exceptional results, embraces change, and consistently raises the standard of excellence. Her proven performance, fearless leadership, and ability to make everyone around her better are exactly why Michelle Sbai should be considered for the honor of being recognized as Lodging Manager of the Year.

Alberto Jorge Soto
Event Services Manager - Indianapolis Marriott Downtown

Alberto (Jorge) Soto consistently demonstrates what true professionalism looks like in hospitality. As an Event Services Manager, the role is physically demanding, fast-paced, and constantly changing, yet he approaches every challenge with a positive attitude and commitment to making the experience better for both our clients and the teams. One of Alberto's greatest strengths is his approach to teamwork and guest interaction. He leads with "yes" and "my pleasure," creating an environment where associates and guests feel supported and valued. Alberto remains calm and adaptable. He understands that in hospitality, his attitude can be just as impactful as the service provided. Alberto is often the manager on-site when groups are loading in late at night. Our clients consistently rave about the exceptional assistance he and his team provide, ensuring events are properly set in the space and assisting with moving materials, packages, and anything else needed to make the event successful. Alberto also takes great pride in developing those around him. He encourages associates to learn and grow in all areas of the operations and not just within their current position. Associates often pick up in other areas of the hotel and complex due to his encouragement to learn different areas (Housekeeping, Purchasing, Club, Banquets, etc.) His leadership helps create stronger, and more well-rounded team members. Alberto encourages his team members to participate in our English Learning Class and has had graduates in every class. What makes Alberto stand out is that he consistently leads by example. He brings professionalism, positivity, adaptability, and pride to a role that requires all those qualities every single day. His commitment to his team and our guests makes a noticeable impact.

Kristin Stonestreet
Bottleworks

Kristin's dedication is very apparent to ensure the Banquets department successfully executes every event at Bottleworks. She leads by example, working alongside her employees on the floor to ensure the details are executed.

Kristin has a true passion for creativity especially when it come to developing menus and personalizing beverage packages for clients. She is always willing to go above and beyond in creating something unique for any event. This year, Kristin crafted two new bar packages that have elevated our events program and created memorable experiences for our guests.
Her flexibility to adapt to the last minute requests with pop up events she is always ready to welcome any additional business. She knows the BEO's like the back of her hand and can adjust staffing and schedules to accommodate new events while ensuring it will still run smoothly.
Kristin strives to have a relationship with new and returning clients but makes it priority to be present and personally connecting with clients to reassure them that is always available if needed.
As a leader, Kristin is constantly encouraging her team to grow and learn. She sets her employees up for success by ensuring they know what to expect when they arrive for their shift. Her team knows they are able to get quick answers to any questions they may have.
Throughout her time here at Bottleworks Kristin has continued to grow as a leader and her dedication for the overall success of the department. Kristin continues to push the boundaries of what exception hospitality looks like!

Jarod Walls
Dual Director of Sales - Home2 Suites Muncie

Jarod Walls, Dual Director of Sales for Home2 Suites and Hampton Inn & Suites Muncie, goes above and beyond by connecting people, strengthening community partnerships, and creating a collaborative culture across both hotels. As Leader of the Cardinal Success BNI group, Jarod expands networking and referral opportunities for local businesses while strengthening Ivy Hospitality's presence in Muncie. His deep relationships with Ball State University and the broader community make him a valuable resource for clients and colleagues. He shares market intelligence with Revenue Management and Operations, helping both hotels anticipate demand, identify opportunities, and deliver coordinated service. Jarod brings creativity and enthusiasm to his work. His themed costume sales blitzes create memorable client interactions while encouraging associate participation and team engagement. He builds relationships that extend beyond a transaction, connecting the hotels with the people and organizations that make Muncie a welcoming destination. While supporting Hampton Inn & Suites, Jarod also helped introduce Home2 Suites to the community through its grand opening. Alongside General Manager Laura Koenker, he coordinated marketing materials, the press release, VIP invitations and RSVPs, the agenda, and speaker talking points. He represented the hotel as a speaker alongside community

and ownership leaders, taking ownership of details beyond traditional sales responsibilities. That commitment is reflected in the hotels' achievements. Both received Ivy Hospitality's Roots Award for volunteerism, charitable involvement, and community partnerships. Home2 earned Gold and Hampton earned Silver in Muncie's Quest for the Best Awards. Home2 achieved and maintained the #1 RevPAR ranking in its competitive set beginning in February 2026, while Hampton maintained its own #1 ranking every month year-to-date. Jarod also generated $148k in first-quarter 2026 group bookings for Home2.Jarod's impact reaches beyond sales results. Through community leadership, creative outreach, and collaboration across departments, he helps clients feel connected, associates feel engaged, and both hotels serve as valued partners in Muncie.

Restaurant Front of the House Award

Melissa Angelillis

Bartender - St Elmo Steak House

For more than a decade, Melissa has been a constant presence at our restaurant. She spent most of her career behind the bar before transitioning into serving, and throughout every chapter, one thing has remained unchanged: Melissa shows up. She shows up for her guests. She shows up for her coworkers. Most importantly, she shows up for people. Melissa is what you might call a silent force in the hospitality industry. She doesn't seek the spotlight or recognition. She simply goes about her work, consistently delivering the kind of hospitality people remember. She is the person who picks up a shift when someone needs help, works the less desirable section without complaint, and sees what needs to be done and does it. She makes the people around her better without needing credit. Her commitment to her coworkers extends far beyond the restaurant. When someone is being recognized, Melissa is there. When someone is going through a difficult time, Melissa is there. At celebrations, recognitions, funerals, and the moments in between, she has made it a habit to show up for the people who have become her restaurant family. That is hospitality in its purest form. Recently, a group of guests she cared for gave Melissa a standing ovation. It was a remarkable moment, but for those who know her, it was not surprising. Her service has always been about more than taking an order or delivering a meal. She creates connections and makes people feel genuinely cared for. Perhaps the greatest testament to Melissa's character is what she has overcome personally. While continuing to be there for everyone around her, Melissa faced her own battle with cancer. She fought through an incredibly difficult chapter and came out the other side, remaining the same caring, dependable person her coworkers have always known. Melissa's story is one of resilience, generosity, and quiet dedication. She represents the kind of hospitality professional every restaurant hopes to have, and while her impact may be quiet, it is anything but small.

Marin Borst
Bartender / Bar Manager - Union 50

Marin is the quiet yet solid beating heart of Union 50 and our talented team of bartenders. Marin's leadership, passion for her craft, and hospitality are evident every day she's in the building. She manages and has helped build one of the greatest cocktail programs in the city. While putting together our most recent fall/winter cocktail list, I witnessed her hard work and dedication during and after her shifts. I would always find Marin working away on her laptop after a shift coming up with themes, names, garnishes, and new unique recipes for the menu. This quality extends through her dedication of her leadership, structure, attention to detail, and her hospitality. Marin's exceptional hard work and dedication have earned the utmost respect from her peers and her management team. She is a true leader and an essential member of our team. I look forward to her continued growth and success as an employee and as a human being.

Marin Borst
Bartender - Union 50

The best of Marin Borst's work at Union 50 often happens after the shift ends, when the guests have gone home but her commitment to excellence continues. Marin manages one of the finest cocktail programs in the city, a program she has helped build through creativity, dedication, and countless hours behind the scenes. While developing Union 50's fall/winter cocktail menu, Marin could be found long after closing, thoughtfully crafting recipes, developing themes, perfecting garnishes, and finding the right names to bring each cocktail to life. Her passion is evident in every detail, and her impact extends far beyond the drinks she serves. Marin is the steady organizer who keeps the team running smoothly, steps up to cover shifts, and consistently puts the needs of others first. She gives her own time and resources to transform the bar for every holiday, creating handmade decorations that make Union 50 feel special. At Christmas, each bartender receives a personalized stocking bearing their name. From Valentine's Day to St. Patrick's Day and Halloween, her artistic touches create memorable experiences for both guests and staff. That same thoughtfulness defines her relationships with guests. Tom, a regular who visits Union 50 more than twice a week for dinner, has become such a meaningful part of Marin's world that he was a guest at her wedding last year. This relationship speaks volumes about the connections she builds and the lasting impression she leaves on those she serves. Marin is the quiet, steady heart of Union 50's bar program. Her leadership, artistry, reliability, and genuine hospitality inspire her colleagues and elevate every guest experience. She does not go above and beyond for recognition; she does it because she cares deeply about her craft, her team, and her guests. It is our honor to nominate Marin Borst for the 2026 Hospitality Indiana Restaurant Front of the House Award.

Abby Candor
Server - the Eagles Nest

Imagine the moment you are about to ask the person you love most to spend the rest of their life with you. You are nervous, excited, and aware that countless moments have led to this one. For life's biggest moments, we want family nearby. In fine dining, those moments happen every day: engagements, milestone birthdays, anniversaries, and celebrations years in the making. A good server knows when to appear, when to guide, and when to step away and let the moment linger. A star server understands something more: for a few hours, they have been invited into the family. Abby Candor is that kind of server. I probably should not write Abby's nomination because, according to Abby, she is my sister. We may have grown up across the world from one another—Abby in the Philippines and me in Indiana—but after she first served me in one of our restaurants, she decided we were family. When I later brought in my 70-year-old mother, Abby greeted her as she would her own: with a huge smile, an embrace, and delighted chatter about seeing her family again. On my anniversary, Abby celebrated alongside my husband and me, taking photographs and even moving to another level of the restaurant to find the perfect angle. And I am only one of many guests welcomed into Abby's enormous family. Abby understands both sides of that bond. While working far from home, she received news that her own mother, thousands of miles away, had passed. Unable to immediately be surrounded by relatives, Abby found comfort in the coworkers who had become her family here. She knows no stranger. Whether recommending the perfect meal, presenting a special vintage, capturing a photograph, or sending guests home with a handmade card, Abby makes people feel celebrated. Long after guests forget what they ordered, they remember how Abby made them feel: like family at a moment worth remembering.

Edgar Cortez
Bartender - Conner's Kitchen and Bar/Rye Bar - Indianapolis Marriott Downtown

For the past three years, Eddie has been an integral part of the Conner's Kitchen and Rye Bar team, bringing a level of expertise, professionalism, and creativity that elevates the guest experience every day. His years of bartending experience have helped shape and strengthen our bar program, and his passion for the craft is evident in every cocktail he creates. Whether he is experimenting with a new spirit, developing an innovative recipe, or adding the perfect finishing touch with a thoughtfully crafted garnish, Eddie pours his heart into his work. His knowledge of cocktails and spirits, combined with his genuine enthusiasm for hospitality, allows him to create memorable experiences for guests. When someone approaches the bar unsure of what to order, Eddie takes the time to connect, recommend, and craft the perfect beverage based on their preferences. Those personalized interactions have helped him build a loyal following of regular guests who return to Rye Bar specifically for his exceptional cocktails and engaging service. Beyond his talent behind the

bar, Eddie is a trusted and dependable team member behind the scenes. He plays an active role in liquor orders, organization, cleanliness, and ensuring that operational tasks are completed to the highest standard. His willingness to step up, support his team, and take pride in every aspect of the operation demonstrates his commitment to excellence. Eddie's dedication, creativity, and professionalism have made a lasting impact on Rye Bar's success over the past several years. We are incredibly proud to have him on our team and grateful for the passion, expertise, and energy he brings to our guests and associates every day.

Yirgalem Ghebreab
Banquet Server - JW Marriott Indianapolis

Yirga is much more than an exceptional banquet server. She is the type of associate who makes our team stronger, our events more successful, and our guests feel genuinely welcomed. What stands out most about Yirga is the pride she takes in her work and the care she shows to everyone around her. No matter how busy the day becomes, she approaches each event with a positive attitude, a warm smile, and a willingness to do whatever is needed to ensure success. Whether she is preparing a ballroom for hundreds of guests, serving a formal banquet, or helping break down an event late in the evening, she gives every task her full effort and attention. Yirga has a natural ability to connect with people. Guests are often drawn to her friendly personality and genuine hospitality. She has a way of making people feel seen and cared for, even during the busiest events. While many guests may never know everything happening behind the scenes, they remember the associate who made them feel welcome, and that is exactly the kind of impression Yirga leaves. Her teammates appreciate her just as much. She is dependable, hardworking, and always willing to lend a hand without being asked. When challenges arise, she remains calm, adaptable, and focused on finding solutions. Her positive attitude is contagious and helps create an environment where teamwork thrives. What makes Yirga truly deserving of this recognition is not simply what she does, but how she does it. She serves with kindness, leads through example, and embodies the spirit of hospitality in every interaction. Yirga represents the very best of our team, and we are incredibly fortunate to have her.

Valerie Kristek
Bottleworks

Valerie provides exceptional service to all of our customers while assisting in all aspects on the operational side of the business. She has been a leader of our culture front the last 7 months and is a huge factor in the coffee shop's turn around. She effortlessly balances making high-quality espresso drinks and making genuine connections with customers, which creates an effervescent

and calming atmosphere, even during the busiest rushes. It's wonderful to have her around while she's continuing her education as an x-ray technician

Luis Perez
Server Assistant - Vida

For four years, Luis Perez has shown us what exceptional hospitality looks like, not through grand gestures, but through the remarkable consistency, humility, and care he brings to every shift at Vida. Each morning, Luis reports to a downtown steakhouse, where he works as a prep cook. After a full day on his feet, he arrives at Vida for his evening shift as a Server Assistant. He is on time, impeccably dressed, and ready to contribute, greeting his teammates and guests with a smile and genuine enthusiasm. Anyone can have a great day at work. Luis has made showing up with that same commitment a defining part of who he is. Four years of this dedication have earned him the admiration and gratitude of everyone at Vida. What truly sets Luis apart, however, is the way he makes people feel. He remembers regulars by name and knows their preferences, creating the kind of personal connection that turns a dinner out into a familiar, welcoming experience. For first-time guests, he offers that same warmth and attention, ensuring they feel as though they belong. He understands that hospitality is not simply about serving a table; it is about making people feel recognized, valued, and cared for. At Vida, where excellence is built on precision and the smallest details matter, Luis is an essential part of what makes the experience exceptional. He notices what needs to be done, supports his teammates without hesitation, and brings a steadiness that allows the entire team to perform at its best. He does not seek recognition or the spotlight. He simply takes pride in doing his job well and making the people around him successful. Luis reminds us that the heart of hospitality is not a title or a particular role. It is the willingness to give your best, even when you are tired, and to treat every person with genuine kindness, every single day. His dedication is extraordinary, and his presence makes Vida better. It is our honor to nominate him for the 2026 Hospitality Indiana Restaurant Front of the House Award.

Josiah "Jo" Thibodeau
Bartender - Modita

For an entire year, Jo Thibodeau showed up to train Modita’s front-of-house team, not because he was asked, but because he believed his teammates deserved the opportunity to learn, grow, and excel, .Jo transformed his passion for mixology, Asian spirits, and sake into a weekly training program he developed and led entirely on his own initiative. His commitment reflects something

exceptional: Jo doesn't keep his knowledge to himself. He shares it, builds confidence in others, and makes everyone around him better. That same instinct defines his hospitality. One evening, a guest jokingly introduced herself as a new Modita employee. Two teammates joined the fun, and Jo added his own ideas: a conversation about sake and a check presented in a training folder. What began as a playful exchange became a personalized training server book, complete with handwritten notes about her meal. The guest was so delighted that she took photos and brought the notes home. Jo helped turn an ordinary dinner into a story worth remembering; a perfect example of hospitality built on creativity, teamwork, and genuine connection. Guests recognize his expertise and the care with which he shares it. A 9/28 review praised Jo's explanations of the stories and origins behind Modita's sake selections, as well as his attentive service, concluding, "I'll be back for training day two!" Jo's influence extends beyond Modita. He was selected for the 2025 FOH × Tales of the Cocktail scholarship class, and his cocktail, Midnight Chimes, earned a place among the top three competitors at Indianapolis's 2026 Bar Fight. These accomplishments demonstrate his commitment to continually developing his craft and contributing to the hospitality community. Even outside the restaurant, Jo's playful, imaginative spirit shines through his longtime Dungeons & Dragons group, an enthusiasm that carries into the experiences he creates for guests and colleagues. Jo embodies what FOH hospitality should be: knowledgeable, generous, and deeply human. He teaches without being asked, inspires without seeking recognition, and turns small moments into lasting memories. It is our honor to nominate Josiah Thibodeau for the 2026 Hospitality Indiana Restaurant Front of the House Award.

Union Tuimuk
Bottleworks Hotel

Union is our longest tenured barista, and she's seen the coffee shop go through many iterations. Through constantly changing leadership, staffing issues, and general chaos, she has remained a force of positivity. No matter what's going on, Union takes time to establish and strengthen relationships with all of our customers, especially our regulars. Her ability to remember names and details with every one of our regulars continues to impress me. She also helps bring some art to our shop with all of her hand drawn signage.

Restaurant Heart of the House Award

Priyangsu Dey
Lead Line Cook - Conner's Kitchen + Bar - Indianapolis Marriott Downtown

The Conners Kitchen team would like to nominate Priyangsu Dey for the Stars of the Industry Hospitality Award in recognition of his work as a line cook at the Indianapolis Marriott Downtown. His care and attention to every ingredient and dish he creates reflects the wonderful hospitality each guest and associate receives in our hotel. His skill in cooking each dish is equally matched by his welcoming demeanor and hospitality forward attitude. Restaurants are hectic, require long days, and hard work. Priyangsu has not only become a dependable member of our team but has grown to become a leader for our Chefs and fellow co-workers. He has been able to meet every expectation and rise to any occasion. This nomination recognizes the value of his work and the role he plays in making guests feel well cared for. Every event and guest we serve, Priyangsu makes every moment special and fosters the human experience and connection we seek to provide. We are extremely proud to nominate Priyangsu Dey for this award and hope his contribution to hotel hospitality receives the recognition it deserves.

Netrice Hawthorn
Entry level Cook – Dean's - JW Marriott Indianapolis

Netrice, or Mimi as she is known by her coworkers, demonstrates a strong performance and professionalism at the Raw Bar station in Dean's Steakhouse. She does an excellent job engaging with our guests and creating a welcoming and approachable dining experience. Mimi is knowledgeable of where our offerings at Raw Bar and in Dean's are sourced and shares that knowledge with our guests, creating an elevated dining experience. With her experience and knowledge paired with her outstanding customer service, she is confident with providing recommendations and making suggestions based on guest's preference. Mimi's engagement with our guests is genuine and she will go above and beyond to take care of our guests. She represents our values as White Lodging and represents Dean's in the best light. Mimi has also helped us with off-site events, trained new associates, and has been mentioned numerus times in guests' reviews, all praising the service she provides. She has not worked at any other station in Dean's Steakhouse other than Raw Bar but that is simply by her choice. She enjoys working at the Raw Bar and enjoys engaging with our guests. We look forward to Netrice's continuing positive impact on our culture and our guest experience.

Juan Reyes
Cook - Livery-Indianapolis

Since 2018, every guest who has dined at Livery in downtown Indianapolis has tasted something Juan prepared. Few may know his name, but his work has helped define their experience for eight

years. Juan is the foundation of our kitchen. Every morning, he prepares the purees, guacamole, and finely diced salsas our dinner team depends on. His knife work is precise, his preparation meticulous, and his consistency unwavering. Across thousands of mornings, he has delivered the same quality, care, and attention to detail that our standards demand. He regularly takes on the workload of three people, puts away incoming orders, and handles whatever else the team needs, without being asked. Livery's leadership cannot recall a single day Juan has called off. That remarkable record reflects more than attendance; it speaks to his character, his work ethic, and his commitment to the people who depend on him. When Juan is on the schedule, his team knows they can count on him. His value is so significant that his Executive Chef openly acknowledges he could not perform his role as effectively without Juan. That is perhaps the clearest measure of Juan's impact. He is not simply completing prep work; he is creating the foundation that allows an entire kitchen to succeed. Juan understands that excellence lives in the details. The salsa he prepares today reflects the same care and quality it did years ago. His work sets the pace for the day, supports the dinner cooks through service, and ensures that every dish begins with ingredients prepared to the highest standard. His contribution may happen before the dining room fills, but its influence reaches every table. Heart of the House is often someone guests never see, someone whose dedication makes everyone else better. Juan embodies that spirit. He shows up, works hard, protects our standards, and puts his team first, day after day. Excellence is not an occasional achievement for Juan; it is his everyday standard. He is the backbone of Livery, and it is our honor to nominate him for the 2026 Hospitality Indiana Restaurant Heart of the House Award.

Cameron Sorensen
Line Cook & HOH Supervisor - 1933 Lounge by St. Elmo

We were very proud to nominate Cameron Sorensen for the Stars of the Industry as our Heart of House representative. This decision comes due to his hard work, versatility, personal and professional growth, and dedication to his team and the culinary world. His team spirit is the backbone of how he creates a well performing, positive, respectful, and supportive kitchen environment. He constantly seeks improvement not only in his role with Huse Culinary, but in his development in Culinary School. He has blended his real-world experience and classroom learning in real time to step up his game in both. In the classroom, Cam has sought out every level of accreditation and certification that he can. He has never settled for what he knows already but has consistently aspired for more. With Huse Culinary, Cam has applied this same drive to become a key player in the function of the kitchen. He is trained on every station and once again, did not stop there but went on to become a supervisor. Because of this level of expertise, he is willing and ready to step in and support his team however the situation demands. In addition to his own development, he has extended these efforts to make connections with the team not only in the kitchen but with the FOH as well. When he is on the line, he is doing whatever he can to support those alongside him.

When he is supervising, he drives the kitchen positively, keeping the whole team communicating, and pushing forward. His work ethic, personality, and genuine care for the work he does let everyone around him know that he has their best in mind. His growth and status within Huse Culinary are a reflection of his character and determination. He approaches every opportunity and challenge as a chance to improve. That mindset has allowed him to go from an early developing culinary professional to a highly capable and trusted member of our team. It is for all these reasons that we are honored to celebrate Cameron Sorensen as our nominee for the Stars of the Industry.

Restaurant Manager of the Year: (4 units or less)

Ernest Guipo
Assistant Director of Operations - the Fat Rooster

While this award calls us to celebrate a restaurant manager, I ask you to also consider an ambassador. Ernest Guipo is, unquestionably, an exceptional restaurant manager. He is respected by servers, baristas, hosts, bussers, and culinary associates alike. He schedules, ensures payroll is accurate, de-escalates misunderstandings between guests and coworkers, and keeps the kitchen, front of house, and guest experience working together in the delicate rhythm required of a successful restaurant operation. He does all of this with professionalism, calm, and panache. But where Ernest truly rises above is in the role he has embraced with our J-1 internship program. For interns arriving after a journey of nearly 28 hours, Ernest helps transform a foreign place into a community. He assists with documentation, helps navigate unfamiliar systems, supports interns in securing housing and roommates, and connects young professionals who may come from different parts of a country made up of more than 7,000 islands. Someone else could interview them, hire them, and wish them well. Ernest makes certain they belong. He ensures they experience more than work. He takes pride in introducing them to Indiana traditions, including the State Fair. They travel, celebrate milestones, share meals, and build friendships. At the same time, Ernest helps them preserve a connection to the culture, families, and home they left behind for a year of learning abroad. Ernest understands that transition personally. While Indianapolis is now his home, he recognizes in each intern the excitement and ambition of building a future in America alongside the very real homesickness and culture shock that can accompany it. Because of his stewardship, our interns do more than survive an international experience—they thrive. Ernest manages restaurants exceptionally well. But his greatest contribution may be the way he manages belonging: creating a community where employees from across the world can learn, grow, and feel at home.

Restaurant Manager of the Year: (5 units or more)

Ronaldo Chiesa
General Manager - Terra Gaucha Brazilian Steakhouse Indianapolis

Ronaldo brings dedication, expertise, and genuine passion to every dining experience, consistently going above and beyond his responsibilities as General Manager of Terra Gaucha Brazilian Steakhouse in Indianapolis. Since helping lead our Indianapolis location from its opening in December 2024, Ronaldo has played an important role in introducing the authentic Brazilian churrasco experience and gaucho tradition to the Indianapolis community. His commitment goes far beyond managing daily restaurant operations. He takes the time to personally connect with guests, make them feel welcome, and ensure that every guest leaves with a memorable experience. Having lived in Indianapolis for several years, Ronaldo has developed a strong understanding of the community and the people who call Indianapolis home. He recognized the opportunity to bring Terra Gaucha to a city he knows well and has worked to make the restaurant a place where locals, visitors, families, and businesses feel genuinely welcomed. He is especially involved in hosting private events and celebrations, where his professionalism, attention to detail, and ability to connect with guests help create experiences that go beyond a typical restaurant visit. Ronaldo is also a strong team leader. He leads by example, supports his staff, and creates an environment where teamwork and hospitality are prioritized. He understands that outstanding guest service starts with a strong team and consistently encourages his staff to uphold the standards and traditions that define Terra Gaucha. His dedication to the Indianapolis community has also extended beyond the restaurant. Ronaldo has represented Terra Gaucha through local media appearances, including segments with WISH-TV and FOX59, helping introduce our restaurant and the Brazilian dining experience to a broader Indianapolis audience. Ronaldo's professionalism, leadership, community involvement, and genuine care for both his team and guests make him an outstanding representative of hospitality in Indianapolis. He does not simply manage a restaurant; he works every day to make Terra Gaucha a welcoming part of the Indianapolis community.

Candace Kavanaugh
General Manager - 1933 Lounge by St. Elmo

Candace Kavanaugh has been a valued member of the Huse Culinary family since 2007, when she joined Harry & Izzy's Downtown as an opening bartender. Nearly 20 years later, she has grown from an exceptional bartender into the General Manager of 1933 Lounge Fishers, leaving a lasting impact on our beverage program, our people, and the Indianapolis hospitality industry. Candace's creativity and passion have helped shape some of our most successful cocktails, including the Pop's Old Fashioned, St. Elmo Cola, and Espresso Martini, which continue to be guest favorites today. Her

ability to pair innovation with consistency in a high-volume environment reflects the same thoughtful approach she brings to every aspect of her work. As a leader, Candace balances genuine care for her team with a commitment to high standards. She holds her Stewards accountable while making sure they feel valued, supported, and motivated to do their best. Since becoming General Manager, she has continued to grow sales, achieve financial goals, and create a positive environment where her team feels inspired to succeed. Her enthusiasm is contagious, and she has a special ability to make both guests and coworkers feel like they are part of something special. Perhaps her greatest impact is the people she has developed. Having started as an hourly steward herself, Candace recognizes potential in others and helps them turn restaurant jobs into meaningful careers. She has mentored countless stewards and managers who have gone on to take on leadership roles throughout our organization. Beyond the restaurant, Candace has built lasting relationships with guests, coworkers, and community members through nearly two decades of genuine care and consistency. Candace represents the very best of hospitality: creativity, resilience, exceptional leadership, and a sincere commitment to people. Her influence extends far beyond the restaurant she leads. The cocktails she created are still enjoyed, the relationships she built continue to thrive, and the people she mentored are helping shape the future of our company. Candace's lasting contributions make her exceptionally deserving of recognition as a Star of the Industry.

Edwin Mateo
Executive Chef - Marquee at the Landing

Chef Edwin Mateo has met Michael Jordan, the GOAT in his eyes. At CRG, we believe we have a GOAT of our own in Edwin, who leads the kitchen at Marquee at the Landing in Fort Wayne with excellence, heart, and an unwavering commitment to hospitality. Edwin has established a standard of excellence that other CRG chefs look to emulate. His kitchen sets the benchmark for cleanliness, organization, and execution. He models accountability, prioritizes preparation, and ensures every team member understands their role in delivering an exceptional guest experience. Beyond daily operations, Edwin invests in his people, earns their trust, and continues mentoring former employees as they advance their hospitality careers. His impact is equally evident in the lasting relationships he builds with guests. The King family exemplifies Edwin's extraordinary approach to hospitality. When Kristen King struggled to find a restaurant willing to prepare carpaccio, Edwin personally invited her to Marquee and offered to make it with a day's notice. That thoughtful gesture transformed a potential visit into a five-year tradition of celebrating birthdays, anniversaries, and

special occasions at Marquee. Edwin continues creating specialty off-menu dishes for the family and personally delivering their meals. The Kings now proudly recommend Marquee and bring friends and family, becoming passionate ambassadors for the restaurant. Edwin understands that hospitality means more than serving exceptional food; it means making people feel known, valued, and remembered. He transforms meals into memories and guests into lifelong advocates. Beyond the restaurant, Edwin is a devoted husband and father, a dedicated member of the Fort Wayne community, and a distance runner committed to continually improving himself. The discipline and determination he brings to his personal life are reflected in his leadership and commitment to excellence. Edwin embodies CRG's core values through his high standards, investment in people, and genuine care for every guest. He has built more than an exceptional kitchen; he has created a culture of accountability, teamwork, and meaningful connections. It is our pleasure to nominate Chef Edwin Mateo for Hospitality Indiana's 2026 Restaurant Manager of the Year.

William McGrew
Banquet Sous Chef - Indianapolis Marriott Downtown

Will's journey with the Indianapolis Marriott is a true example of talent, dedication, and growth. He first joined our team in May 2023 as a summer intern and banquet cook while attending Johnson & Wales University. After graduating, we were fortunate to welcome him back in June 2024 as a Culinary Supervisor. William declined a management offer and decided to start as an hourly supervisor because he wanted to start and build upon a solid foundation, taking the time to work beside those he would soon be leading. Just one year later, he earned a promotion to Banquet Sous Chef. Since the day he arrived, Will has consistently exceeded expectations and embraced every challenge with determination and professionalism. One of the most rewarding aspects of working with Will has been watching him evolve from an exceptional cook into an outstanding leader. As his responsibilities have grown, he has confidently taken on menu development, recipe creation, process improvements, and operational planning. He brings creativity, attention to detail, and a unique culinary perspective that enhances both the quality of our food and the experiences we create for our guests. More importantly, he takes genuine pride and ownership in our culinary operation and in representing the Indianapolis Marriott. Will's impact extends beyond the kitchen. He is deeply committed to developing his team, leading by example, and working alongside associates to ensure their success. Through coaching, training, and mentorship, he helps team members grow while maintaining our vision of delivering exceptional hospitality. Without question, Will is one of the most talented and well-rounded young chefs I have had the privilege of working with. It is remarkable to see the maturity, skill, and leadership he demonstrates at just 24 years old. His passion for the culinary profession and commitment to continuous improvement have already made a lasting impact on our team. I have no doubt that he will continue to achieve great things, and I am grateful to have the opportunity to watch his journey unfold.

Maria Guzman Puga
Event Services Manager - JW Marriott

Maria began her journey with the JW Marriott in 2017 as a dishwasher while attending college. From the very beginning, she was never afraid of hard work. She consistently stepped up when needed, embraced every opportunity to learn, and approached each role with a commitment to excellence. Through her work ethic, grit, and dedication, she steadily built a career that serves as an example to others. Today, she has grown from dishwasher to Event Services Manager, a remarkable accomplishment that reflects both her character and her passion for the industry. Maria's impact is felt throughout the hotel. She is known for her ability to organize complex events, communicate effectively with clients and hotel teams, and ensure every detail is thoughtfully executed. She builds strong relationships with guests and colleagues alike and understands that successful events require collaboration, accountability, and trust. Her calm approach and problem-solving mindset help teams navigate challenges while maintaining a high standard of service. What makes Maria especially deserving of this recognition is her unwavering focus on the guest experience. She consistently goes above and beyond to ensure events are executed seamlessly and that guests leave with lasting positive impressions. She leads by example, supports her team, and creates an environment where people work together toward a common goal. Maria is not someone who seeks the spotlight. She is often quiet in her approach, but her impact is undeniable. Maria's career is a testament to what can be achieved through hard work, determination, and a genuine passion for hospitality.

Andrew Wilbur
General Manager - Penn Station Sandwiches

There are managers who run restaurants. There are leaders who build teams. And then there are exceptional leaders like Andrew Wilbur, who build people, develop future leaders, create lasting cultures, and deliver extraordinary business results. Andrew's greatest accomplishment is the leadership legacy he is creating. During his time in Lebanon, he has promoted more than a dozen managers, building a pipeline of talent prepared to lead today and tomorrow. He currently has a top-tier assistant manager preparing for promotion, two strong hourly managers, and two additional leaders in development. Andrew measures his success not only by what he accomplishes, but by what his people become capable of accomplishing because of him. His business results are equally impressive. After finishing 2025 up 1.16%, Lebanon has delivered positive comparable sales every month in 2026, ranging from 7% to 18.5%, and is currently exceeding 12.5% growth for the year. His team has exceeded its catering goal every month and generated nearly four times the previous year's catering sales in less than ten months. Lebanon was also the first location to embrace the

new online catering platform, positioning the restaurant to capitalize on the rapid growth of the Lebanon community and Lilly workforce. But Andrew's impact cannot be measured by numbers alone. He has created a genuine "Cheers" culture where guests are known by name, regulars' orders are remembered, and people feel like they are coming home rather than simply stopping for a meal. With Lebanon having the highest dine-in rate in the company, Andrew has made hospitality a defining strength and a powerful driver of loyalty. His influence extends beyond Lebanon. Andrew willingly supports managers and restaurants across his District and throughout the company, sharing knowledge, supporting initiatives, and raising standards through his own example. He arrives early, plans meticulously, and expects the highest standards from himself before asking them of anyone else. Andrew doesn't simply manage a restaurant—he builds people, develops leaders, creates loyalty, drives growth, and strengthens the organization around him. He builds people. He builds leaders. He builds loyalty. He builds growth. And he builds a legacy.

Mike Yaklin
General Manager - Grindstone on the Monon

I am proud to nominate Mike Yaklin, General Manager of Grindstone on the Monon, for Manager of the Year. With more than 20 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Mike has built his career around leading teams and creating memorable guest experiences. Before moving to Indiana, Mike managed restaurants in Texas. After relocating, he continued his career with Cafe Patachou before joining the Clancy's Hospitality team. Mike represents what great restaurant management should look like. He understands that being a successful General Manager isn't simply about managing the day-to-day operation—it is about leading people, building a strong culture, delivering exceptional hospitality, and producing results. Over the past year, Mike has been instrumental in transforming the culture at Grindstone on the Monon. Through consistent leadership, accountability, communication, and a genuine investment in his team, Mike has created an environment where employees are more engaged, expectations are clearer, and everyone understands the role they play in the restaurant's success. Mike leads from the floor. He is present during busy shifts, engaged with his team and guests, and willing to step into whatever role is needed. He holds his team accountable to high standards while also working alongside them to achieve those standards. The impact of Mike's leadership can be seen in the restaurant's performance. Under his leadership, Grindstone on the Monon has achieved 11% sales growth over the previous year. Achieving double-digit growth in an established restaurant is an outstanding accomplishment and reflects the stronger culture, improved execution, and consistent guest experience Mike and his team have built. What makes Mike particularly deserving of Manager of the Year is his ability to balance people and performance. He has created a healthier, more positive culture while simultaneously delivering significant business growth. After more than two decades in hospitality, Mike continues to demonstrate the passion, work ethic, and commitment to people that make our industry special.

Grindstone on the Monon is a better restaurant today because of Mike Yaklin's leadership, and I am proud to nominate him for Manager of the Year at the Stars of the Industry Awards.

Rising Star Award

Zoie Cottrell
Front Desk Manager - Indianapolis Marriott Downtown

Zoie Cottrell has consistently demonstrated a level of professionalism and leadership that has accelerated her growth within our Front Office team. Zoie joined the Front Office team in November of 2024 where she quickly became an asset to the department. Zoie began learning her role and started seeking out opportunities to help her learn and grow at the Hotel. Zoie's eagerness to grow led to her promotion to a Front Desk Supervisor and then, after only six months as a supervisor, Zoie earned her promotion to Front Desk Manager. Zoie has continued to prove her worth to our team through her ability to lead by example, support her team, and create genuine connections with our guests. Zoie brings a true "hop to it" attitude to everything she does, whether she is stepping in to assist a guest or helping an associate succeed. Her "hop to it" attitude speaks to Zoie's passion for service. Zoie takes ownership of ensuring our associates are properly trained and intentionally turns everyday situations into learning opportunities that help develop those around her. Her impact on the guest experience is equally impressive, with repeat guests calling ahead before their arrival just to ask if Zoie will be working. Her professionalism, initiative, and genuine care for both guests and associates truly embody what it means to be a Hospitalitarian, and we cannot wait to see the accomplishment of this Rising Star.

Amber Dennis
Guest Services Manager - Hampton by Hilton, Bedford

It is Amber Dennis's mission to provide excellent Hoosier Hospitality to every guest that enters the Hampton Inn Bedford. With her signature blend of humor, heart, and servant leadership, not only does she exceed guest expectations, but she also inspires her team to do the same. In less than three years in hospitality, Amber has learned and achieved more than many others do in decades. Not only has she been mentioned in countless positive reviews, she and her team have maintained

an average Service Quality score of 97% throughout 2026. These incredible scores are no accident – Amber has dedicated herself to making sure all guests have an exceptional stay. An effort is made to connect with each guest that enters our hotel, and to make sure they leave knowing their choice to stay with us has been appreciated. Whether it is via a personalized welcome gift for a guest who just achieved Lifetime Diamond status, a congratulations card to a newlywed couple, or a simple and heartfelt "Thank you for staying with us," all the guests who interact with Amber know they are valued. Thanks in large part to the efforts of Amber, the Hampton Inn Bedford received the Make It Right Award earlier in 2026. This award is reserved for the top 1% of Hampton Inn hotels and is based in large part on Service Quality Scores. The guests have spoken – Amber's efforts are award worthy.

Delaney Dunn
Restaurant Manager - Dean's - JW Marriott Indianapolis

Delaney's impact is not defined by a single moment or achievement. It is reflected in the countless small details she notices every day and the standards she inspires others to uphold. Delaney understands that exceptional guest experiences are built through consistent execution of the basics. She focuses on the details many people overlook: the way linens are folded, ensuring silverware shines, checking that glassware is spotless, and making certain every touchpoint reflects care and professionalism. She recognizes that these small actions shape how guests feel about their experience, and she approaches them with purpose every day. She has a unique ability to help others understand why details matter. Through her example, coaching, and daily interactions, she encourages team members to think differently about service and their role in creating memorable experiences. Her mindset has positively influenced those around her, raising standards across the team. Delaney's journey has given her a well-rounded understanding of hospitality. Having spent time serving and bartending, she developed a deep appreciation for restaurant operations and guest expectations. She later expanded her leadership capabilities with the Front Office team, gaining insight into the hotel experience from another perspective. Today, as a Restaurant Manager at Dean's Steakhouse, she combines those experiences to lead with credibility, empathy, and a strong operational focus. Equally important is the way Delaney cares for the people around her. She invests in relationships, supports her teammates, and brings a sense of humor that makes her approachable and for years, Delaney has attended Stars of the Industry events to celebrate and support her fellow team members. This year, it is her turn to be recognized. Her growth, leadership, and impact on Dean's Steakhouse and our hotel make her truly deserving of the Rising Star Award.

Alexander Harris
Assistant General Manager - Hampton Inn and Suites

It is with great pride that I nominate Alex Harris, our Assistant General Manager, for the Indiana Restaurant & Lodging Rising Star Award. Over the past two years, I have had the opportunity to watch Alex grow from an associate into a confident, dependable leader who makes a meaningful impact on our guests, our team, and our property. Alex brings something truly special to hospitality. His personality is one of a kind, and his ability to connect with people is one of his greatest strengths. Our Guest Service Scores have ranked #1 in the company for the past four months, and Alex's name is consistently mentioned in guest feedback. Whether he is welcoming a guest at the front desk or going the extra mile to make someone's stay memorable, he creates genuine connections that guests remember. Alex's impact goes beyond our guests. He brings an energy and positivity to our team that is difficult to teach. I often joke that we are like Sour Patch Kids—he brings the sweet, while I tend to be more serious. That balance makes our team stronger. Alex has a natural ability to make people feel welcome, appreciated, and part of the team. What makes Alex a true rising star is his growth. He has taken on greater responsibility, learned from challenges, and developed into someone our team can rely on. He steps in wherever needed, handles changing situations with a calm, can-do attitude, and consistently leads with integrity. I never have to question whether Alex will do the right thing. Alex understands that hospitality is about more than rooms and operations—it is about people. He genuinely cares about the experience we provide and the people he works alongside. I am incredibly proud of the leader Alex has become. He continues to grow, inspire those around him, and make a lasting difference in our hotel. Alex represents the future of hospitality, and I believe he is truly deserving of the Indiana Restaurant & Lodging Rising Star Award.

Whitney Henry
Concierge Lounge Attendant - the Westin Indianapolis

Whitney Henry is our Rising Star Award nominee. New to hotel hospitality and with our team only since June 2026, Whitney has already made an extraordinary impression. In just a few months, she has transformed the Club Lounge experience through her warmth, joyful spirit, and remarkable ability to make guests feel at home. Whitney's welcome is unmistakable: a big, jovial, heartfelt hello that makes people light up. For those who welcome one, a hug often follows. It is just as natural to see her dancing down the hallway, sharing the happiness she brings to work each day. Her enthusiasm is sincere, and people respond to it. Guests and colleagues adore Whitney because she makes every person she encounters feel seen, appreciated, and welcome. That gift has made a meaningful difference in our Club Lounge. In just a few months, Whitney has earned countless positive name mentions. Guests repeatedly take the time to recognize her by name and describe how her kindness and personal attention enhanced their stay. Many share that she makes them feel like family. One recent frequent traveler noted that she had never felt as welcome and at home in a

hotel as Whitney made her feel each morning. For someone who spends so much time away from home, that sense of belonging is an exceptional gift. Her impact is reflected in our results as well. Since Whitney joined the team, our Club Lounge guest survey scores have increased dramatically year over year. These results, together with her consistent recognition across Tripadvisor and GSS, reinforce what we experience every day: Whitney is making a lasting difference. She turns breakfast, a morning greeting, or a passing conversation into a personal connection that guests remember long after checkout. What makes Whitney such a compelling Rising Star is how much she has accomplished at the very beginning of her hospitality career. She already understands something essential to exceptional service: people remember how you make them feel. Whitney has already left her mark on The Westin Indianapolis, and I believe she will leave an equally meaningful mark on the hospitality industry.

Morgan Howard
Marketing Manager - Explore Evansville

Morgan Howard, Marketing Manager at Explore Evansville, consistently goes above and beyond her job responsibilities to showcase Evansville and strengthen our local hospitality industry. Morgan brings an infectious positive attitude and tremendous energy to everything she does. She genuinely cares about our visitors, hospitality partners, and the community she represents. Her professionalism, creativity, and willingness to jump in wherever needed make her an outstanding teammate and resource for our tourism partners. Morgan has made a tremendous impact on the visitor experience through her work across digital, social media, print, and visitor engagement. Her work helps visitors discover what to do, where to go, and how to experience Evansville while directly supporting our hotels, restaurants, attractions, events, and other hospitality businesses. She has led the development of Explore Evansville's newsletters, strengthening both their content and effectiveness. Under her leadership, newsletter performance has achieved results above industry standards, connecting visitors with more reasons to explore Evansville and driving awareness of our hospitality partners. Morgan also helped develop the Picasso Trail, an innovative initiative designed to connect visitors with the rare Picasso artwork at the Evansville Museum of Arts, History & Science while encouraging them to explore more of the destination. It is a great example of Morgan finding creative ways to turn a unique community asset into a broader visitor experience. Her creativity was also instrumental in developing and executing one of Explore Evansville's most impactful social media reels. The content showcased Evansville in an authentic and engaging way and created excitement around experiencing the destination. Most importantly, Morgan understands that destination marketing is hospitality. Every visitor she helps inspire, inform, and connect with Evansville represents an opportunity for a hotel, restaurant, attraction, retailer, or event venue. Her work helps make the visitor experience easier, more engaging, and more memorable while strengthening the businesses that depend on tourism. Morgan represents what hospitality should

be: welcoming, energetic, collaborative, creative, and passionate about serving others. Her work is making Evansville a better destination for our visitors and a stronger tourism community for our partners.

Kristie Kenworthy
Guest Services Manager - Hilton Garden Inn Indianapolis Airport

Kristie began her hospitality journey as a Front Desk Agent, and through her dedication, strong attention to detail, willingness to learn, and genuine understanding of guest satisfaction, she has risen into the role of Guest Services Manager. Kristie consistently demonstrates the qualities of a true rising leader. In addition to working shifts at the front desk, she dedicates significant time to training and supporting our team as new procedures and operational changes are introduced. She also actively seeks opportunities to learn beyond her own department, whether that means understanding pool maintenance and chemical procedures, helping clean guest rooms, or simply stepping in wherever an extra set of hands is needed. She is the type of leader who is willing and capable of stepping directly into the middle of an operational challenge and handling it calmly and professionally. To ensure she is present when the team needs her most, Kristie often works an inconsistent and demanding schedule. Even so, she regularly arrives early, stays late, and does what is necessary to help set the team up for success. Just as importantly, Kristie is deeply passionate about the people she works with. She is willing to speak up for what she believes is right, advocate for her team, and address concerns directly. Perhaps even more impressive is her willingness to listen, reflect, and humbly acknowledge when she may have been wrong. That combination of confidence and humility has helped her continue to grow into an increasingly effective leader. Over the past year, Kristie has played a crucial role in ensuring that our individual guests, groups, and team members are well taken care of. She consistently demonstrates our core values of Respect, Integrity, Service, and Excitement, not simply through her words, but through her actions every day. Kristie represents exactly what a Rising Star in the hospitality industry should be: someone who is continually learning, willing to step outside of her comfort zone, committed to those around her, and eager to make both her team and her hotel better. I am proud to nominate her for this recognition

Caitlyn Mathew
Area Sales Director - Fairfield Inn Evansville West

I am taking the opportunity to nominate myself for this recognition began my hospitality career in 2019, and over the years, this industry has become much more than a job to me. Hospitality is about people, relationships, and creating experiences that make others feel welcome and valued. That is what continues to motivate me every day. Prior to joining the Fairfield Inn Evansville West team, I

served as a sales Manager at other hotels, gaining valuable experience in hotel sales, building client relationships, and growing group and corporate business. I joined Fairfield Inn Evansville West as the Sales Director and became the Area Sales Director when Lumina Hospitality acquired the hotel in December 2025. This transition allowed me to take on greater responsibility and play a larger role in the continued growth and success of the property. I take pride in being someone who is willing to get out into the community and build genuine connections. Whether I am attending a community event, meeting a client for lunch, giving a property tour, visiting a local business, working with a sports team, assisting a wedding group, or simply checking in with a guest, I believe every interaction is an opportunity to build a lasting relationship. One of my greatest accomplishments has been helping grow our property's presence in the Evansville community. I have worked hard to develop new accounts, grow group business, strengthen relationships with the University of Southern Indiana and local organizations, and create new opportunities for our hotel. I also believe strongly in being a team player. A successful hotel requires every department working together, and I am always willing to support my coworkers and celebrate our team's accomplishments. Hospitality has taught me resilience, creativity, patience, and the importance of showing up—even on the difficult days. I am proud of how far I have come since 2019 and grateful for everyone who has trusted, challenged, and supported me along the way. Most importantly, I am proud to be part of an industry where something as simple as making someone feel welcome can make a lasting difference.

Renee Mitchell
Guest Services Agent - Bottleworks Hotel

Renee Mitchell exemplifies what it means to be a Rising Star in Hospitality. Her warmth, intelligence, empathy, and professionalism shine through in every guest interaction. She consistently goes above and beyond to ensure guests feel valued, cared for, and confident they are in exceptional hands. One of Renee’s greatest strengths is her extraordinary attention to detail. She understands that memorable hospitality is built on thoughtful gestures and personal touches. An intuitive problem solver, she looks beyond immediate requests to understand guests’ needs and deliver creative, meaningful solutions. When a penthouse guest arrived to discover her room was not ready, Renee demonstrated remarkable composure and professionalism. She calmly de-escalated the guest’s frustration, took ownership of the situation, coordinated with multiple departments, and maintained consistent communication. Her proactive approach reflected exceptional judgment and an unwavering commitment to guest satisfaction. Renee’s compassion is equally remarkable. During one stay, a father was visiting while his son recovered from a major spinal injury following an accident. Recognizing the emotional difficulty of his circumstances, Renee prepared a personalized note and thoughtful amenity, then continued checking on his well-being throughout his stay. Her genuine kindness provided comfort during an incredibly challenging time and

demonstrated hospitality at its most meaningful. Even under pressure, Renee remains tactful, organized, and solution oriented. She skillfully balances guest expectations with operational realities while ensuring every interaction feels personal. Her critical thinking, intuition, and ability to prioritize make her an invaluable resource to guests and colleagues alike. Above all, Renee is someone others can depend on. She takes ownership of every concern, follows through on her commitments, and approaches each opportunity with genuine care. Her ability to combine empathy with sound judgment and creativity with professionalism sets her apart. Renee does more than deliver exceptional service. She creates memorable experiences and makes people feel that they truly matter. Her dedication, compassion, and outstanding hospitality instincts make her a deserving candidate for the Stars of the Industry Rising Star Award.

Anlly Ornealas
Banquet Captain - the Westin Indianapolis

In nearly five years at The Westin Indianapolis, Anlly Ornelas has grown from a Banquet Server into a trusted Banquet Captain, earning her advancement through hard work, reliability, and a natural ability to care for people. She has embraced the opportunity to lead while continuing to be the person her team can count on to jump in and help. Anlly understands that hospitality is a shared effort. Whether she is stepping into the kitchen to help cook, picking up an extra shift, or working alongside her banquet servers, she gives her time and energy wherever they are needed. Her willingness to help strengthens her team and keeps the guest experience at the center of the work. That commitment is felt by our clients and guests. Anlly consistently receives outstanding feedback for the personal attention she brings to events and her ability to make people feel welcome. She has also earned the coveted Lucky Bamboo Award, recognition from a group contact for making a meaningful difference in their experience. It is a fitting reflection of the care she puts into her work. In a profession where getting a foot in the door can be difficult, Anlly opened that door—and never closed it behind her. As she advances, she continues to support the people beside her, showing that leadership means helping others succeed, too. Her growth from server to captain is only the beginning. Through her initiative, generosity, and dedication to service, Anlly is already demonstrating the qualities that make her a compelling nominee for the Stars of the Industry Rising Star Award.

Angela Reynoso
Room Attendant - Fairfield Inn & Suites, Whitestown

Angela Reynoso is a true rising star who has shown tremendous growth, dedication, and enthusiasm during her first year in the hospitality industry. Although Angela's primary position is housekeeping, she is always looking for opportunities to learn something new and asks what else

she can do to support the hotel and her team. Angela's willingness to help extends well beyond housekeeping. She regularly assists with breakfast on weekends and is one of the first team members to offer additional help when we are short-staffed. She also assists with laundry when needed and is willing to stay beyond her scheduled time to help the team finish important tasks. Her guest interactions especially demonstrate her natural ability for hospitality. While working breakfast, Angela consistently receives compliments from guests about how happy, welcoming, and refreshing her personality is. She greets guests with a smile and makes them feel genuinely welcome. These positive comments have reinforced what our team sees every day—Angela takes pride in creating a positive experience for everyone who walks through our doors. Angela is also an exceptional teammate. She willingly helps coworkers with physically demanding tasks when they need additional support and do so with a positive attitude. She looks for ways to make another team member's day easier rather than focusing only on her own responsibilities. What makes Angela a Rising Star is her desire to continually improve. She asks questions, welcomes feedback, learns new responsibilities, and takes pride in representing our hotel. In only one year, Angela has demonstrated the professionalism, teamwork, dependability, and genuine hospitality of someone with a very promising future in this industry.

Natalie Rosales
Guest Services Associate - Ironworks Hotel Indy

I am proud to nominate Natalie Rosales for the Rising Award in recognition of her dedication to exceptional guest service, tremendous professional growth, and commitment to our team. Throughout her first year with us, Natalie has demonstrated remarkable initiative, confidence, and empathy when engaging with our guests. She has consistently stepped up when needed, including independently managing shifts, and has proven herself to be a dependable and hardworking member of our team. Her willingness to embrace new challenges and take pride in her work has been rewarding to watch. Natalie's commitment to our guests has also earned her multiple pieces of recognition in guest surveys. One guest specifically credited her thoughtful service with making them a customer for life. Another recognized her helpfulness and, demonstrating her ability to make a positive impression at every touchpoint of the guest experience. These comments reflect the meaningful impact she has on our guests and our hotel. What makes Natalie especially deserving of this recognition is not only the quality of her work today, but also the growth she has demonstrated in her first year in the industry and her continued eagerness to learn. She has tremendous potential to take on new challenges, expand her expertise, and continue developing her career within the Indianapolis hospitality industry. Natalie has earned this recognition through her hard work, dedication, and positive contributions to our team. I am proud of how far she has come and excited to see her continued success as a rising hospitality professional and future hotelier.

Jose Sanchez
Maintenance Technician - Bottleworks Hotel

Jose is the definition of a Rising Star at Bottleworks Hotel. Since joining our team in March 2026 as a Houseperson in Housekeeping, Jose has demonstrated an incredible ability to learn, adapt, and make a positive impact wherever he is needed. When the Maintenance Department was in need, our General Manager quickly recognized Jose's potential and offered him an opportunity to join the team. Jose embraced the challenge and has quickly become an invaluable member of the department. As Bottleworks Hotel's first bilingual Maintenance Technician, he brings a unique ability to connect with and support both guests and fellow team members. Jose has earned the nickname "The Professor," and it could not be more fitting. He is just as eager to teach as he is to learn. He absorbs new information quickly, shares his knowledge freely, and is always looking for opportunities to help those around him succeed. What truly sets Jose apart is his commitment to the guest experience. Regardless of his department, he understands that every task ultimately impacts our guests. When a guest was disappointed by debris on the outside of their guestroom window that obstructed their view, Jose went above and beyond. Although window cleaning is outside his normal responsibilities and is handled through annual cleanings, Jose found a ladder, arranged for someone to spot him, and personally addressed the issue. He didn't stop until the guest was completely satisfied with their view. This is the kind of initiative and care that defines Jose. Jose also responds quickly and completes maintenance requests efficiently, with an impressive average ticket close time of just 15.5 minutes. He builds relationships naturally, never meets a stranger, and is always willing to lend a hand. In just a short time, Jose has shown tremendous growth, initiative, and leadership potential. His positive attitude, eagerness to learn, willingness to teach, and unwavering focus on our guests make him an exceptional Rising Star and a valued member of the Bottleworks team.

Maxwell Servi
Front Desk Agent - Homewood Suites, Munster

Maxwell Servi is an outstanding example of what exceptional hospitality looks like. What makes Max's accomplishments even more impressive is that he began his hospitality career less than two years ago. In that short time, he has developed into a dependable, knowledgeable, and genuinely guest-focused hospitality professional who consistently goes above and beyond. Max has a natural ability to make guests feel welcome and valued. He knows many of our guests by name and greets them with a smile and a genuine willingness to help. His friendly and approachable personality makes guests feel comfortable and appreciated, creating the kind of personal connection that keeps them coming back. One of Max's greatest strengths is his willingness to help wherever he is

needed. Whether assisting a guest, supporting a coworker, or helping solve a problem, Max consistently steps up without hesitation. He has quickly developed a strong knowledge of hotel operations and can be counted on to provide accurate information and dependable service. Max is also exceptionally reliable. He has established himself as someone his team can truly depend on. He has never called in and consistently demonstrates a strong commitment to his responsibilities, his coworkers, and our guests. His willingness to show up, work hard, and help wherever needed speaks volumes about his character and dedication. Perhaps most impressive is how naturally Max has embraced the hospitality industry. In such a short time, he has learned the importance of creating meaningful guest experiences and has developed the confidence and knowledge of someone with far more experience. His positive attitude and genuine care for others are evident in every interaction. Max represents the best qualities of a front-of-house hospitality professional: reliability, knowledge, warmth, professionalism, and a true desire to serve others. His rapid growth in the industry and the positive impression he makes on our guests and team make him exceptionally deserving of this award. Max may have less than two years of hospitality experience, but the impact he has made in that time is remarkable. He is exactly the kind of rising hospitality professional that deserves to be recognized and celebrated.

Laura Vibbart
Front Desk Supervisor - Homewood Suites Keystone at the Crossing

Since her first day at the hotel, Laura has been very dedicated to everything that she does. She is an outstanding hotel supervisor who consistently goes above and beyond to make sure every guest feels welcomed, valued, and well taken care of. She brings a positive attitude and a strong sense of responsibility to everything she does, always willing to step in wherever she is needed. Her commitment to exceptional guest service is evident every day. She takes the time to listen to guests, address their concerns, and make sure their experience is as comfortable and enjoyable as possible. She treats every guest with genuine care and professionalism, often doing more than what is expected to ensure their needs are met. She is also an excellent leader and mentor to her team. She takes the time to train and support staff, sharing her knowledge and helping others develop the skills and confidence they need to succeed. She leads by example, demonstrating the professionalism, patience, teamwork, and dedication she expects from those around her. What truly sets her apart is her willingness to go the extra mile, not only for guests, but also for her coworkers and the hotel. No matter how busy things become, she can be counted on to step up, find solutions, and help wherever she is needed. Her hard work, dedication, leadership, and genuine care for others make her an invaluable part of the hotel team. She consistently gives her best and inspires those around her to do the same.