



## **2025 Stars of the Industry Honoree Nominations**

### **Event Planner of the Year**

#### **Sarah Harding**

Dual Senior Event Manager - Marriott Indy Place

For over a decade, Sarah Harding has embodied excellence in hospitality as an Event Manager at Marriott Indy Place, and for the past five years, she has led the way in managing the largest and most complex events for Marriott Indy Place. Her combination of precision, adaptability, and warmth has made her a trusted partner to clients and colleagues alike. In 2025, Sarah has already produced 1,151 Event Orders, coordinated 26 major groups, and generated over \$8 million in event revenue for the Marriott Indy Place hotels—all while maintaining 11-for-11 on ESS, reflecting a 100% satisfaction rate among the guests and planners she serves. Sarah's organizational mastery ensures that no detail is overlooked. She leads complex citywide programs with seamless efficiency and poise. Her commitment to collaboration and problem-solving turns potential challenges into moments of success. Even while managing a demanding event load, Sarah brings balance to her professional and personal life, raising two young children while continuing to perform at the highest level—an inspiring testament to her dedication and resilience. Sarah's impact goes beyond logistics and revenue—she builds relationships rooted in trust and care. Her clients know she will deliver excellence every time, and her colleagues rely on her as a mentor and collaborator. Her unwavering dedication to both her guests and her team makes her the embodiment of what the Indiana Restaurant & Lodging Association's Event Manager of the Year represents—service, leadership, and passion that elevate the entire industry. Her excellence is best described in the words of her clients:

- USC Football – “Everything was tremendous! Sarah planned everything with great precision and was adaptable and solution oriented. Top-tier professionalism.”
- WeebCon – “Sarah managed to maintain and streamline everything for us. Her ability to delegate and improvise was phenomenal.”
- BorgWarner – “Sarah and team were an absolute pleasure to work with. Kind, attentive, and supportive.”
- Source America – “Even after returning from maternity leave, the planning process was seamless. Sarah went above and beyond to ensure every detail was covered.”
- Make-A-Wish – “Sarah and her team always make our staff feel valued. They remember our event history, offer thoughtful solutions, and understand our mission.”

#### **Alyssa Soria**

Senior Event Planning Manager - Hyatt Regency Indianapolis

For years, humans looked to the night sky and saw only a scatter of lights. It took the vision of polymaths—Ptolemy, Copernicus, Galileo—to connect those stars into constellations, revealing patterns that guided discovery and exploration. Much like those astronomers, Alyssa Soria often has her eyes on the sky. A fan of the celestial, she shares their gift for seeing order in chaos—transforming countless moving parts into a seamless, shining event. Recently promoted to Senior Event Planner, Alyssa has become the team's guiding star—mentoring new colleagues, inspiring creativity, and ensuring every client experience sparkles with intention. Her ability to visualize, communicate, and execute complex programs makes her the person everyone turns to when a challenge arises.



When one group requested an immersive food and beverage event that also supported a charitable cause, Alyssa designed a “Salsa and Margarita Mixer” where guests could donate by adding extra ingredients to their signature creations. The result? An interactive, joy-filled experience that left guests raving and a charity uplifted. Where others see obstacles, Alyssa sees opportunity—and then she builds something extraordinary from it. Her professionalism has earned her the honor of Manager of the Quarter twice in just three years at Hyatt Regency Indianapolis, along with the admiration of both clients and peers. “Alyssa is a solid member of the events team,” one nominator wrote. “She’s organized, can handle any group, and is a wealth of knowledge. I’d be hard-pressed without her!” Another shared, “My clients were thrilled—one just signed their contract for 2026!” Alyssa’s impact radiates far beyond logistics. She is steady, intuitive, and endlessly kind—a constellation of qualities that light the way for her colleagues and clients alike. Through every late-night diagram, tasting, and site visit, Alyssa continues to remind us that great events don’t just happen by chance—they’re charted by stars like her.

### **Amy Vaughn**

Private Event Manager - 1933 Lounge - Fishers & The HC Tavern + Kitchen.

Amy is the kind of event manager every team dream of having. She is hands-on, thoughtful, and dedicated to ensuring every guest experience is extraordinary. Whether she is orchestrating a large-scale private event or personally greeting a regular guest, Amy brings a level of care and attention to detail that sets her apart. As the private event manager for two of our restaurant locations, Amy juggles a demanding schedule with remarkable ease and professionalism. She manages the needs of both teams seamlessly, ensuring that every event, no matter the size or setting, runs flawlessly. Her ability to stay organized, calm, and positive while balancing multiple properties is truly impressive. What makes Amy truly special is her genuine connection with both guests and staff. She takes the time to get to know our regulars and VIPs, greeting them by name and making each visit feel personal and memorable. Amy’s commitment doesn’t stop with our guests, she is equally devoted to her team. She consistently goes above and beyond to support her coworkers, whether it’s jumping on expo during a busy shift, assisting with an offsite event, or lending a hand wherever she is needed. No task is beneath her, and her willingness to roll up her sleeves sets a powerful example of leadership through action. Amy’s combination of professionalism, compassion, and enthusiasm embodies what it means to be an exceptional event manager. She not only delivers flawless events but also builds lasting relationships and inspires her team through her kindness and work ethic. We are proud to nominate Amy for Event Manager of the Year, there is no one more deserving of this recognition.

### **Emily Wagner**

Private Dining and Events Manager - Ruth's Chris Steak House

From the moment Ruth’s Chris Fort Wayne opened its doors, Emily has been at the heart of its success. As a member of the original opening team, she has built and sustained an exceptional Private Dining and Events program that embodies the warmth, precision, and excellence that define the Ruth’s Chris brand. Emily’s leadership extends far beyond her title. She is the quiet force that keeps the operation running seamlessly—whether she’s coordinating a high-profile event, greeting guests by name, or stepping onto the floor or expo line to ensure every plate and every guest experience meets our highest standards. Her commitment to excellence is unwavering, and her ability to adapt and lead by example has made her indispensable to both her team and the greater restaurant community. Throughout the challenges of COVID-19 and the years that followed, Emily remained a constant source of stability, optimism, and drive. While others faced uncertainty, she continued to elevate the guest experience, finding creative ways to maintain connection and hospitality even during the toughest times. Her dedication to her team and guests alike is a model of service and leadership in action. To know Emily is to be inspired by her passion and integrity. She



has fostered relationships across the city that extend far beyond the four walls of the restaurant—earning the trust and admiration of countless clients, colleagues, and community members. Her presence is felt in every successful event, every satisfied guest, and every teammate who strives to meet the standard she sets. Emily’s impact is extraordinary not just because of what she does, but because of how she does it—with humility, heart, and an unwavering commitment to excellence. Ruth’s Chris Fort Wayne would not be the same without her.

## **Hospitality Supporting Role of the Year**

### **Nicole Bailey**

Office Manager - Commission Row

Nominating Nicole Bailey for the INRLA Hospitality Supporting Role of the Year for 2025. While Nicole is the Office Manager for Commission Row, her title would be better suited as Team Player/Team Leader. Day in and day out Nicole’s focus on supporting the Leaders and staff of 112 around her is second to none. Her dedication to development, training and setting the standard of excellence is that of legend. Since opening the venue in early 2024, Nicole has had a hand in the development and promotion of five Chefs, three FOH Managers and all of the hourly staff in every department. She leads new hire orientation, property tours, uniform inventory and has become a master of HVAC, Security cameras, furniture maintenance and Septic and recycled grease housing, all with a smile and positivity that sets the tone for the entire team. Nicole not only oversees accounts payable, receivable, payroll and contract management, she is essential in preventative maintenance, vendor direction and property leadership of an almost \$40 million dollar property. Nicole’s emphasis on team work and training has been on display this Spring and Summer where she planned, organized and executed CPR/AED Training, Fire Extinguisher training and Active Shooter Awareness training all while completing her daily tasks. The passion Nicole brings to her work evidenced with the saying “Give a person a fish, you will feed them for a day. Teach a person to fish, you will feed them for a lifetime”, only that Nicole will ensure the person knows the best lure, equipment, has been trained on how to filet and de-bone, sauté’, garnish and serve the meal with an amazing wine pairing. It is my pleasure to work with Nicole on a daily basis and am very proud to nominate her for the INRLA Hospitality Supporting Role of the Year Award.

### **Stephanie Ebarb**

Director of Marketing - Huse Culinary

True hospitality extends far beyond serving guests. It is about anticipating needs and exceeding expectations to create moments of care before they are even asked for. Stephanie Ebarb embodies this philosophy every day in her leadership of the Huse Culinary marketing department. She demonstrates that hospitality exists beyond the guest experience; it lives in thoughtful communication, proactive problem-solving, and collaboration that strengthens our restaurants and stewards. Stephanie leads with a servant-leadership mindset. She is often the first in the office and the last to leave, ensuring her team and partners have the tools, clarity, and encouragement they need to thrive. She never approaches tasks as boxes to be checked but as opportunities to lift others and support both personal and professional growth. She listens deeply, leads with empathy, and then encourages her team to work towards solutions that balance strategy and creativity. Her career in hospitality marketing began in 2007, spanning major markets including Las Vegas and Nashville. Since joining Huse Culinary in 2022, she has brought deep experience and a drive to make our brands and people shine. She balances the pace of restaurant marketing with composure, supporting both departmental goals and requests from operations, leadership, and other partners. In her first year at Huse Culinary, she inspired the creation of our first holiday pop-up that was a huge success. Yet she did not stop



at presenting a great idea. She volunteered her entire weekend to decorate. And when opening day arrived, she dressed up as The Grinch to further elevate the experience, complete with the costume, mannerisms, and a hilariously convincing impression. It was a perfect example of her dedication and joyful attitude that delights both guests and team members. Stephanie is the glue that keeps the marketing team together. In a role that can easily become overwhelming, she fosters a culture of focus and achievement. She builds bridges, strengthens communication, and inspires others to live our mission to entertain and delight our guests with genuine hospitality and professional service. Through her dedication and heart, Stephanie Ebarb not only supports Huse Culinary, but she also elevates it.

### **Alexander Harris**

Assistant General Manager - Hampton Inn and Suites Indy Airport

Alex's impact on our team, our guests, and the overall spirit of the property cannot be overstated. He brings something truly special to our workplace—a unique personality and energy that transforms the environment for both staff and guests alike. Alex's personality is truly one of a kind, and that uniqueness is what makes him such an effective and inspiring leader. He has an effortless ability to build genuine connections, and the positive feedback we've received from guests in recent months speaks volumes. Whether he's welcoming someone at the front desk or going above and beyond behind the scenes to enhance a guest's stay, Alex leaves a lasting impression that not only elevates the guest experience but encourages repeat visits. Under Alex's leadership, we've also seen tangible improvements in our performance. Our service scores have grown consistently by 9% year-to-date, which in turn has boosted our overall stay score by up to 10%. These numbers reflect more than just metrics—they represent the real impact of Alex's hands-on involvement, attention to detail, and commitment to guest satisfaction. Equally impressive is the positive influence Alex has had on our team culture and retention. Through his authenticity, sense of humor, and unwavering positivity, Alex has helped create a workplace environment where people feel motivated and supported. That culture shift is clearly reflected in our improved retention numbers: associate retention for those employed less than a year has increased from 74.5% to 83%, while retention for team members with more than two years of service has risen from 52.7% to 67.9%. These are not just statistics—they're a direct result of the way Alex leads with empathy, recognition, and inclusion. Simply put, Alex is a leader who lifts everyone around him. His energy is contagious, his professionalism is unwavering, and his contributions to our property's success are immeasurable. For all of these reasons and more, I wholeheartedly nominate Alex Harris for this recognition. He embodies the best of who we are and continues to raise the bar every single day.

### **Courtney Hidalgo**

Area Director of Sales - Hilton Garden Inn Jeffersonville Louisville North / General Hotels Corporation

Courtney Hidalgo exemplifies outstanding leadership and an unwavering dedication to the success of the hotel. Her exceptional commitment to client satisfaction has set a new benchmark for customer service. She consistently follows up with clients on property, ensuring their needs are not only met but exceeded, often providing personal check-ins during banquets and events. This level of detail and personal care is uncommon in the industry and reflects her deep passion for delivering exceptional guest experiences. A hallmark of Courtney's leadership is her willingness to assist across departments, creating a positive ripple effect throughout the team. Her adaptability, enthusiasm, and proactive attitude consistently inspire those around her. Her dedication to the hotel's mission and values has directly contributed to increased revenue and client satisfaction. Courtney has been recognized as Sales Manager of the Quarter for three consecutive quarters—a testament to her consistent performance and impact. She routinely goes above and beyond expectations, taking on tasks such as cleaning rooms, supporting the front desk, and assisting with restaurant service, all without being asked. Despite entering the role without prior hotel sales experience, she has mastered it within just 1.5 years. Her contributions have significantly enhanced hotel



performance. Even with a challenging May forecast, April and June exceeded budget by 108.8%, largely due to her consistent prospecting and relationship-building. In this quarter alone, she generated \$45,983 in room revenue from new LNR accounts and secured over \$33,000 in future group business. Courtney's dedication extends beyond the workplace. While on vacation in Hawaii, she arranged a complimentary tour for a loyal client, underscoring her commitment to nurturing long-term relationships. Courtney Hidalgo stands out as a dynamic, reliable, and results-driven professional whose leadership and service excellence continue to make a lasting impact on the hotel and its guests.

### **Allysha Hoffman**

Executive Housekeeper - Holiday Inn Indianapolis Airport

It is with great pride that we nominate Allyshia Hoffman for the Stars of the Industry Award. Allyshia has been a dedicated professional in the hospitality industry for over eight years, and during that time, she has excelled in numerous roles. Of all the positions she has held, the one she values most—and truly embodies—is that of Executive Housekeeper. Allyshia's work ethic and leadership are unmatched. She is consistently the first to arrive each morning and the last to leave each evening, ensuring her team is supported and every guest room meets the highest standards of cleanliness and comfort. Her hands-on approach sets her apart; whether she's folding laundry, cleaning rooms, or making beds to help guests check in early, Allyshia leads by example and inspires her team to take pride in their work. What truly distinguishes Allyshia is her unwavering commitment to the guest experience. She takes great care in adding thoughtful touches to guest rooms, going above and beyond to make every stay memorable. Her passion for hospitality shines through in everything she does, and her warm spirit leaves a lasting impression on both guests and colleagues alike. Allyshia Hoffman is a shining example of what it means to be a true hospitality professional. Her dedication, positivity, and compassion make her not only a star within our hotel but also a star in the eyes of every guest she serves. For these reasons and many more, we are honored to nominate Allyshia Hoffman for the Stars of the Industry Award.

### **Phil Landaw**

Dual Chief Engineer - Marriott IndyPlace

It is with great pride that I nominate Phil Landaw, Chief Engineer of the JW Marriott Indianapolis, for the 2025 Stars of the Industry Award in the Supporting Role category. Phil is an active and visible leader in daily operations, consistently ensuring the seamless functioning of one of the largest hotels in the Midwest. He responds swiftly to all types of emergencies affecting building systems—whether mechanical, electrical, or environmental—and expertly returns operations to normal with minimal disruption to our valued guests. His immediate and effective action not only preserves guest satisfaction but also protects our company from costly downtime and damage. Phil's remarkable responsiveness extends across every corner of our complex operation: our commercial laundry facility, two main kitchens, three food outlets, 1,013 guestrooms, and more than one million square feet of event space. His mechanical expertise and operational intelligence make complex challenges appear effortless, a testament to both his skill and his dedication. Beyond his technical ability, Phil embodies the heart of hospitality. He is a steady source of support for associates, often stepping in to assist team members during personal family emergencies. His leadership is reflected in consistently high associate engagement scores and in the trust and loyalty he inspires in his team. Phil also commits himself to proactive excellence—personally walking event spaces and guestrooms to ensure quality, safety, and comfort—directly contributing to our consistently strong guest satisfaction scores. His balance of technical mastery, operational reliability, and compassionate leadership makes him truly deserving of recognition. For his outstanding performance, unwavering commitment, and meaningful impact on both guests and associates, Phil Landaw is more than deserving of the title "Star of the Industry."



### **Benjamin Sebring**

Human Resources Manager - The Westin Indianapolis

Benjamin Sebring exemplifies what it means to be in a true supporting role—someone who is always there to lend a hand, provide guidance, and uplift those around him. His dedication to serving others extends far beyond his responsibilities as Human Resources Manager, making him an invaluable part of our team at The Westin Indianapolis. Benjamin consistently makes time for every associate, no matter the concern, big or small. His approachable nature ensures that everyone feels heard, supported, and valued. Beyond his open-door commitment, Benjamin actively contributes to the greater success of our company as a member of Davidson Hospitality's DEI Committee, where he fosters inclusion and belonging, and as a champion of the Safety Committee, where he drives initiatives that keep our team and guests safe. What makes Benjamin exceptional is his willingness to step outside the traditional scope of his role. Whether it is plating food for a banquet, flipping a room setup, or jumping in to help housekeeping, Benjamin is never hesitant to get his hands dirty in service of the team. His generosity doesn't stop there—he also shares his creative talents, often handcrafting floral centerpieces for team member events, adding a thoughtful and personal touch that makes gatherings truly special. When it comes to supporting others, Benjamin embodies the very definition of service and teamwork. He is selfless, dependable, and passionate about helping those around him succeed. Benjamin Sebring is more than a Human Resources Manager—he is a cornerstone of our hotel family and a shining example of what it means to serve with heart. For these reasons, I proudly nominate Benjamin Sebring for the Stars of the Industry Award in the Best Supporting Role category.

### **Jacob Sharp**

Tech Support - Cunningham Restaurant Group

Roles like Jacob's often happen quietly in the background, and those in technical support don't always receive recognition for the critical part they play in the hospitality experience. It is easy to take for granted the people who keep systems running so our operations never miss a beat. Jacob embodies why those roles matter. His dedication and creativity directly support the heart of hospitality, even if guests never see his work firsthand. By blending technical skill with hospitality-minded service, he has become an indispensable partner to CRG restaurants and an outstanding example of service excellence in our industry. Jacob has gone above and beyond in his role by combining professionalism, technical expertise, and a true sense of hospitality in every interaction. Since transitioning from server to Tech Services in 2018, he has continually demonstrated how his restaurant background shapes the way he approaches support. He understands the urgency managers and staff feel when technology interrupts service, and he meets those moments with calm patience, empathy, and steady problem-solving. His ability to stay composed during high-pressure situations reflects not only professionalism but also a dedication to ensuring seamless guest experiences, even from behind the scenes. A true team player, Jacob has built lasting trust across Cunningham Restaurant Group by taking personal ownership of challenges until they're fully resolved. Whether programming, troubleshooting, or working on-site alongside restaurant teams, he consistently shows flexibility and commitment, even during off hours when others might step away. His humility and approachable style foster collaboration, while his unique sense of humor makes tense situations easier to navigate and strengthens rapport between IT and operations. Jacob's contributions extend well beyond day-to-day troubleshooting. When an outside solution couldn't meet CRG's needs, he developed an internal system, "Sharpay", which streamlined payroll and ensured accuracy for staff across all restaurants. This innovation eliminated significant hurdles for managers and demonstrated his ability to think creatively for the greater good of the company. The impact of this



effort is far-reaching, even if invisible to guests, teams can focus more on hospitality because operations run smoothly.

### **Shiloh Trent**

Director of Sales - Hampton Inn by Hilton Bedford / General Hotels Corporation

Shiloh Trent deserves the Hospitality Supporting Role of the Year award because she has a true heart for hospitality. She never fails to make a genuine connection with our guests and make sure they have an excellent stay. Shiloh excels in her sales role because of her ability to make everyone feel welcome and important. Clients consistently brag on her professionalism, humor, and how she goes above and beyond to meet their needs. We are lucky to have Shiloh as the face of our hotel. She takes an active role in community, participating in local leadership committees and always attending local events to show her support. Shiloh is also a key leader inside our hotel – she is constantly working to build bridges between sales and other departments, empowering our associates to grow and take great care of our guests. She has helped push our team to provide the highest level of service possible by providing constant positivity and encouragement. Despite her many obligations in her sales role, Shiloh is often the first to jump in and help wherever it is needed – whether that means covering the front desk, folding laundry, or helping clean rooms. Shiloh understands that hospitality requires teamwork high quality service from reservation to checkout.

## **Lodging Front of House Award**

### **Tommie Cottrell**

Front Desk Agent - Holiday Inn Terre Haute by IHG / General Hotels Corporation

For 11 years, Tommie Cottrell has been the heart of our front desk and the impression that keeps guests returning time and time again. Tommie isn't just dependable, she's unforgettable. Guests know her by name, ask for her specifically, and even worry if she isn't at her usual post on a Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday evening. That kind of loyalty and recognition doesn't happen by accident; it comes from years of consistent, genuine care. Tommie has a remarkable ability to connect with people. She remembers our regular guests, greets them as friends, and goes above and beyond to ensure every stay is smooth and memorable. Whether it's coordinating with housekeeping and management to resolve an issue quickly or catching a detail that could have easily been overlooked, Tommie never lets a guest slip through the cracks. Her attentiveness directly drives our loyalty enrollments and recognition scores, which consistently peak on the days she works. Her impact doesn't stop at guest satisfaction. Tommie is a key partner to our sales team, collecting valuable information from travelers about their business and leisure needs. By doing so, she creates opportunities that extend far beyond the front desk, directly contributing to our property's revenue and future growth. At the same time, she is a natural mentor to her coworkers—always ready to lend a hand, share her knowledge, and set the standard for excellent service. What makes Tommie truly special is her combination of reliability, kindness, and professionalism. She is steady and dependable, yet also thoughtful and understanding, bringing out the best in her team and making every guest feel valued. For over a decade, Tommie has embodied what front-of-house hospitality should be: welcoming, dependable, and genuinely invested in every guest experience. It's no exaggeration to say that Tommie is the face of our hotel. She has earned the respect of her colleagues, the gratitude of countless guests, and the admiration of our leadership.

### **Jordan Evans**

Front Desk Agent - TownePlace Suites by Marriott Indianapolis Airport / General Hotels Corporation



As a dedicated team member at TownePlace Suites, Jordan consistently exemplifies the highest standards of hospitality, leadership, and brand representation. From the moment guests walk through our doors, Jordan sets the tone for an exceptional stay. He doesn't just greet guests—he welcomes them with warmth, attentiveness, and a genuine desire to make them feel at home. Whether it's remembering a returning guest's preferences or crafting a personalized experience, his service is always tailored, thoughtful, and sincere. What truly sets Jordan apart is his natural ability to take initiative and lead with confidence. In moments of uncertainty or challenge, he is the calm in the storm—stepping forward to resolve issues swiftly and professionally, often before they escalate. His proactive approach ensures that both guests and team members feel supported and empowered. Jordan has become the person that everyone in the hotel – regardless of department – feels comfortable going to with questions, advice, or even just an easy laugh. He is the first to offer support in any department – including housekeeping and maintenance. While he may be a front desk associate, he is active in every department, every day. Jordan is truly an asset to the hotel, the company, and the brand. Beyond his individual performance, Jordan embodies the spirit of TownePlace Suites. His presence uplifts the atmosphere, creating a sense of community among coworkers and a feeling of comfort for every guest. He doesn't just work at the front desk, he is the heartbeat of our lobby, a living example of our brand promise. Whether it is a group jeopardy game in the lobby during the guests after work hours or taking the time to create engaging conversations with guests in the lobby, Jordan builds connections with our guests with ease. In every way, Jordan goes above and beyond his responsibilities, and his impact is felt far beyond the check-in counter.

### **Betty Kellough**

Shuttle Driver - Hampton Inn Evansville Airport

Since joining our team in 2015, Betty Kellough has exemplified dedication, teamwork, and exceptional guest service as our part-time evening airport shuttle driver. While balancing another job at the airport, Betty never hesitates to go above and beyond for guests and colleagues. She is quick to step in on her days off to ensure travellers impacted by delayed or cancelled flights have reliable transportation. During heavy snowstorms, Betty has even cleared snow from guest car windows to help them avoid delays and travel safely. She also coordinates closely with her airport colleagues to provide seamless transitions for guests when travel disruptions occur. Betty constantly looks for ways to improve organization and efficiency at the property, strengthening both guest satisfaction and team performance. Guests often share their appreciation for Betty's kindness and personal touch, returning to our hotel because they trust she will be there to welcome them. Her presence brings reassurance and comfort, making her an invaluable part of the guest experience. Beyond her hotel role, Betty is an active and selfless member of her community. She serves in her church's women's ministry and children's programs, organizes monthly senior events, and for over 15 years has hosted two large annual community gatherings, including a beloved Fourth of July celebration. On top of these commitments, she provides daily care for her mother, who is battling dementia, all while maintaining her positive, dependable presence at work. Betty's warmth, reliability, and strong work ethic extend to her team as well. She leads by example, has been a top source of employee referrals at both our hotel and sister property, and brings an uplifting spirit that inspires others. In every way—through guest care, community service, and teamwork—Betty embodies the spirit of this award. Whether she is transporting a weary traveler, clearing snow from car windows to ensure safe departures, or simply offering a smile at the end of a long day, Betty makes a lasting impact. We are truly fortunate to have her on our team and proud to nominate her for recognition.

### **Ramatu Naku**

Front Desk Supervisor - JW Marriott



Ramatu has been a constant example of professionalism, ownership, and care in every guest interaction. She handles guest issues with grace and tact while consistently being present and supportive of her team. Ramatu walks with confidence and carries the natural air of a leader someone her peers deeply respect and look up to. She has been instrumental to the success of our Bonvoy enrollment goals. She not only demonstrates this excellence in her role as a Front Desk Supervisor but has also represented our property with honor and distinction while serving as acting MOD at the Indianapolis Marriott Downtown. Ramatu leads by example, challenges processes constructively when she identifies opportunities for improvement, and continuously strives to enhance the team's success. She's a full-time student in hospitality program in Indiana University Indianapolis while she manages full time schedule at the hotel. I am truly thrilled to recognize her continued growth, leadership, and commitment to excellence.

### **Leo Penalosa**

#### **Banquet Captain – Bottleworks Hotel**

I am proud to nominate Leo for a *Stars of the Industry* award. Leo has been a Banquet Captain at the Bottleworks Hotel for just over a year, and from day one, he has made a remarkable impact on both our guests and our team.

Leo is the kind of person who can move faster than an Olympic sprinter when an event needs him. Always equipped with the latest gadgets and an eagerness to help, he goes above and beyond to ensure every event is seamless. His attention to detail keeps everything running smoothly — from staying on schedule to ensuring food is perfectly timed and event spaces are impeccably set.

His steady, consistent work ethic paired with an incredible can-do spirit truly sets him apart. Leo never compromises on quality and is quick to bring forward anything that falls short of our standards. His commitment to excellence shows in every detail, and his thorough pre-shift meetings leave nothing to chance. When Leo is in charge, I have complete confidence that our guests and events are in the best hands.

Leo is also an exceptional team player. He often arrives early to start prepping and brewing coffee before anyone else arrives, setting his team up for success from the start of the day.

A recent example of his dedication occurred during a wedding when the Bluetooth system in the event space malfunctioned. Without hesitation, Leo sprinted to his car to grab his own personal Bluetooth speaker so the guests could continue their celebration without interruption. When we later offered a complimentary champagne toast to smooth things over, Leo immediately began polishing glasses and preparing the champagne — all without being asked. Thanks to his quick thinking and proactive nature, what could have been a stressful situation turned into a spectacular event.

Leo's calm and resourceful demeanor keep the team composed and focused, even in challenging situations. When we've been short-staffed, Leo has willingly stepped into any role needed — server, bartender, setup crew, or even dishwasher — always ready to support the team and ensure success.

Leo's dedication to our hotel, our team, and our guests embodies the very spirit of hospitality. He is one of the key reasons the Bottleworks Hotel continues to be so highly rated. I couldn't be prouder to work alongside him each day and to nominate him for this award. Win or not, Leo is our true Star of the Industry.

### **Anna Prokopets**

#### **Guest Services Associate - Ironworks Hotel Indy**



Anna Prokopets exemplifies the very best of hospitality, dedication, warmth, and an unwavering commitment to excellence. As a cornerstone of our Front of House operations, Anna consistently takes personal ownership of every guest interaction and every detail that shapes our visitors' experience. Her reliability, initiative, and poise make her an indispensable partner to her Supervisors and Managers. As our designated trainer, Anna serves as both mentor and role model for new associates. She takes each new team member under her wing, ensuring they develop not only strong operational skills but also the confidence and grace that define true service excellence. Thanks to her guidance, our front desk team embodies the professionalism and hospitality that distinguish Ironworks Hotel. Anna's impact extends well beyond her daily duties. She has been recognized in dozens of guest surveys and reviews for her exceptional warmth, professionalism, and care, feedback that reflects both her personal touch and her genuine passion for hospitality. Though she is not originally from Indiana, Anna has wholeheartedly embraced the spirit of Hoosier Hospitality, becoming one of its most authentic ambassadors. It is a privilege to witness Anna's continued growth and success. Her dedication, empathy, and professionalism set the standard for our entire team. I am confident that her future in hospitality will be as bright and inspiring as the example she sets every day.

### **Betty Yosha**

**Restaurant Server - Sheraton Indianapolis City Centre**

Betty has been at the Sheraton for 6 years; she is a restaurant server in the Circle Cafe breakfast restaurant. She has the most seniority on that team and she takes that with a lot of responsibility. She is a leader among her team by training new servers and she has a passion for taking care of our guests. Here's a few of her name mentions from our guest reviews. "Betty at breakfast is excellent and really makes a difference", "Betty from the cafe made my breakfast experience amazing and a good start to the day", "Betty in the breakfast dining staff was a JOY to be around and talk to about Indianapolis", "Betty was amazingly kind at breakfast", "My server Betty was superb". Betty's superpower is her humor, if you ever want a good laugh go talk with her for a couple minutes and you'll get one.

## **Lodging Heart of the House Award**

### **Maribel Alvarez**

**Executive Housekeeper - Hampton Inn & Suites Keystone at the Crossing**

Maribel has been a dedicated member of the Schahet Hotels family for over 15 years, with the last four spent making a remarkable impact at the Hampton Inn & Suites Keystone. Her leadership, integrity, and commitment to excellence have elevated both guest satisfaction and team morale. In 2025, her department achieved an outstanding 95.9% cleanliness score on Hilton Guest Surveys, including a perfect 100% in July — placing the property among the top 5% of all Hampton Inn & Suites nationwide. These results come as no surprise. At previous Schahet properties, Maribel played a key role in earning multiple Lighthouse Awards and numerous brand quality assurance recognitions — so many she's likely lost count. When she left for a couple of years, we were thrilled when she reached out to return to our Schahet Hotels family. Because of her leadership, the housekeeping department enjoys exceptional stability — a rarity in the industry. Several team members have worked with her for many years, a testament to the positive culture she fosters. Maribel leads by example, personally inspecting rooms, training her team thoroughly, and ensuring every guest receives the clean, welcoming experience they deserve. She reminds her staff that rooms should be cleaned as if they were our own — a philosophy that inspires lasting pride in their work. Beyond her daily responsibilities, Maribel truly cares for her team. She is known for helping collect funds when someone faces financial hardship and for creating a cheerful work environment that lifts spirits. Even through her own personal challenges, Maribel remains reliable and compassionate, showing her greatest strength when life tests her most. She is admired for her optimism, problem-solving mindset, and calm, can-do attitude — her



signature “no pasa nada” spirit that keeps her team motivated and focused. Maribel embodies everything a hospitality professional should be — reliable, caring, and dedicated to excellence. She is a leader of integrity and heart, and she represents the very best of Schahet Hotels.

### **Glenda Betancourth**

Houseman - Home 2 Suites Indianapolis Airport

For the past three years, Glenda Betancourth has exemplified what it means to be a reliable, positive, and proactive team member. In that time, she has never called off once—a testament to her strong work ethic, dependability, and commitment to excellence. Her consistent presence has been a cornerstone of our operations, providing stability and support that does not go unnoticed. Beyond her perfect attendance, Glenda brings something equally important to work every single day: a genuine smile and a can-do attitude. Whether she is helping a guest, supporting a coworker, or taking on a task outside of her usual duties, she does so with grace, enthusiasm, and a willingness to go above and beyond. She truly embodies the spirit of hospitality. Glenda is not only a team player—she is a team lifter. Her positivity boosts morale, her work sets a high standard, and her dedication inspires those around her. It is employees like Glenda who make our hotel a place guests return to, and staff are proud to be part of. I wholeheartedly recommend her for any recognition or award that honors dedication, service excellence, and outstanding team spirit.

### **Bill Brewer**

Lead Engineer - Sheraton Indianapolis City Centre

Bill’s nickname at the Sheraton given to him by his previous Chief Engineer is MacGyver, meaning “to make or repair in an improvised or inventive way, making use of whatever items are at hand.” I couldn’t think of a better way to describe him. Bill has been at the Sheraton for 3 years now and has developed himself into one of the core leaders on our team. He has stepped up tremendously in the last year as the previous Chief Engineer retired after 30 years and someone needed to step up and fill the gap and help teach the new Chief the building, and that was Bill. For his leadership skills and his technical knowledge of his position and of the hotel, Bill was promoted to Lead Engineer in 2024, and he has taken that responsibility seriously and taken on a mentor role with his fellow engineers and has really put a lot of time and effort into developing their skills. Bill has a curious mind and enjoys going down the rabbit hole until he figures it out, this has led him to be our property expert on systems like SafLok key encoding, and he is also our unofficial IT Tech. Whenever there is a computer/printer issue, everyone calls Bill. He also very passionate about our guests, he is constantly brining up new ideas to better serve our guests especially regarding their safety and security. On a lighter note, Bill is also the life of the break room catching everyone up on the recent events in Indianapolis. Bill is a huge culture piece of the Sheraton, and the hotel would not be the same without him.

### **Jazmin Cabanas**

F&B Supervisor - Crowne Plaza Indianapolis Airport, an IHG Hotel / General Hotels Corporation

Jazmin’s impact goes far beyond routine service. She is a natural team player, always ready to lend a hand when a fellow server needs help or to step in when a guest looks confused or in need. Whether suggesting menu items to someone unsure of what to order or guiding lost travelers, Jazmin is attentive to every detail and person around her. One night, when room service had already closed, Jazmin took a guest’s order over the phone because the woman sounded tired. She arranged for someone to watch her section, then personally delivered the meal to the guest’s room. There, she learned the woman was caring for her ill mother and couldn’t leave the mother alone. Jazmin’s small act of kindness meant the world to someone in a difficult moment. On another occasion, Jazmin noticed an older guest struggling to book a Lyft. Without hesitation, she used her own account to get him where he needed to



go, expecting nothing in return. The man later came back to thank her, deeply moved by her generosity. Jazmin brings this same compassion and commitment to everything she does. She believes every guest should feel welcome, included, and appreciated—and she lives that belief daily. She also works tirelessly to provide for her family and is raising her sons to share her values of kindness, hard work, and respect. Jazmin doesn't just serve guests—she touches lives. Her integrity, selflessness, and genuine care make her an outstanding representative of our industry and a true example of service excellence.

### **Emmie Cortez**

Housekeeper - Fairfield Inn and Suites Carmel

It is with great pride and admiration that we nominate Emmie for recognition of her exceptional dedication and service. For over 19 years, Emmie has been an integral part of our housekeeping team not only at this hotel, but with the Scachet company, consistently demonstrating professionalism, reliability, and pride in her work. Even now, well into her 70s, Emmie continues to show up each day with the same energy, commitment, and warm spirit that have inspired her coworkers for nearly two decades. Her strong work ethic, attention to detail, and positive attitude set the standard for excellence in our department. Emmie approaches every task—no matter how big or small—with care and respect. She takes ownership of her work, ensures that every space she touches is spotless, and goes above and beyond to make guests and team members feel welcome. Beyond her exceptional work performance, she is known for her kindness, humility, and unwavering dedication to the company and her peers. Her longevity and commitment speak volumes about her character and the pride she takes in her role. Emmie embodies the true meaning of loyalty, perseverance, and excellence, and she is deeply deserving of this recognition. We are honored to nominate her for this award and to celebrate her incredible contributions to our team and organization.

### **Erica Deitsch**

Executive Housekeeper - Hampton Inn Corydon / General Hotels Corporation

Erica consistently goes above and beyond—not only in fulfilling her responsibilities as a leader but also in the genuine care and kindness she shows to others. Her love and patience are unmatched, and she consistently puts the needs of others ahead of her own without hesitation. The impression she leaves on both guests and team members is lasting and deeply impactful. Her positive attitude is contagious, uplifting those around her and fostering an atmosphere of encouragement and support. A natural overachiever, Erica gives 110% to everything she does, often without needing direction or motivation. Her dedication is so remarkable that the team sometimes reminds her to pause and take a breath. Her compassion extends beyond people. By her own account, Erica has cared for sick and injured animals—including wildlife—nursing them back to health. While these stories haven't been witnessed firsthand by the team, they are entirely believable given her consistently generous and nurturing nature. That's simply who Erica is—someone with an extraordinary heart for all living beings. The entire team at Hampton Inn Corydon holds Erica in the highest regard. Her contributions, character, and spirit make her truly one of a kind. She is deeply appreciated and admired by all who work with her.

### **Michelle Garcia**

Room Attendant - Hampton Inn Vincennes / General Hotels Corporation

For the past three years at General Hotels Corporation, Michelle has exemplified what it means to serve with heart, dedication, and teamwork. Always warm and welcoming, she brings a bright smile and positive attitude to every shift—creating a supportive and uplifting environment for both guests and team members alike. Michelle has naturally stepped into a mentorship role among our housekeeping team, often acting as a role model to newer and



younger employees. She checks in on their well-being, offers encouragement, and ensures they feel confident and cared for in their roles. Her bilingual skills in Spanish—and her ability to communicate across language barriers—have been invaluable, particularly in assisting our two Spanish-speaking and one French-speaking team members, ensuring no one feels left behind. Though her primary role is Room Attendant, Michelle consistently goes above and beyond her duties without hesitation. She stepped up without question to cover breakfast service during a family emergency, showing her adaptability and commitment to the team. She regularly assists in the laundry room and fills in wherever support is needed with grace and without complaint. Michelle’s selflessness, reliability, and genuine care for others embody the very spirit of this award. Her quiet leadership and unwavering dedication behind the scenes make a powerful impact every day, and the entire team is better because of her.

**Olga Hernandez Burmudez**

Housekeeping Supervisor - Indianapolis Marriott Downtown

With over 8 years of dedication to the company, Olga exemplifies the highest standards of excellence. Despite her long tenure, she approaches every shift with the same enthusiasm and passion as she did on day one. Her fearlessness in the face of challenges is inspiring, and her work ethic is unmatched. As our morning shift Housekeeping Supervisor, she sets the tone for the day, ensuring seamless operations and exceptional guest experiences. Olga is a shining example of the company values. Her perfect attendance record is a testament to her commitment, and the initiative she takes to help our department succeed on the day is evident in every aspect of her work. She consistently goes above and beyond for our guests, paying meticulous attention to detail to make every stay special. What truly sets her apart is her genuine care for her role, the company, and the people around her. She lives the company pledges every day, treating the hotel as her own, treating the associates like guests, making guests feel special through thoughtful touches she adds to every room and her dedication to fulfilling guest requests exceeding their expectations showcases her exceptional commitment. Her dedication is not only admirable but contagious, inspiring those around her.

**Megan Mann**

Inspector - Homewood Suites by Hilton Munster / General Hotels Corporation

Megan Mann is an outstanding nominee for the Lodging Heart of House Award, recognized for her unwavering dedication, behind-the-scenes excellence, and foundational contributions to guest satisfaction and team success. A former Employee of the Year, Megan consistently delivers exceptional service that enhances the guest experience from the heart of operations. Her attention to detail, reliability, and proactive mindset ensure that the front desk runs seamlessly, even during high-pressure or understaffed moments. She anticipates needs before they arise, ensuring smooth internal workflows and a consistently warm, welcoming environment for every guest. Megan’s impact extends beyond her core responsibilities. She maintains an impeccable attendance record and is known for stepping up without hesitation—filling critical gaps, mentoring new staff, and offering support wherever needed. She is consistently recognized by her peers for bringing a sense of calm and dependability that strengthens the entire team. This peer appreciation led to a recent Employee of the Month nomination, underscoring her role as a trusted, essential team member. Through her humility, consistency, and quiet leadership, Megan exemplifies the values at the core of the Heart of House Award. Her efforts may happen behind the scenes, but their impact is felt at every level of the guest experience.

**Michael Mason**

Maintenance Technician - Hilton Indianapolis Hotel & Suites



Mike is a 25-year building services veteran at the Hilton Indianapolis Hotel & Suites; he is the very cornerstone of our building services team and rich heritage of long-term associates. Today, Mike continues to work with us part-time, not out of obligation, but out of a genuine passion and commitment to his team and our property. He provides hands-on training and guidance to the next generation of building services technicians to ensure consistent quality and safety standards are maintained throughout hotel operations. He is part of our team that is responsible for our year-to-date Room Quality score which is 10% better than the Hilton brand average. His unwavering dedication and deep knowledge make him an invaluable mentor and role model for our team members. Mike leads by example every day, whether working face-to-face with guests or behind the scenes, he constantly demonstrates the highest standards of professionalism and care. His willingness to go above and beyond—offering guidance, sharing his experience, and stepping up whenever needed—leaves a lasting positive impression on both his teammates and our guests. Mike's enduring passion and exemplary service truly embody what it means to be a trusted and inspiring team member who consistently elevates the guest experience and supports the success of our team.

### **Maximino Montano**

IRD Cook - Bottleworks Hotel

I'd like to nominate Maximino Montano for Heart of House. When Max came in as an IRD Cook early this year, he was always willing to help with whatever we had going on. I've noticed over time that this willingness to help isn't about keeping busy, it's about doing anything he can to help the team. If there were dishes in the sink, he'd be over there to do them. If we have a wedding, he's gathering ingredients to help without being asked. Need help with a plate up and he's scheduled for IRD? He's saucing plates waiting to get the page like an on-call doctor if he needs to fly downstairs to make an order for a guest. But he doesn't just help with what is needing to be done, he helps the team to get the finish line with his calming presence. Evening banquets and weddings would not be able to operate the way they do without him, and we are a stronger place for having him on the team.

### **Edilia Morales**

Room Attendant - Fairfield by Marriott Inn & Suites Whitestown Indianapolis NW / General Hotels Corporation

With over five years of experience in the hospitality industry, Edilia has demonstrated unwavering dedication and excellence in her work. Edilia began her journey with our hotel as a housekeeper and, within just six months, was promoted to Room Inspector—a testament to her strong work ethic and attention to detail. She consistently goes above and beyond in her role, not only ensuring the highest standards of cleanliness and service but also creating a welcoming environment for both guests and staff. She is known for her warm and friendly demeanor, often greeting and engaging with guests throughout the hotel. Moreover, her willingness to step in and assist wherever needed highlights her team-first mentality. Beyond her professional contributions, Edilia is deeply valued by our entire team. Her positivity, reliability, and dedication make her a beloved member of our staff and an outstanding representative of our brand.

### **Maria Peña**

Banquet Server/Setup - Hilton Garden Inn Indianapolis Airport

Maria is officially part of our banquet team, responsible for both service and setup, but that's just the tip of the iceberg. On any given day, you'll find her setting up tables, chairs, and linens for events; preparing and presenting buffets; keeping drinks refilled and stations spotless; and ensuring the event space is perfectly reset afterward. Beyond that, she routinely jumps in wherever she's needed, whether it's food prep, bussing tables, or even dishwashing, always with a positive attitude and a team-first mindset. What truly sets Maria apart is the way she connects with our guests. Even though she primarily speaks Spanish and is still learning English, she never lets



language be a barrier to hospitality. Her warm, genuine presence resonates with guests, and her recent effort to begin using an in-ear translator shows her remarkable commitment to communication and growth. It's inspiring to see her go above and beyond to ensure guests feel welcomed and cared for, even without always sharing the same words. Over the past two years, Maria has grown immensely, not just in her skills, but in her confidence and leadership on the floor. She takes great pride in her work and consistently sets the tone for excellence. She is one of those rare individuals who leads by example and lifts everyone around her. Maria embodies what it means to be a true team player, and her contributions are a cornerstone of our banquet success. She is dependable, humble, and deeply respected by her peers. Simply put, events don't run the same without her.

### **Michelle Romero**

Front Desk Agent - Hampton Inn and Suites Munster / General Hotels Corporation

Michelle radiates the values of H.E.A.R.T.—the Hilton acronym that stands for Hospitality, Empathy, Attention to Detail, Responsiveness, and Thoughtfulness. She consistently goes above and beyond in all areas of guest service and truly exemplifies what it means to care for others. Michelle takes immense pride in her work and in delivering exceptional service to our guests. She always listens attentively to their needs and responds with genuine empathy. One recent example of this occurred when a guest was staying with us following a death in their family. A young woman contacted the hotel for help with a eulogy document—her mother needed to read it at a funeral, but the font was too small to see. Without hesitation, Michelle enlarged the font, printed the document, and personally ensured that it was ready in time. She expressed sincere condolences, handed the document to the guest's mother, and followed up later to check on her well-being. Michelle even asked if there was anything else she could do to help, ending the interaction by thanking the guest for choosing our hotel during such a difficult time. Later that same week, Michelle assisted another guest who was anxiously awaiting a replacement cell phone delivery. She made sure the package was received promptly and delivered it immediately to the guest. The guest was incredibly grateful and took the time to recognize Michelle's attention to detail and helpfulness. Michelle brings warmth, care, and a positive attitude to our hotel every single day. She not only provides outstanding service to guests but is also a supportive and uplifting presence among her team members. Her name frequently appears in glowing guest reviews, reflecting the consistent impact she makes. Michelle is an invaluable part of our team, and her dedication to Hilton's values makes her truly deserving of recognition.

### **Ashley Schuppe**

Sales Coordinator - Crowne Plaza Indianapolis Downtown Union Station by IHG / General Hotels Corporation

Ashley is an invaluable asset as our Sales Coordinator to the Sales & Events Department, as well as the entire hotel for almost three years. Ashley consistently goes above and beyond, demonstrating exceptional dedication to delivering outstanding customer service to both internal and external guests. Her professionalism, positive attitude, and unwavering commitment to excellence make her an integral part of our team. Ashley took the initiative to create QR codes, which were included in a welcome letter sent to all guests prior to their arrival. These codes provided maps and directions to help guests navigate the city's construction projects and the hotel's renovation. Ashley knew the more we can inform the guests before their arrival, the more we can maximize their overall experience by not having any unexpected surprises. This proactive solution significantly minimized guest frustration and eased the burden on our front-of-house staff, who were able to focus on welcoming an informed guest instead of handling a potentially frustrated one. Beyond her stellar administrative contributions, Ashley continuously steps up in other areas. She managed valet parking logistics during the high-traffic Taylor Swift concert weekend, designed and created signage for all departments during renovation, and routinely supports our reservations team by handling guest calls—helping to minimize transfers to Central Reservations. Ashley's exceptional service, problem-solving skills, and dedication to proactively support our organization's culture and goals, make her a true role model.



### **Karen Shockley**

Room Attendant - Fairfield by Marriott Inn & Suites Franklin / General Hotels Corporation

Over the past year, Karen has consistently gone above and beyond to ensure that every guest room she touches is not only spotless but also welcoming—creating an environment where guests truly feel at home. Her unwavering commitment to cleanliness and hospitality sets a high standard for excellence. Karen’s impact extends far beyond her daily responsibilities. She is the first to arrive early to assist with laundry, the first to offer help to a coworker, and the first to lift others up with her kindness and positivity. Her quiet dedication, team spirit, and work ethic make her an essential part of our hotel family. Karen truly embodies what the Heart of the House Award represents. She is not just a housekeeper, she is a cornerstone of our operation, and a shining example of what hospitality is all about. We are honored to work alongside her and even more honored to nominate her for this well-deserved recognition.

### **Vee Smith**

Housekeeping Supervisor - Bottleworks Hotel

I am proud to nominate Vee Smith, our exceptional Housekeeping Supervisor, for the Lodging Heart of House Award. For over four years, Vee has defined what it means to lead by example, consistently leaving lasting impressions on both guests and her peers. Vee’s commitment to guest experiences is exceptional, extending far beyond her core duties. She regularly gives spontaneous tours to guests, sharing our building’s unique history and showcasing its beauty, ensuring they leave with a memorable connection to the property. Furthermore, her dedication to guest safety is clear: when an unsafe guest situation arose recently, Vee was the “Firsthand on Deck,” staying calmly with the guest until help arrived. She is also the first to sacrifice her time, frequently picking up extra shifts, coming in early, and staying late. Beyond guests, Vee elevates our entire team. She continually raises the bar for cleanliness standards, voluntarily conducting cart and public space inspections. Her dedication to team culture is just as notable: she organized monthly Flea Markets of donated items for our staff and has brought homemade soup to sick team members at home. This profound commitment to care—whether through exceptional cleanliness or genuine human kindness—makes Vee the undeniable heart of our house.

### **Stacy Staten**

Breakfast Host - Holiday Inn Express Evansville East

Since joining our team in August 2022, Stacy Staten has brought energy, professionalism, and creativity to her role as our full-time breakfast host. She quickly elevated the breakfast department with her strong experience, organizational skills, and natural ability to connect with guests. Currently our breakfast service is scoring in the Elite category with the IHG brand. Stacy leads by example in every way. She has developed order guides, implemented thorough deep-clean routines, and eagerly stepped in to train new hires, ensuring they succeed and feel supported. She does all of this while maintaining an engaging, guest-focused presence that leaves a lasting impression. Her efforts are directly reflected in the steady climb of our breakfast service scores since she joined the team. Guests regularly highlight Stacy in their reviews, praising her warm hospitality and the special touches she brings to the breakfast experience. One of her most memorable gestures is leaving hand-written notes on bananas—a simple, fun, and personal way to brighten a guest’s day. These small but meaningful details showcase Stacy’s creativity and her genuine desire to make each guest feel welcome. Her commitment goes far beyond her primary role. Stacy willingly cross-trains and assists in other areas of the hotel whenever needed, always stepping in with a positive attitude and team-first mindset. She also contributes her time and effort to employee celebrations, offering help with setup, service, and cleanup to ensure these events run smoothly. Stacy’s love for travel and people shines through in every interaction. She shares her experiences with guests and staff in ways that create connections,



inspire conversations, and foster a welcoming environment. Her reliability, enthusiasm, and thoughtful touches have made her one of the most positively recognized employees on our team. Stacy truly embodies the spirit of this award. Through her leadership by example, commitment to excellence, and ability to create memorable experiences for guests and colleagues alike, she has become an indispensable part of our hotel's success. We are proud to nominate her for this recognition.

**Guillermina Vasquez**

Housekeeper - JW Marriott

I would like to nominate Guillermina Vasquez as a star of the industry. Guillermina previously worked for the hotel in 2016 and returned in January of 2020. It was not the best time to restart, but when it came time to reopen the hotel in July of 2020 her knowledge was essential to bringing the JW back after a renovation and closing for 100 days. During that time guille would work up to 3 different jobs on the same day (GRA in morning, houseman in afternoon, finish in laundry) always responding with "however I can help!" Since then, Guillermina has worked as a housekeeper, supervisor, laundry and public space attendant. Guillermina is always asking to train our new associates and helps to mentor them as they grow in the department. She is a trusted associate that I can always turn to if we need help, just last week I pulled her from her normal job to come help finish cleaning a football team's room that we had specific time to clean and with her help we got it done with 5 mins to spare! On a personal note, she is amazing at crocheting and amazing cook (especially her chili relleno) Guillermina truly embodies what it means to be a star in our hospitality industry!

**Lodging Manager of the Year (100 rooms or less)**

**Holly Bell**

Guest Service Manager - SpringHill Suites by Marriott Terre Haute / General Hotels Corporation

Holly has quickly become an integral part of General Hotels Corporation, consistently delivering outstanding guest service and exemplifying the spirit of Hoosier hospitality. Holly consistently goes above and beyond, not out of obligation but from genuine care and passion for people. Her ability to anticipate guest needs, create meaningful personal connections, and foster loyalty is unmatched. Whether celebrating milestones or resolving challenges, she delivers memorable experiences that resonate with guests long after their stay. Under Holly's leadership, the front desk team has flourished. She leads by example—modeling attentiveness, kindness, and initiative—and inspires those around her to deliver their best. Her efforts have directly contributed to an increase in guest satisfaction scores, glowing reviews, and repeat visits, strengthening both our service culture and brand reputation. Guests take the time to write compliments about Holly's warmth and professionalism, citing her ability to turn a simple stay into a standout experience. Her proactive approach, thoughtful gestures, and unwavering commitment to excellence make her a guest favorite and a valued leader among her peers. Holly exemplifies what it means to deliver genuine Hoosier hospitality, welcoming, caring, and community-minded. She understands that true service is not just about fulfilling expectations, but about creating joy, connection, and trust. For her outstanding performance, deep commitment to service, and inspiring leadership, Holly Bell is a shining example of industry excellence and is richly deserving of recognition as a 2025 Star of the Industry.

**Gretchen Hineman**

Housekeeping Supervisor - Fairfield by Marriott Inn & Suites Whitestown Indianapolis NW / General Hotels Corporation



With over nine years of experience in the hospitality industry, Gretchen has brought a wealth of knowledge and professionalism to our team. Over the past year, I have had the privilege of working closely with her in her role as Housekeeping Supervisor. Gretchen possesses an exceptional background in housekeeping management and has consistently demonstrated a strong commitment to excellence. Since joining our team, she has gone above and beyond in every aspect of her role. Her dedication has not only contributed to her own professional growth but has also significantly strengthened our entire housekeeping team. She ensures that every team member is equipped with the tools, training, and support they need to succeed daily. Her leadership has fostered a productive, positive, and welcoming work environment, and her efforts have not gone unnoticed as staff across all departments have shared overwhelmingly positive feedback regarding her impact. Gretchen also shows genuine kindness and compassion toward our housekeeping team. She regularly checks in with them, asking how they're doing and offering a listening ear when they need support. She's someone many feel comfortable turning to, knowing they'll be met with empathy and understanding. One example of her care was when she gave a thoughtful gift to a team member who was going through a very difficult personal situation. That gesture meant a great deal to the staff member. In addition to her behind-the-scenes contributions, Gretchen plays a vital role in ensuring high-quality guest experience. She takes pride in maintaining spotless facilities and often goes out of her way to engage warmly with our guests, ensuring they feel welcome and valued. She takes the time to listen thoughtfully to our guests, especially regarding their feedback on our breakfast options. Her efforts have led to ordering more popular items and consistently ensuring that guests leave feeling satisfied and cared for.

## **Lodging Manager of the Year (more than 100 rooms)**

### **Herbert Brumfield**

F&B Supervisor - Hyatt Place Evansville Downtown / General Hotels Corporation

Herbert Brumfield, from the Hyatt Place Evansville Downtown, is a man who exemplifies what it means to create exceptional guest experiences. From interacting with departing guests during breakfast service, to greeting arriving guests with a drink at the bar, Herbert prides himself on making the difference in the Hospitality Industry, and being the light, warm face in a field often so over-shadowed with negative experiences. Herbert is also dedicated to both his property and his colleagues. As the Food & Beverage Supervisor, he consistently helps and supports other departments, such as the Front Desk, and will work cross-department double shifts without hesitation or pushback. Whether it's a smile in passing, providing directions to local eateries in downtown Evansville along our food-friendly Main Street, or welcoming an arriving guest, you'll always find Herbert with a smile on his face and pure intentions in his heart.

### **Lailanie Castaneda**

Executive Housekeeper/Director of Housekeeping - The Westin Indianapolis

It is with great pride that I nominate Lailanie "Lani" Castaneda for Lodging Manager of the Year. A Leader Who Cares Deeply for Her Team. Lani has always shown the kind of special care for her people that sets apart a truly great head of housekeeping. On the busiest of days, she is never afraid to work shoulder to shoulder with her team, staying late to support those who are struggling, and advocating passionately to ensure her associates have the tools and resources they need to succeed. Beyond the walls of the hotel, Lani continues her support—taking time to help associates with personal challenges and being a source of encouragement when life presents obstacles. Her genuine compassion has earned her the admiration and trust of her entire team. Driving Business Success and Guest Satisfaction. While Lani's heart is with her people, she is also a strong business leader who ensures that budgets, productivity goals, and GSS targets are consistently met. Under her guidance, our housekeeping team has



delivered the highest guest satisfaction scores in our hotel's history, with improvements year after year over the past three years. Her relentless pursuit of excellence continues to elevate both her team and the guest experience. A Proven Track Record of Excellence. Lani's leadership has already been recognized at the highest levels. She has been an integral part of a rooms team that has won Rooms Team of the Year for the past two years. She was also named Manager of the Year for 2024, the same year our hotel won Hotel of the Year for Davidson Hotels. Inspiring Engagement and Loyalty. Perhaps the most compelling measure of Lani's leadership is the extraordinary engagement of her team. In an industry where housekeeping is one of the most demanding roles, Lani has achieved a remarkable 94% engagement score paired with a 94% intent-to-stay rating among her associates. These numbers speak volumes about her ability to create a positive, supportive, and empowering workplace culture where people feel valued and motivated to give their best.

### **Radell Green**

General Manager - Hampton Inn & Suites Keystone

Radell exemplifies the very best of hospitality—an extraordinary blend of heart, leadership, and results. For over 16 years with Schahet Hotels, she has been the steady, inspiring presence behind two Hampton Inn properties, currently as General Manager Hampton Inn & Suites Keystone, Indianapolis, IN. A Heart for People. Radell's leadership is defined by compassion. She has supported associates through personal hardships, helped new parents by caring for their children, and eased financial burdens when needed. Her generosity extends to the broader community through countless hours with nursing homes, food pantries, animal shelters, and the Megan Ott Foundation. She gives without expectation—her only goal is to make a difference. A Mentor Who Builds Leaders. Her legacy is measured in the careers she has shaped. Dozens of associates have grown into General Managers under her guidance, calling her their “Godmother” and crediting her with transforming jobs into lasting careers. She invests time, patience, and wisdom, ensuring her team not only succeeds but thrives. Relentless Standards of Excellence. Radell pairs compassion with high performance. Under her leadership:

- Her hotel ranks in the Top 10 of 193 Indianapolis hotels on TripAdvisor.
- Her team has achieved 16 Hilton “Outstanding” QA awards.
- The property is ranked Top 11% nationwide in Hilton's Total Quality Score.
- Twice her hotel earned the Hilton Award of Excellence, placing among the brand's top 5%.

She has also built a culture of loyalty, with 61% of associates staying over a year—an exceptional achievement in hospitality. Leading by Example. Radell leads from the front lines, whether covering the front desk, resolving guest concerns, or personally ensuring a flawless stay. Her peers respect her deeply; she has received Schahet Hotels' Dan Waller Leadership Award and serves on leadership and recognition committees, shaping the company's culture and future. Why She Deserves This Honor. Radell Green is far more than a GM—she is a mentor, community builder, and standard-bearer of excellence. Her leadership uplifts people, drives results, and embodies the spirit of hospitality. With pride and admiration, we nominate her for the InRLA Lodging GM of the Year Award.

### **Ethan Jones**

Director of Front Office - JW Marriott

Ethan Jones, Director of Front Office, is a leader whose integrity, strategic mindset, and unwavering professionalism make him an exceptional nominee for Front of the House Lodging Associate of the Year. Ethan's communication skills are exemplary. He engages effectively across all levels of the organization, ensuring clarity, consistency, and collaboration in every interaction. His ability to articulate complex ideas and navigate challenging conversations with confidence and respect sets a high standard for leadership. As a strategic thinker, Ethan approaches every situation with a solutions-oriented mindset. He is known for solving complex problems with precision and foresight, often anticipating needs before they arise. Ethan is courageous in his leadership—willing to take calculated risks



and make tough decisions, when necessary, always guided by his strong moral compass. His military background keeps him grounded and calm while solving situations. Ethan's professionalism is unwavering, especially in difficult situations. He handles challenges with grace and confidence, maintaining a calm and composed demeanor that reassures both guests and associates. His integrity is evident in everything he does—he leads by example, consistently doing the right thing even when no one is watching. What truly sets Ethan apart is his genuine care for his team. He supports their goals both professionally and personally, creating an environment where people feel valued and empowered. His leadership inspires trust, loyalty, and a shared commitment to excellence. Ethan Jones is not only a skilled director—he is a mentor, a role model, and a driving force behind the success of the Front Office team. His dedication to service, his principled leadership, and his ability to inspire those around him make him a truly deserving candidate for this prestigious recognition.

### **Christopher Knight**

Director of Operations - Hilton Garden Inn Jeffersonville Louisville North / General Hotels Corporation

Christopher Knight exemplifies what it means to lead with purpose, positivity, and a people-first mindset. He brings a unique and invaluable balance to the hotel team. Known for being smart, creative, consistent, and structured, Christopher ensures that every department understands expectations—yet never in a way that feels forced. Instead, his leadership creates a sense of unity and shared progress throughout the entire operation. Calm under pressure and confident in the face of challenges, Christopher focuses on efficiency and effectiveness in hotel operations. His leadership has resulted in consistent, perfect sell-outs—not by chance, but through strategic planning, strong execution, and a commitment to training his team. He doesn't simply set goals and hope for success; he drives outcomes by paying close attention before, during, and after each opportunity. Christopher is a leader dedicated to growth, both personally and professionally. Open to feedback and ready to take on new challenges, he actively pursues opportunities to learn and improve. With clear aspirations to become a General Manager, he consistently embraces change, adopts new technologies, and engages fully with training and systems. These qualities make him a strong and compelling candidate for continued advancement. Team members at all levels feel comfortable approaching him—whether for a quick question or to share a big idea—knowing they'll be met with respect and support. He fosters an environment that is welcoming, professional, and genuinely enjoyable to work in. His energy motivates others not out of obligation, but out of inspiration and shared purpose. Reliable, communicative, and thorough, Christopher is deeply invested in the success of his team and the hotel. During his 2½ years of service, the property has earned Outstanding QA scores for three consecutive years, with Christopher serving as a key driver of that achievement. Christopher Knight is an outstanding leader whose contributions elevate the entire operation. His consistent excellence and leadership potential make him highly deserving of this recognition.

### **Robert Leal Ransone**

Assistant General Manager - Hyatt Place/Hyatt House Downtown Indianapolis Indiana

We are proud to nominate Robert "Leal" Ransone, Assistant General Manager, for the Lodging Manager of the Year award. Leal exemplifies the very best of Hoosier hospitality and embodies our hotel's guiding principle: caring for people so they can be their best. Throughout his tenure, Leal has consistently demonstrated versatility, resilience, and leadership across multiple areas of hotel operations. During times of transition and departmental vacancies in Food & Beverage, Housekeeping, and Guest Services, Leal willingly stepped in to provide oversight and support. His ability to adapt quickly, lead with confidence, and maintain operational excellence ensured the continuity of service and the satisfaction of our guests. More importantly, he takes on these responsibilities without hesitation or complaint, modeling a standard of teamwork and dedication for the entire staff. His never-ending thirst for knowledge and understanding—no matter what the topic—drives him to be a champion in every task he touches. This commitment to growth and excellence inspires those around him and elevates the performance of the entire



team. Beyond his professional achievements, Leal has also displayed remarkable composure and professionalism while managing personal challenges. He practices the very approach we coach our associates— “leave it outside”—ensuring that his focus on guests, team members, and operations remains unwavering. His steadiness and commitment under pressure set a strong example for others and reflect his deep dedication to the hospitality profession. Leal’s leadership, character, and embodiment of true hospitality make him an outstanding candidate for Lodging Manager of the Year. He has consistently proven himself as not only a capable manager but also a trusted mentor and role model within our organization.

### **Andy Martich**

Housekeeping Manager - Ironworks Hotel – Indy

I’d like to nominate Andy for Lodging Manager of the Year. He keeps things running smoothly and guests happy. He leads by example, supports his team, and speaks up to find ways to improve our staff’s level of service beyond his own department. Our rooms are consistently spotless, and our guest feedback is very positive regarding cleanliness! He brings a calm attitude even during the busiest times, and he’s always willing to jump in or adjust his schedule wherever needed. He cares about the guest experience and his team and after 4 years of managing our housekeeping team, I think he deserves this nomination!

### **Patricia Powell**

Housekeeping Manager - Courtyard Indianapolis Fishers

It is with great pride that I nominate Patricia Powell for this award. As Housekeeping Manager at the Courtyard Fishers, Patricia has consistently demonstrated exceptional leadership, dedication, and commitment to excellence. Under Patricia’s guidance, our hotel is ranked in the top 2% in cleanliness scores across the entire brand and has received several Marriott awards, including Marriott’s Hotel Opening of the Year. This distinction speaks directly to her relentless standards and attention to detail. She not only sets the bar for operational excellence but also ensures that her team feels empowered, supported, and motivated. The loyalty and enthusiasm of her staff are a testament to her ability to inspire and lead with both professionalism and compassion. Guests frequently commend the spotless condition of our property, often calling out Patricia’s team’s work in reviews and personal feedback. This reputation for cleanliness has not only enhanced the guest experience but also elevated our standing within the brand, making Patricia’s contributions vital to the hotel’s overall success. Beyond metrics and recognition, Patricia embodies the qualities of a true leader. She mentors her staff, fosters a culture of respect and teamwork, and consistently goes above and beyond to ensure both guests and associates feel valued. For her outstanding leadership, her unwavering commitment to guest satisfaction, and her role in positioning our hotel as the best of the brand, Patricia is highly deserving of this award.

### **Sheena Punzalan**

Assistant Executive Housekeeper - Hyatt Regency Indianapolis

“Masaya akong makilala ka.” “¡Qué gusto verte!” “I’m so happy to see you.” No matter what language Sheena Punzalan greets you in, you know instinctively that she means it. Having grown from Front Desk Host to Assistant Executive Housekeeper, Sheena embodies what it means to welcome each person she meets with sincerity, humor, and heart. Sheena radiates the Hyatt purpose of Caring for people so they can be their best. Her team describes her as patient, encouraging, and deeply invested in others’ success. What began as quiet determination has blossomed into confident leadership—her “true colors,” as one nominator said, “now shine as a leader.” She approaches every challenge with precision and calm, whether coordinating site-visit rooms that help win business, delivering engaging



morning meetings, or ensuring spotless guest spaces that elevate our cleanliness scores. But Sheena's brilliance extends far beyond her technical expertise. She is the first to lend a hand, the one who fills the room with laughter, and the manager who always checks in—not just on tasks, but on people. Colleagues light up when her name is mentioned; it's a reflection of the joy, motivation, and trust she inspires. One nominator said it best: "Sheena is my favorite person to work with. Even when she says she's tired, she's the hardest-working person I know." Her impact stretches across departments—from Front Office to Engineering to Sales. Her clear communication and can-do spirit keep operations running seamlessly. And somehow, amid the endless questions, race weekends, and last-minute requests, Sheena continues to uplift everyone around her. Confident. Graceful. Understanding. A "baddie," as one colleague put it—with equal parts excellence and empathy. Sheena is a true bituin, estrella—an absolute star.

### **Juan Rios Gamboa**

**Banquet Manager - Sheraton Indianapolis City Centre**

Juan began in hotels 50 years ago in Mexico where he was a Regional F&B Director for Presidente Hotels, running F&B operations for 29 resorts across the country, that's until he met his Hoosier wife one sunny day in Cancun in 1987, and the next thing you know he was on a plane to Indianapolis, married, and looking to continue his hospitality career. There was one problem though, he did not speak English, so that limited his opportunities, but he did not let that stop him. He first got a job at the Adam's Mark Indianapolis Airport Hotel as a Room Service Server, and he let his work ethic lead the way as he learned English. He took some pit stops at the Radisson Keystone at the Crossing, Radisson Airport, Hilton Downtown, and then finally to the Sheraton Indianapolis City Centre where he has remained as the Banquet Manager now for the past 23 years. Juan is the longest tenured manager at the Sheraton, he has seen two decades of managers come and go, yet he remains as a shining light of hospitality and service excellence. Juan has been regarded as the best banquet manager in all of Remington Hotels throughout his career and for 7 years straight he traveled and ran the banquet operations for the Remington's Annual Leadership Conference. He has been a part of every major Indianapolis event in the last 38 years, including the Super Bowl, 7 Final 4's, and of course Taylor Swift. He has also executed many conferences at the Sheraton over the years, with the American Legion conferences being the largest, multiple events of 300+ attendees over each year for the past 36 years that the Sheraton has had the partnership with American Legion, and every event has been better than the last. At the core of Juan's leadership is professionalism, teamwork, and guest service. His standard is high, and he does not compromise it in order to take care of our guests and give them a 5-Start banquet event.

### **Rafael Suarez**

**Dual Housekeeping Manager - Courtyard/Spring Hill Suites Downtown Indianapolis**

Rafael exemplifies leadership, teamwork, and dedication every single day. His commitment to his team and to the success of our operation goes far beyond the expectations of his role. As a bilingual leader, Rafael consistently goes the extra mile to support his team members — not only within Housekeeping but across departments. He readily assists associates by answering questions, locating vacant rooms, sharing efficiency tips, and even repairing equipment such as vacuums. Beyond his operational expertise, Rafael helps associates set up their online portals (and has reset probably 100 passwords), translates when language barriers arise (with guests and associates), and ensures every team member feels supported and included. His approachable demeanor and genuine care are evident in how his team interacts with him — their respect and appreciation are unmistakable. Rafael joined the Housekeeping team a year ago after transitioning from the Front Desk. His flexibility and willingness to help wherever needed have made him an invaluable cross-departmental asset. Whether stepping in to assist during a Front Desk rush or sharing insights to improve Housekeeping processes, Rafael's efforts have led to increased efficiency and earlier guest check-ins — directly enhancing the guest experience. A true "jack of all trades," Rafael has also taken



initiative to partner with our Engineering team, learning how to perform minor room repairs. This proactive approach allows Engineering to focus on larger projects while ensuring rooms return to service more quickly — another example of Rafael’s commitment to operational excellence. Beyond his daily impact, Rafael brings enthusiasm and positivity to our culture. On “PI Day,” his rapport with the team was evident. His line was by far the longest--and filled with lots of laughter. Moments like these reflect the genuine connection he has with his team and the inclusive, enjoyable environment he fosters. Rafael embodies our core value of creating an environment where everyone can be their best self. His leadership has strengthened our team both inside and outside the workplace, improving communication, morale, and performance. We are incredibly grateful for Rafael’s leadership, versatility, and unwavering commitment to excellence.

### **Caitlin Wilde**

General Manager - Home2 Suites Indianapolis Airport

Nomination for Caitlin Wilde – Lodging Manager of The Year It’s an honor to nominate Caitlin though anyone who’s worked alongside her knows she’s always been a star. In her new role as General Manager, Caitlin has proven exactly why she was destined for leadership. In less than one year, she has not only maintained strong retention but also transformed the guest experience at her property, taking it from #43 to #7 on TripAdvisor—placing it firmly in the top 10 hotels in the city of Indianapolis. That kind of turnaround doesn’t happen by chance—it’s a direct result of Caitlin’s focus, vision, and unwavering commitment to excellence. What sets Caitlin apart is not just what she’s achieved, but how she’s done it. Her first year in leadership came with challenges most wouldn’t see in a decade: tragic, unexpected tragedy on property, rooms destroyed, and more. She has truly seen it all, still, she’s never wavered. Her strength under pressure, her grace in crisis, and her steady hand in the most turbulent times have left a lasting impact on both her team and her guests. Caitlin leads with heart. Her style is rooted in servitude, she shows up for her team every single day, not just in words but in action. Whether it’s celebrating their wins or supporting them through setbacks, her presence is constant and meaningful. Operationally, Caitlin is meticulous. Her reports are not only consistently on time—they’re often turned in before they’re due. She keeps a beautifully maintained property where everything—and everyone has its place. That sense of order and intentionality is felt throughout the building and speaks volumes about the care she brings to the role. Caitlin has earned the respect and admiration of her peers, her team, and her guests. Her rising-star status is not just about potential, it’s about performance, perseverance, and the remarkable ability to lead with both strength and compassion. She’s already an outstanding General Manager, and there’s no doubt her leadership journey is just beginning. For all these reasons and more, I wholeheartedly nominate Caitlin. She is exactly the kind of leader this recognition was made for.

### **Maribel Woodard**

Executive Housekeeper - Hilton Indianapolis Hotel & Suites

Maribel Woodard represents the crème-de-la-crème in housekeeping operations with nearly 40-years of experience. As Executive Housekeeper, at the Hilton Indianapolis Hotel & Suites, she masterfully balances an impeccable eye for detail with decades of industry experience that elevates every aspect of housekeeping operations. Under her expert guidance, the hotel has averaged an incredible 96.55% cleanliness score on our brand quality assurance audits over the past 5-years. Additionally, Maribel has delivered in the eyes of our guests, her department has earned a year-to-date cleanliness score which exceeds the Hilton average by 8.4%. These results are a testament to her relentless commitment to operational excellence and guest satisfaction. Maribel leads by example—rolling up her sleeves to mentor her team while fostering an inspiring culture of care, professionalism, pride, and a constant drive to be the best. Her unwavering dedication ensures that every room not only meets, but exceeds, exacting standards, creating an atmosphere where guests feel truly valued. Maribel’s dedication, leadership, and impact make her a standout choice for Lodging Manager of the Year.



## **Restaurant Front of the House Award**

### **Ian Axelberg**

**Bartender - Ruth's Chris Steak House**

Ian has been an integral part of Ruth's Chris South Bend for six years, consistently setting the standard for excellence, leadership, and hospitality. As a Bartender, his contributions have extended far beyond his home location, leaving a lasting impact across multiple markets. Ian played a pivotal role as Lead Bartender and Coach during the successful openings of both the West Des Moines and Rogers, Arkansas locations, most recently serving as a Support Manager in Rogers to ensure a seamless launch. Ian's dependability and commitment are unmatched. He never hesitates to step up—whether it's assisting another location on short notice or tackling additional responsibilities to help his team succeed. At the South Bend restaurant, Ian oversees all liquor, wine, and beer orders, and manages weekly inventory, ensuring operations run smoothly and efficiently. Beyond his operational excellence, Ian's true strength lies in his connection with guests. His ability to create memorable experiences is second to none. Regulars are greeted not only by name but often with their favorite cocktail already in progress before they've even taken a seat. His intuitive service and genuine care for people embody the very essence of hospitality. Ian's leadership extends well beyond his title. He inspires others through his work ethic, professionalism, and example. His attitude—“never say no”—and his unwavering dedication to the guest experience have earned him the respect of both his peers and leaders. Leadership is not defined by position but by action, and Ian demonstrates that every day. His passion, consistency, and excellence make him an exceptional representative of Ruth's Chris and a true leader in our industry.

### **Anthony Barrett**

**Server- The Eagles Nest at Hyatt Regency Indianapolis**

With the sincerity of Tom Hanks, the charm of Robert Redford, and a kindness that is wholly his own, Anthony Barrett exemplifies the traits of a Front of House Star of the Industry. His natural star power is remarkable—for in his presence, you feel genuinely seen and celebrated. Starting as a server's assistant in the years following the pandemic, Anthony has grown into one of the most requested servers at The Eagles Nest, recognized frequently in online reviews and guest comment cards. Guests praise not only his professionalism but also his ability to create unforgettable moments. He balances fine-dining grace with heartfelt warmth, making every table feel like the most important in the restaurant. But what truly sets Anthony apart is his depth of sincerity. When new trainings or corporate communications are shared, most employees simply sign and move on. Anthony, however, reaches out to clarify details—wanting to ensure he represents both the restaurant and the Hyatt brand with full understanding and integrity. That commitment extends to every part of his work: from double-checking dietary restrictions to ensuring a proposal dinner unfolds flawlessly. Anthony's calm, steady presence has anchored countless special occasions—from anniversaries to engagements. He has an instinct for when to appear and when to let a moment breathe. His colleagues describe him as “the heartbeat of the dining room,” someone who quietly mentors others through example—steady, composed, and endlessly kind. He treats every guest as if they are family, every shift as if it matters deeply, and every task with pride. In an industry built on connection, Anthony Barrett reminds us that true hospitality begins with sincerity. His consistent excellence, humility, and warmth make him not only a standout server, but a genuine ambassador of what makes The Eagles Nest—and our industry—shine.



### **Michael Burns**

Server - Ruth's Chris Steak House

For over 18 years, Mike Burns has brought warmth, humor, and exceptional attention to detail to our restaurant. As one of our most requested servers, Mike consistently delivers a level of service that turns a meal into a memorable experience for our guests. Mike's kindness is felt by everyone he encounters—guests and team members alike. He always has a smile ready and a positive attitude that lifts the energy of the entire room. His natural ability to connect with people, combined with his quick wit and genuine care, has earned him a loyal following of regular guests who often ask for him by name. What sets Mike apart is his meticulous attention to detail. Whether he's anticipating a guest's favorite drink before they ask or ensuring every table is perfectly set, he takes pride in the little things that make a big difference. His work reflects not only professionalism but a sincere desire to provide the best possible experience to every person he serves. Mike's dedication doesn't stop at the dining room. He supports his team with the same thoughtfulness he shows his guests—always willing to jump in, offer help, or share a laugh to keep spirits high during a busy shift. His consistency, reliability, and positive presence make him a true cornerstone of our service team. Above all, Mike exemplifies what it means to go above and beyond in hospitality. He brings kindness, joy, and excellence to every shift, making a lasting impression on everyone he meets.

### **Jakob Haley**

Bartender - Ruth's Chris Steak House

It is with immense pleasure and unwavering confidence that we nominate Jakob Haley for the prestigious Star of the Industry: Front of the House Award. Jakob is not only an integral member of the team at Ruth's Chris Steak House—Indianapolis Northside at Ironworks—but he is also one of our celebrated Employee of the Year Award winners, a testament to his value within our own organization. An Unwavering Commitment to Excellence This nomination recognizes Jakob's profound passion for hospitality and his ability to consistently elevate the guest experience well beyond the expected. He doesn't merely meet expectations; he effortlessly surpasses them, curating a welcoming, lively, and truly memorable atmosphere for every patron. Jakob's talents are on brilliant display, whether he is crafting innovative and delicious cocktails that delight our guests or seamlessly managing the flow and energy from the bar top. The True Definition of Hospitality The volume of positive feedback we receive about Jakob is truly phenomenal, and it is his extraordinary dedication to genuine hospitality that sets him apart as an industry leader. He consistently demonstrates a remarkable level of care, going the extra mile with both guests and colleagues. Consider these powerful examples of his dedication:

- Guest-Focused Empathy: He takes the initiative to perform small but impactful gestures, such as proactively moving tables to ensure the comfort of our regular guests who use a wheelchair, making them feel valued and at home.
- Profound Team Support: He shows deep commitment to his colleagues, even coming in on his day off to mentor and set up new bartenders for success, demonstrating leadership that extends far beyond his own shift.

Jakob's commitment to his team and our guests sets an incredibly high standard for everyone on our staff. His passion, dedication, and genuine care make him an invaluable asset. We are profoundly grateful to have him representing the very best of Ruth's Chris Steak House, and we believe he is exceptionally deserving of the Star of the Industry: Front of the House Award.

### **Tyra Harris**

Lead Bartender - Indianapolis Marriott Downtown



Tyra Harris is the embodiment of excellence in hospitality. As a Lead Bartender with White Lodging for over 20 years, Tyra has become a cornerstone of our Food and Beverage team, consistently delivering exceptional service with grace, warmth, and unmatched expertise. Tyra's passion lies in creating meaningful connections with every guest she serves. Her ability to engage in genuine conversation and build lasting relationships has made her a beloved figure among our regulars. In fact, many guests return year after year, requesting Tyra by name—proof of the lasting impression she leaves and the trust she's built over decades of dedicated service. Behind the bar, Tyra is a true artist. Her extensive cocktail knowledge and intuitive understanding of flavor profiles allow her to craft drinks that not only delight the palate but also elevate the guest experience. Whether she's introducing a guest to a new favorite or customizing a classic with a personal twist, Tyra's creations are always memorable. Tyra Harris is more than a bartender—she is a trusted host, a skilled mixologist, and a cherished member of our team. Her legacy of service and her unwavering dedication to guest satisfaction make her a truly deserving nominee for this prestigious recognition.

### **Lucas Livolsi**

**Server - Stone Creek Dining Company Zionsville**

It is with great enthusiasm that I nominate Lucas Livolsi for outstanding service recognition. Lucas consistently demonstrates an unwavering commitment to excellence, whether he is serving high-profile executives or families enjoying a night out. His approach is rooted in professionalism, empathy, and a genuine passion for creating memorable guest experiences. From his first interaction with a guest to the moment they leave, Lucas sets a standard for hospitality that is difficult to match. His attention to detail is exceptional — whether it's remembering a returning guest's favorite dish or customizing a dining experience to meet dietary needs or special occasions. His extensive menu knowledge allows him to guide guests confidently, answering questions with clarity and enthusiasm, and often offering insightful recommendations that enhance the overall experience. Lucas also displays remarkable adaptability. No matter how busy the shift or unexpected the circumstances, he remains calm, composed, and solution focused. His ability to anticipate guest needs before they are even expressed has earned him numerous glowing reviews. Guests frequently mention him by name, highlighting his kindness, professionalism, and the personal touches that make their visits special. One of Lucas's greatest strengths is his ability to connect with people. Whether he's engaging a curious diner with a detailed explanation of a dish or ensuring that a family with young children feels completely at ease, he brings warmth and sincerity to every table. His service doesn't just meet expectations — it exceeds them.

### **Lindsay Sloan**

**Assistant Manager - Commission Row**

Lindsay Sloan opened Commission Row in downtown Indianapolis in early 2024, taking our operation from Hardhat construction to one of the Best Fine Dining Experiences to be found in the Heart of our City. Transferring within Cunningham Restaurant Group from Modita, Lindsay led the way from interviewing, loading in artwork and restaurant equipment to Sommelier and Fine Dining service for 210 team members. More than a year later, with award winning service, amazing client reviews and tens of thousands of guest visits, Lindsay is still setting the bar for personalized excellence in service and curating detailed fine dining experiences. Lindsay's devotion to training and supporting staff members through education, mentoring and building them up is one of her most outstanding qualities. Coming into work on her days off to take part in team meetings and staff engagement and taking a hands-on approach in personal development of her staff are some of the ways she works to support people in life and in their careers. A story that stands out in Lindsay's leadership would be during the Indiana Pacers NBA Finals series in early 2025. On a night that had over 600 guests in our restaurant, covering three floors of activations, with Celebrities, VIP guests and hundreds of staff and vendors, as well as a massive economic influx for our City, Lindsay



took her own personal time to make food and bring snacks and drinks to her staff who would be busy working across multiple shifts. Later I spotted her lending a compassionate ear to one of her Team who was going through a personal struggle at the time, and shortly after was able to “slow down” to present a wine tasting to several first times guests of Commission Row. Finding the bandwidth and thoughtfulness to take care of her staff and the guests alike amid all the madness is just one example of how truly amazing Lindsay is as a Leader and positive part of our community. It is my pleasure to nominate Lindsay Sloan for FOH Manager of the Year for INRLA in 2025.

### **Jenna Turner**

Lead Server - JW Marriott

Jenna truly is one of the bests. She started with High Velocity as a host a few years ago. She quickly became a lead host as her talent, skills, and care allowed her to thrive in that position. Shortly after, she was promoted as a server and eventually became a lead server and certified trainer for new associates. When I first started as a manager, Jenna, was my go-to server. From observations, I could tell that she was this person for all associates. She is very resourceful and finds a solution and a way for any issue that arises. She has developed strong relationships with all team members, including associates in other departments as well. She has a great rapport with front desk, IRD, banquets, etc. Jenna, like all of our associates, has had her fair share of difficult guests/situations. In every situation, Jenna chooses to make the best of things and do whatever it takes to ensure guest satisfaction. She never shows frustration on the floor or in front of our guests. Jenna makes all guests feel welcome and creates a personalized experience for everyone. She does little things that really enhance the guest experience (ex. Candles and messages on dessert plates for birthdays/special occasions, offering menu/drink recommendations tailored to guests, and even going to or asking other departments for food items/drink items that we may not offer but we have in house). No is not an option for Jenna when it comes to taking care of her guests. Jenna is the epitome of what you cannot teach, but what we all truly look for and what we hope to find in our associates. She is a quiet, but natural born leader. Her personality traits and overall genuine care inside and outside of the JW make her a standout "STAR" associate. I have no doubt that she will continue to thrive and be very successful in life and in whatever career path she chooses to follow. She will do BIG things one day, and I cannot wait to see how her journey continues to develop and grow.

### **Morgan Wiebers**

Server & Bartender - 1933 Lounge – Carmel

It is an honor to nominate Morgan Wiebers for the Stars of the Industry award. Morgan is a rare blend of heart and hustle, the kind of person who embodies the very best of hospitality, not through grand gestures, but through the everyday excellence she brings to each shift, guest, and teammate. Morgan has the unique ability to be everyone's friend, everyone's confidant, and the steady presence that keeps everything cool and correct, no matter how busy the day gets. She brings a calm confidence to every situation and approaches challenges not with frustration, but with focus and grace. Her positivity radiates through the team, uplifting everyone around her and helping even the toughest days feel lighter. What makes Morgan truly exceptional is her willingness to do whatever it takes, not just for her team or her guests, but for anyone in need. There is no limit to how far she will go to help, whether that means stepping into a new role, staying late to support a coworker, or extending genuine kindness to a stranger. She is a quiet warrior, leading through action and empathy. Morgan is also a true student of hospitality. She pays attention, she listens, and she's always eager to learn. Her love for hospitality and culinary arts runs deep. She takes pride in the details, in understanding the “why” behind service standards, and is constantly improving herself and her team. That combination of passion, humility, and drive is what makes Morgan so special.



## **Restaurant Heart of the House Award**

### **Emmanuel Garcia**

Saute Cook - Ruth's Chris Steak House

For over 20 years, Emmanuel “Manny” Garcia has been a cornerstone of our kitchen and a shining example of dedication, skill, and kindness. As a sauté cook, Manny brings a level of excellence to his craft that consistently elevates our food and our team. His talent in the kitchen is matched only by his calm, friendly demeanor and his ever-present sense of humor. Manny is the kind of team member every restaurant dreams of—reliable, detail-oriented, and consistently performing at the highest level. He approaches every shift with quiet confidence and pride in his work, ensuring each dish that leaves his station is perfectly prepared. His consistency and skill have earned him deep respect from both the back and front of house teams. What makes Manny truly exceptional, however, goes beyond his technical abilities. He brings warmth and humility to every interaction, lifting those around him with a kind word or a well-timed joke. Even in the most high-pressure moments, Manny leads with grace, setting the tone for a supportive, collaborative kitchen environment. One of the greatest testaments to Manny’s character is the fact that his son now works with us as a server assistant. That he chose to bring his family into our restaurant community speaks volumes about the pride he takes in his work and the trust he has in our team. We are deeply honored that Manny has made this a family affair. Manny is not just an exemplary cook—he is an irreplaceable part of who we are. His commitment, kindness, and quiet leadership have helped shape the heart of our restaurant for over two decades. Simply put, we can’t imagine working without him.

### **Beatriz Hernandez**

Dishwasher/Kitchen Steward - Indianapolis Marriott Downtown

Beatriz Hernandez is the heart and soul of Conner’s Kitchen and Bar. As our dedicated dishwasher and kitchen steward, Beatriz brings more than just hard work to every shift—she brings warmth, positivity, and a spirit of care that lifts the entire team. Affectionately known as “Mama” by her coworkers, Beatriz has earned this nickname through her nurturing presence and unwavering support. She is always in a good mood, always smiling, and always ready to lend a helping hand. Whether it’s assisting a line cook, supporting a server, or simply offering a kind word, Beatriz makes everyone around her feel valued and cared for. Her work ethic is unmatched. Beatriz ensures the dish machine is spotless and ready for the next shift, keeping operations running smoothly and efficiently. She goes above and beyond to make sure the kitchen is fully stocked with clean pots, pans, and utensils—never missing a beat, even during the busiest service periods. Her attention to detail and commitment to excellence directly impact our ability to serve guests with speed and quality. But what truly sets Beatriz apart is her heart. She creates an environment where people feel seen, supported, and appreciated. Her presence is a source of joy, and her consistency is a foundation we rely on daily. Beatriz doesn’t just do her job—she elevates the entire team through her kindness, reliability, and quiet leadership. Beatriz Hernandez is more than a steward—she is a guiding light in our kitchen. Her contributions deserve to be celebrated, and her impact is felt far beyond the dish room. She is a true star of our industry.



### **Elana Matlock**

Senior Line Cook - JW Marriott

Elana Matlock is a standout member of our culinary team whose enthusiasm, work ethic, and commitment to growth have made a lasting impression. A graduate of the INRLA Culinary Apprenticeship Program, Elana completed her apprenticeship ahead of schedule—a reflection of her discipline and drive to continually improve. Elana was recommended for the program by her leaders, who recognized her potential early on. Since then, she has consistently demonstrated a meticulous approach to learning and growth. Elana never turns down an opportunity to learn. She actively cross-trains in Loaf & Vine and Starbucks, expanding her skill set and supporting her team wherever she's needed. Her willingness to jump in was especially evident during the Taylor Swift concert weekend, where she helped with the Bonvoy bead-making station—bringing creativity and joy to a high-energy event. Her attention to detail and commitment to her craft are evident in every dish she touches. Elana works with care and precision, always striving to refine her technique and deepen her culinary knowledge. She listens, learns, and applies feedback with humility and focus. Elana's presence in the kitchen uplifts those around her. She is a dependable, enthusiastic team member who leads through action and attitude. Her contributions continue to strengthen our culinary operation and reflect the values we hold most dear.

### **Juan Reyes**

Lead Prep Cook - Livery Indianapolis- Cunningham Restaurant Group

For more than seven years, Juan Reyes has been the quiet heartbeat of Livery, the steady presence that allows our restaurant to thrive at one of the highest volumes in the city. From the moment he joined Cunningham Restaurant Group, Juan has embodied what true hospitality looks like behind the scenes—professionalism, humility, and an unwavering commitment to excellence. Juan isn't just part of our team; he is its foundation. His discipline and dedication have shaped the quality our guests associate with Livery. Consider this: over the years, he has prepared more than 3,600 gallons of salsa fresco, mixed 9,000 gallons of crema, and dedicated over 15,000 hours to ensuring every single dish meets our highest standards. These aren't just impressive numbers—they are a testament to the level of consistency and care Juan brings day after day. But his contributions can't be measured only in output. Juan carries an instinct for leadership through action—arriving on his days off with a prep list already planned, spotting needs before anyone has to ask, and stepping in without hesitation whether it's organizing a walk-in, helping with orders, or making sure a teammate isn't left behind. His work ethic doesn't just support the team; it elevates it. Others look to him as an example of what it means to show up fully for the job and for each other. Equally remarkable is his character. In an industry defined by long hours and relentless pace, Juan remains positive, steady, and uncomplaining. He has rarely, if ever, called in. His craftsmanship is precise, his attitude inspiring, and his dependability unmatched. Juan Reyes doesn't seek the spotlight, but his impact is unmistakable. He is the kind of person who makes everyone around him better—another reason Livery is more than just a restaurant to our guests. It is because of people like Juan, whose commitment and quiet excellence deserve to be celebrated, that our team continues to succeed.

### **Kahuna Taylor-Austin**

Heart of House Supervisor - The HC Tavern + Kitchen

Kahuna has had an outstanding year, stepping into his new role as Heart of House Supervisor with enthusiasm, accountability, and a genuine commitment to growth. Since his promotion, he has made a significant impact on both the heart of house team and the overall restaurant culture. One of Kahuna's greatest strengths is his ability to bridge the gap between the kitchen and the front of house team. He has taken initiative to strengthen engagement and communication, ensuring everyone works together seamlessly to deliver an exceptional guest experience. His



leadership has fostered stronger teamwork, mutual respect, and a more cohesive work environment. Kahuna has also rolled out a series of staff education initiatives focused on menu knowledge and allergy safety, two areas critical to guest satisfaction and safety. Through these efforts, he has helped the team build confidence and consistency, empowering everyone to better support each other and our guests. Kahuna leads by example every day, bringing positivity, professionalism, and a solution-oriented mindset to every shift. His growth this year and his dedication to both his team and our guests make him an invaluable part of our kitchen team and a great candidate for this award.

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

### **Kate Barrier**

**Director of Event Operations - Indianapolis Marriott Downtown**

Kate Barrier, Director of Event Operations at the Indianapolis Marriott Downtown, is a leader whose presence alone elevates every space she enters. While it's difficult to pinpoint just one moment that defines her excellence, it's the consistency of her leadership and the way she makes others feel that truly sets her apart. Kate's team currently hold a record of 95.5% with 112 surveys completed by Guests. This ranks the Indianapolis Marriott in the top 10% of the Marriott and the Convention Resort Network. Kate is, simply put, one of one. Her ability to lead with care, commitment, and clarity embodies everything White Lodging stands for when we talk about being a Hospitalitarian. She creates a culture where both guests and associates feel genuinely valued, and her influence is felt far beyond her department. Kate also oversees the Food and Beverage J1 Intern program, ensuring all interns are the perfect fit for the Indianapolis Marriott Downtown prior to their arrival and during their internship. Overseeing more than 42,000 square feet of meeting space, Kate manages complexity with ease and grace. She's warm yet direct, always leading with "yes"—and even when she must say no, she does so in a way that feels supportive and solution-oriented. Her strategic thinking and ability to mentor others have shaped the careers of many leaders at the Indianapolis Marriott Downtown. Kate has developed training binders for multiple departments, ensuring consistency and excellence across the board. Her commitment to development is evident in the number of associates she's helped prepare for promotions and leadership roles. She doesn't just manage—she inspires. Anyone who has the privilege of working alongside Kate or reporting to her becomes better at their job because of her influence. Her demeanor, her integrity, and her unwavering support make her a rare and invaluable leader. Once you meet Kate, you're better for it. Kate Barrier is not only deserving of this nomination—she is the standard by which exceptional leadership should be measured.

### **David Kingi**

**Assistant Restaurant Manager - The Westin Indianapolis**

David Kingi has demonstrated exceptional innovation, leadership, and dedication to excellence throughout the past year. His creative approach, technical expertise, and commitment to continuous improvement have made a significant impact on our Food & Beverage operations and guest experience. Key Contributions: TripAdvisor Initiative: David developed a creative idea to encourage TripAdvisor engagement using Gen Con dice, resulting in more than 50 positive guest reviews and enhanced online visibility for our restaurant. Micros System Enhancements: He has successfully updated and improved the functionality of our Micros system across all outlets. In the Market, he programmed nearly all items to be scannable by barcode, which has improved checkout accuracy and significantly reduced transaction times for guests. Training and Team Development: David has taken the initiative to train all F&B leaders on the functionality of Micros, empowering the team to make system updates and adjustments independently. His efforts have increased team confidence and operational efficiency. Tip-Out Process Improvement: He redesigned our tip-out calculation document, streamlining the process and simplifying



accuracy checks, which has reduced administrative time and improved accountability. Guest Service Excellence: Earlier this year, David took it upon himself to translate both our breakfast and dinner menus into Portuguese for an in-house group. This thoughtful gesture, which required considerable time and effort, delighted the guests and demonstrated his commitment to personalized service. Menu Matrix Development: David created an innovative “Menu Matrix” for both food and beverage offerings. Through a scannable QR code, team members can access detailed descriptions of menu items, ingredients, and allergens, enhancing product knowledge and training. Summary: Dávid is an innovative, analytical, and highly creative leader whose ideas have directly contributed to improved training, guest satisfaction, and operational excellence. He balances professionalism with a fun and approachable leadership style—his lighthearted humor and “dad jokes” make him a pleasure to work with. We are truly fortunate to have David on our team. His contributions have elevated both our guest experience and our internal culture, making him an outstanding candidate for Restaurant Manager of the Year.

### **Rachel Solano**

**Banquet Executive Chef - JW Marriott**

Rachel Solano, Executive Banquet Chef at the JW Marriott Indianapolis, is a powerhouse of leadership, collaboration, and heart. Her impact on the culinary culture within the hotel is profound, having cultivated a welcoming environment rooted in development, teamwork, and pride in the city she serves. Rachel started as a line cook when we open JW 14 years ago and worked her way up to Executive Chef of largest JW Marriott in the U.S. Rachel leads with authenticity and confidence. She is approachable to associates at every level and communicates with clarity and purpose, whether she’s mentoring a new team member or engaging with high-profile guests. Her ability to adapt to last-minute changes and execute flawlessly is a testament to her professionalism and poise. Rachel works seamlessly with the sales and events teams to ensure every detail is aligned with guest expectations, often exceeding them with her thoughtful execution and creative solutions. Her pride in Indianapolis shines through in everything she does. Rachel has earned the respect of high-level groups and clients by understanding their unique needs and delivering what other locations could not. Her commitment to excellence has positioned the JW Marriott as a trusted venue for complex and prestigious events. What makes Rachel truly exceptional is her unwavering appreciation for her team. She celebrates their contributions, mentors those around her, and builds strong relationships with fellow leaders. Her kitchen is not just a place of work—it’s a place of growth, belonging, and shared success. Rachel Solano is more than a manager—she is a culture builder, a mentor, and a leader who inspires through action. Her dedication to her craft, her team, and her city makes her a standout candidate for Restaurant Manager of the Year. She represents the very best of our industry, and her continued impact deserves to be recognized and celebrated.

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

### **Tanner Claiborne**

**General Manager- Bru Burger Bar- Greenwood**

Tanner's style of training doesn't simply check boxes; it develops leaders. Many carry forward his lessons into their own careers, proof of the lasting influence he has on others. Tanner has dedicated the past nine years to the hospitality industry, and for the last 2.5 years as General Manager with Cunningham Restaurant Group, he has distinguished himself as a model of professionalism, leadership, and true hospitality. His work consistently goes beyond the expectations of his role, setting a standard of excellence that inspires both his team and his guests. One of Tanner's most impactful accomplishments was leading BRU Burger Bar in Brownsburg to become the very first certified training location for Cunningham Restaurant Group—a milestone that speaks to his vision, organization, and ability to develop strong, knowledgeable teams. He also oversaw the successful opening of BRU Burger Bar in



Greenwood, managing every detail from staff training to guest satisfaction with skill and care. These achievements reflect not only his dedication to operational success but also to the long-term growth of our people and our brand. What sets Tanner apart is his balance of professionalism and personal connection. He leads by example, fostering an environment of teamwork where every staff member feels supported and valued. His impact is evident in the way his team members describe their experiences with him: welcoming, thorough, patient, and always willing to go the extra mile to ensure understanding and build confidence. Tanner's excellence extends to guest interactions, where he takes time to make meaningful connections. His presence on the floor and his genuine care for each guest's experience create memorable visits that keep guests returning. He understands that hospitality is about details, and whether it's answering a question with patience, following through on a promise, or going above and beyond to make a guest feel welcome, Tanner embodies the heart of our industry. Through his professionalism, teamwork, and guest-first mindset, Tanner has made a lasting impact not only at BRU Burger Bar but across Cunningham Restaurant Group. His leadership and hospitality shine every day, making him an outstanding candidate for Manager of the Year.

### **Roman Dickel**

**Beverage Manager - Ruth's Chris Steak House**

Roman's journey with Ruth's Chris is a true story of growth, perseverance, and excellence in hospitality. Beginning his career in 2018 as a food runner, Roman's unwavering dedication and drive for excellence propelled him to his current role as Beverage Manager—a position he has elevated through innovation, leadership, and an unrelenting commitment to the guest experience. From day one, Roman has embodied the Ruth's Chris standard of hospitality: gracious, precise, and guest-focused. His attention to detail and strong work ethic quickly set him apart, earning him the respect and trust of both his peers and leadership team. As Beverage Manager, Roman has built a program defined by consistency and quality, ensuring that every glass poured complements the exceptional dining experience guests have come to expect. Roman's approach to leadership is grounded in teamwork and accountability. He leads by example—whether managing detailed inventories, training new team members, or stepping in wherever needed to support the restaurant. His calm and professional demeanor fosters confidence among his peers and creates an environment where excellence is the expectation. The challenges brought on by COVID-19 tested every facet of the hospitality industry, but Roman emerged as a steady and reliable force. Amid uncertainty and leadership transitions, he not only maintained operational standards but raised them—showing resilience, adaptability, and an unshakeable commitment to both the team and the brand. Today, Roman stands as a leader who continues to grow, inspire, and uphold the highest standards of service and hospitality. His story reflects what makes Ruth's Chris truly special: a dedication to craft, to people, and to creating memorable experiences that extend far beyond the dining room. Roman's rise from food runner to Beverage Manager is not just a testament to his skill—it's a reflection of his heart for hospitality and his drive to make every moment matter.

### **Jared May**

**General Manager and Wine Director- Vida**

If you've been to Vida, you know. The feeling, the experience, the connection. In just two years as General Manager at Vida, Jared May has transformed great service into something unforgettable. With 17 years in the hospitality industry, Jared brings both polish and authenticity to a dining room where every detail matters. He orchestrates experiences. Guests feel that difference. Reviews of Vida often read like love letters to the service, describing it as "impeccable," "thoughtfully choreographed," and "the best dining experience in Indianapolis." Many of those reviews name Jared directly, praising his ability to combine professionalism with genuine warmth. One guest wrote: "From start to finish, this was flawless. Jared and his team anticipated every need before we even asked. This was more than dinner- it was an experience." Another shared: "We've dined at Michelin-starred restaurants across the



country, and Jared's team offers service that's just as polished- if not better." What makes Jared's leadership stand out is that it extends well beyond the guest-facing moments. He invests in his team, mentoring them to deliver service with confidence, empathy, and precision. Jared leads by example, setting the tone through his calm presence on the floor and creating a culture of collaboration where every team member feels supported. The result is a dining room that operates seamlessly, with service that anticipates needs as naturally as it responds to them. His depth of expertise further elevates the experience. A Level 2 Sommelier certified by the Court of Master Sommeliers, Jared uses wine not just as a pairing, but as a storytelling tool. His thoughtful selections connect seamlessly to the menu, turning a meal into a narrative that lingers long after the last course. Guests often describe his recommendations as memorable highlights of the evening. For Jared, hospitality is never "good enough." Under his leadership, Vida has amassed hundreds of 5-star reviews, earned a loyal clientele, and solidified its place as a benchmark for dining in Indianapolis. His professionalism, vision, and unwavering commitment to service excellence make Jared May more than a manager- he's the standard for what leadership in hospitality should be.

### **Megan Stoller**

**Executive Chef for- Modita Restaurant**

Executive Chef Megan Stoller is the quiet engine of Modita, one of Indy's hottest restaurants located in the heart of the Bottleworks District in Downtown Indianapolis. Chef Stoller is steadfast, exacting, and relentlessly guest focused. From butchering to broth work, she treats every station as the last line of hospitality, insisting that the experience on the plate matches the promise of the dining room. She models calm in the heat of service, builds trust through feedback, and turns tastings into teachable moments so both cooks and servers can speak with confidence about flavor, sourcing, and allergens. The result is a kitchen that anticipates needs, communicates clearly with the front of house, and delivers consistent excellence for our guests. Megan has pursued this industry with passion since age sixteen, starting as a host at Olive Garden in 2016 and working every rung to Executive Chef. Born and raised in Indianapolis, she went on to earn degrees in Culinary Arts and Food Service Management at Johnson & Wales University. She has excelled in a field, still largely led by men, by pairing uncompromising standards with real advocacy for people, watching workload and well-being, celebrating growth, and giving voice to both heart-of-house and front-of-house teammates. Her leadership extends beyond our walls. In September, she served as a featured panelist for Girls Inc. of Greater Indianapolis' TogetHER luncheon, encouraging girls and women to claim space at the table and in the kitchen. That is the ethos of "Heart of the House": unseen preparation that makes unforgettable hospitality possible. Chef Stoller embodies it every day, elevating standards, elevating people, and elevating Indiana hospitality.

### **Tammy Tenant**

**Front Of House Manager - Ruth's Chris Steak House**

For over 30 years, Tammy has been the heart and soul of our restaurant, setting a standard of hospitality that goes far beyond job expectations. Her commitment to exceptional service and genuine care for others has made a lasting impact on both our team and our guests. Tammy doesn't just offer hospitality —she builds relationships. She knows countless guests by name, remembers their preferences, and even recalls their children's birthdays. For many, visiting our restaurant means seeing Tammy; her presence has become part of their family traditions. Her ability to create personalized experiences makes every guest feel like the most important person in the room. But her dedication doesn't stop at our guests. Tammy is a thoughtful, supportive leader who treats her teammates like family. She takes time to mentor new staff, celebrates their successes, and is always the first to lend a hand when someone is struggling. Her steady presence during busy or challenging shifts helps the entire team feel confident. What sets Tammy apart is her sincere passion for people. She doesn't go above and beyond because she has to— she does it because she truly loves making others feel welcome and valued. Whether she's comforting a stressed



coworker, celebrating a regular's milestone, or simply offering a warm smile to someone having a tough day, Tammy leads with empathy and grace. Tammy exemplifies everything the hospitality industry should be: lively, consistent, and deeply human. Her legacy of service is not only reflected in her years of dedication but in the countless lives she has touched along the way.

### **Clair Weyant**

#### **Operations Director - Penn Station East Coast Subs**

Twenty-eight years ago, a big, burly man, named Clair Weyant, sat down for a GM interview wearing a Winnie the Pooh tie. When asked about the backstory – he smiled proudly and stated his kids picked it out, and we picked up a pillar of our success. As a GM, he always earned an Excellent Performance Evaluation score from Corporate. Clair became our 1st Operations Director upon the opening of the 10th store; there are now 32 locations. He worked side by side with the owner, embracing the operations manual as a guide to success while the business grew. He has made thousands of sandwiches, trained countless staff, shared his broad smile and positive energy throughout Indianapolis communities. He was instrumental in growing the brand in the Indy market, literally walking the streets to introduce Penn Station and expand our catering business. The School Program “Kids Eat Free” was his project to increase our business and support families. He currently oversees 8 locations and within our system:

- 4 GM's have worked with him for over 20 years!
- 2 GM's - more than 15 years! 2
- GM's - more than 10 years!

His leadership skills are exemplified by the tenure of those GM's. He teaches how to proactively impact the P&L statement for greater profitability, so successfully that he's addressed the entire franchise system at annual GM meetings. He understands the need to implement the structure of operations policy while varying his management style to best motivate the individual. Four of his GM's became Penn Station franchisees and Corporate has requested he train multiple Managing Owners. He is committed to the success of everyone around him and freely shares his vast experience. His GMs consistently earn an Excellent Performance Evaluation which directly correlates to positive guest interactions, product quality, and an additional bonus for the GM's. After 28 years, his name is legendary within Penn Station:

- Operational Excellence in Training – with sincere enthusiasm.
- Hands-on Approach revitalizing underperforming stores– with patient instruction and positive affirmation.
- Develop Strategies in difficult circumstances, i.e. food shortages, Covid – with creativity, efficiency, and guest-focused

## **Rising Star Award**

### **Chloe Bohlander**

#### **Sales Coordinator - Homewood Suites by Hilton Lafayette / General Hotels Corporation**

Since joining our team, Chloe has brought energy, professionalism, and a results-driven mindset to her role as Sales Coordinator. Her dedication and drive have been nothing short of inspiring, and she consistently embodies the core values and potential that this award represents—leadership, industry engagement, and continual professional growth. Among Chloe's many achievements, several stand out:

- Collaborating closely with the Director of Sales to consistently grow market share
- Driving year-over-year growth in both the group and LNR market segments



- Building and maintaining strong relationships with repeat clients, contributing to sustained business success

Beyond these tangible accomplishments, Chloe's character truly distinguishes her. She is compassionate, dependable, and always willing to lend a hand—qualities that make her not only an outstanding team member but also a respected and valued presence throughout the hotel. Chloe's performance, attitude, and potential consistently demonstrate her value to the team and highlight her as an emerging leader within the organization.

### **Valerie Clark**

Bar Manager - Social Cantina Carmel

Valerie Clark first fell in love with the hospitality industry back in 2020 when she started at The Chocolate Moose, a beloved Bloomington institution, during her sophomore year of college at Indiana University. During her four years there, she quickly realized what a positive impact she could have on others through providing an exceptional guest experience, as well as how fulfilling it was to play a role in the special memories created through shared culinary experiences. Upon graduation, she moved to the Indy area where she started her first serving job at Social Cantina, quickly moving her way up the ranks to her current position as Bar Manager. She loves the fast-paced environment, the ever-changing demands of her role, and most importantly, the opportunity to connect with the community. Valerie is the quickest promoted team member to manager in the company. Her passion, dedication, and love for Hospitality is to be honored and awarded.

### **Calana Dukes**

Sales Coordinator - Hyatt Place-Hyatt House Indianapolis-Fishers

It is with great pride that we nominate Calana Dukes for the Indiana Restaurant and Lodging Association's Rising Star Award. As Sales Coordinator at the Hyatt Place-Hyatt House Indianapolis-Fishers, Calana is new to the hospitality sales but has quickly distinguished herself as an invaluable team member and a true rising leader in the hospitality industry. Calana consistently demonstrates a remarkable commitment to excellence and professionalism in everything she does. She has received countless praises from clients for her ability to anticipate their needs and deliver an exceptional level of detail when planning meetings and events. She remembers the specifics of each client from training to training, ensuring a seamless, personalized experience that makes guests eager to return. Her proactive communication by constantly checking in to ensure every need is met, has earned her a reputation for both reliability and genuine care. Calana goes above and beyond the expectations of her role. She willingly works after scheduled hours, putting in the extra effort to make sure guests feel valued and supported. Her dedication to going the extra mile has created not only loyal clients for our property but also meaningful opportunities to attract new accounts. With a creative and strategic mindset, she is always thinking of ways to drive incremental revenue to the hotel while maintaining a world-class standard of service. What truly sets Calana apart is her willingness to take on daunting tasks that others shy away from. She embraces challenges head-on with determination, always focused on what will make the hotel more profitable, successful, and competitive in our market. In doing so, she exemplifies the very spirit of hospitality by serving guests with excellence while driving business results for the property. Through her dedication, creativity, and passion for hospitality, Calana has proven herself to be a true rising star. She elevates our team, strengthens our client relationships, and inspires those around her. For these reasons, we proudly submit Calana Dukes for the Rising Star Award. She embodies the qualities this recognition represents: passion for hospitality, a commitment to excellence, and the promise of an exceptional career ahead.

### **Erin Krueger**

Front Desk Manager - JW Marriott



When I think of Erin, I think of the word's strength and steadfast. These perfectly align with her spirit, character, and work ethic. She has consistently demonstrated sound decision-making and professionalism as a Front Desk Supervisor and has far exceeded those expectations and operational ability in her current role as Front Desk Manager. At a property of this size, a Front Desk Manager must possess mental endurance, composure under pressure, and exceptional task management. This will ensure the empathetic and professional culture we strive for in the front office environment. Erin embodies all of these qualities. She has gracefully navigated numerous walk scenarios, has been instrumental in the hiring and onboarding process for our team, and approaches every challenge with resolve and precision. "Get stuff done" could easily be her motto as she leaves nothing unfinished, always planning, learning, and executing with purpose. She is eager and always wanting to learn as much as she can. It is a true honor for her to be recognized for this award. Erin will continue to shine brightly in whatever path she pursues. Her strength and endurance will undoubtedly carry her toward continued measurable success. It is with zero hesitation within myself that I believe she is deserving of this recognition. She worked full time while attending hospitality program at Indiana University Indianapolis and offered a management position before her graduation.

#### **Cesar Ocanto**

**Hourly Kitchen Manager - Social Cantina Carmel**

Cesar Ocanto's journey has been an inspiring story. Cesar moved from the country of Venezuela 3 years ago. Within hours of stepping into this country he was at Social Cantina's door applying for a BOH position. He did not speak a word of English. These past 3 years he has flourished professionally and personally. He has learned English all by his own. He learned every station in the kitchen from the pits of the dish room to outside expo. He has been an hourly BOH manager for the last 6 months. Cesar's passion for culinary excellence is to be admired and honored! He loves training and pours his knowledge and passion into every team member. He leads with enthusiasm and ensures every plate that leaves his kitchen is prepared to perfection and made with love. He is recognized by his peers and leadership team as a rising star within the FHG family.

#### **Molly Pastor**

**Restaurant Manager - Indianapolis Marriott Downtown**

Molly has started to lay a strong foundation that will support her future career in hospitality. After successfully completing White Lodging's Manager in Training program, Molly stepped into her first leadership role as Bar Manager this July—and she has already made a remarkable impact. In just a few short months, Molly has transformed the bar operation with thoughtful innovation and a clear vision. She redesigned the bar layouts to improve efficiency, assisted in creating a uniform look book to elevate team presentation, and developed interactive shift checklists that promote accountability and consistency. Molly has also led a full re-training of the bartender team, set clear expectations and raising the standard of excellence across the board. But what truly sets Molly apart is not just what she accomplishes, it's how she leads. Molly brings an infectious positivity to every shift. She is always smiling, always helpful, and always present. Her energy uplifts those around her, and her approachable leadership style fosters trust and collaboration. Molly asks thoughtful, clarifying questions to ensure she understands tasks fully, and she leads with humility—never hesitating to own a mistake if it means growing into the best version of herself. Molly's commitment to her team, her craft, and her own development is inspiring. She is a natural leader who leads by example, and her drive to continuously improve makes her stand out among her peers. Molly Pastor is not only a rising star—she is a bright light in our operation, and her future in hospitality leadership is undeniably promising.

#### **Allyson Schneider**

**Guest Services Supervisor - Bottle works Hotel**



It is with the utmost enthusiasm and confidence that I nominate Allyson Schneider for the Rising Star Award. Allyson currently serves as Guest Services Supervisor at Bottleworks Hotel and has demonstrated truly exceptional growth and clear potential to lead the next generation of hospitality professionals. Her professional trajectory is nothing short of phenomenal, having achieved her current highly impactful status in only 11 months in the industry, starting as a Guest Services Agent and quickly grasping onto concepts and showing leadership potential. This swift ascent is powerfully underscored by her critical role as a contributing member of the team that successfully retained our Michelin Key for a second consecutive year, proving her immediate mastery of world-class standards. Allyson's exceptional contributions extend to driving tangible improvement and operational clarity; she personally refined our training programs and implemented new communication standards crucial for smooth, high-level transitions between shifts. Beyond her technical achievements, Allyson's leadership is defined by an unparalleled commitment to a positive, selfless culture: she is a true team player, consistently stepping up to cover shifts and offering assistance to coworkers outside of work hours, which fosters immense loyalty. This supportive approach and her proactive mentorship of team members, positions her as a dynamic future leader. Allyson Schneider's accelerated rise and immediate, profound impact on both performance and culture make her a stand-out choice for the Rising Star Award, and I recommend her without reservation.

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