

## Concierge Corner

### Leader Knows Keys to a Good Stay

When a concierge is bearing the crossed keys of Les Clefs d'Or, travelers are assured that they are dealing with a seasoned professional who is dedicated to their every need.

Vikki Wrede, an 18-year veteran of the hospitality industry, wears the gold keys proudly on her lapel. In addition to earning her keys recently from the worldwide Les Clefs association, Vikki, the chef concierge at Clearwater Beach Marriott Suites on Sand Key, is serving her third year as president of the Bay Area Concierge Association (BACA).

BACA fosters friendship, networking and communication among concierges in the Tampa Bay area. During Vikki's tenure as president, the group has developed a monthly newsletter that complements a Web site and monthly meetings. It usually meets at the site of a local attraction or restaurant, which wants the concierges to know about its environs, activities or food so the concierges, in turn, will send their guests there.

"We get calls constantly from places that want to host us," Vikki said. "They're going right to the source."

As a result, spur-of-the-moment invitations from attractions and restaurants are common. When speaking to Where QuickGuide, for example, Vikki had recently been invited to a cruise and been offered three tickets to a play. "You get to be a VIP to everything, from the Grand Prix to hockey games," she said. As for restaurants, "The average

conciierge probably puts on an extra 20 pounds the first year."

Vikki has been at the Sand Key Marriott for 14 years, starting at the front desk before becoming a conciierge two years later. In addition to her title as chef conciierge, she serves as the property's guest manager and oversees the bell staff. The Sand Key Marriott has four conciierges in all with two usually on duty -- one serving at the conciierge desk and the other "mobile."

"We basically do everything from dinner reservations, book transportation, sell tickets to Busch Gardens, boat trips, excursions -- we pretty much do everything people come to you for," Vikki said.

For day excursions, the Marriott staff might recommend St. Pete for its museums or The Pier or send guests to Honeymoon and Caladesi islands. "Tarpon Springs is a popular one," Vikki said. "We get a high rate of people going to Busch Gardens. There's Ybor City in Tampa for people who want nightlife or the pirate ship out of Clearwater Beach, Captain Memo's. We send couples, a lot of families on that." Other guests opt for the Sunset Festival at Pier 60.

"Some of the things I like about it are that it's always different, not the same," Vikki said of her job.

"It's not like going to the same office every day. From business travelers to groups to families, it's never boring."