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## **USCB is Preparing the Next Generation of Hospitality Professionals**

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**BLUFFTON, S.C.** – The next generation of hospitality professionals who will ensure your resort stay is flawless is preparing for their careers at the University of South Carolina Beaufort right now.

Students in USCB's Hospitality Management program are combining classroom instruction with practical, hands-on experience by serving as interns at local hotels, clubs and resorts, one of which is the finest upscale resort on Hilton Head Island, the Westin Hilton Head Island Resort & Spa.

Hospitality Management majors explore a wide range of related topics: event promotion, accounting, destination marketing, nutrition, food science, hotel management, club management, and hotel, restaurant and travel law. As graduation draws near, students must complete a capstone course that involves a 400-hour internship at a local hotel, club or resort. Generally taken in the senior year, a capstone course is the culminating class of an academic program. It requires the student to demonstrate everything he or she has learned over the previous four years.

"Tourism drives what we do in Beaufort County," says Sean Barth, Ph.D., associate professor of Hospitality Management at USCB. "It's our number-one industry. Beaufort County ranks eighth in the number of millionaires per capita. Our students are very fortunate. They get to work in a world-class environment on Hilton Head Island with world-class people in a place that's really unmatched in terms of quality and opportunity. They're gaining professional experience from people who are highly successful in their field.

"I've been teaching for 12 years now," Dr. Barth adds. "There's a shortage of labor, but we're bridging the gap. We're producing people who want to work. We're producing people who will turn into future managers."

More than a dozen USCB Hospitality Management majors were chosen to serve internships at the Westin over the summer. The Starwood property prides itself on providing a distinctive resort experience for its upscale guests.

Brianna Kelnhofner and Haley Brown, both Hospitality Management majors, were two of the fortunate few. Academically gifted and athletically inclined, they played on the 2015 USCB women's softball team that came just one game shy of competing in the NAIA national championship. They'll be back in the lineup when the 2016 softball season opens in January.

The Hospitality Management program was a logical choice for Kelnhofer, who was born and raised in Beaufort. “I grew up in the industry and I just enjoy working with people,” she says. “My dad worked for a beverage distribution company and my mom has always worked in restaurants.”

In her internship, Kelnhofer provided poolside service to guests at the Westin, serving food and drinks, arranging for chairs and towels, and, in general, seeing to their well-being.

“You’re learning something new every day,” she says. “We worked with a lot of cool people there. There were about 10 people from around the world—South Africa, the Czech Republic, the Philippines, the USCB contingent, and students from the University of South Carolina and the University of Georgia.”

Her goal is to manage the front of the house at a club or restaurant. She will graduate in May.

“I chose Hospitality Management because I really like getting to travel and work in different places,” says Haley Brown from St. Petersburg, Fla. “I love working with people and making them happy.”

Brown was a server at poolside during lunch service, then worked the dinner shift at View 32, an outdoor restaurant with a panoramic ocean view. “I met a lot of really good people, had a lot of really good experiences and learned a lot about that side of the industry,” she says. “I worked in a restaurant before, but never in a resort. This was a whole different way of serving and interacting with the guests.”

Based on her experience at the Westin, Brown wants to focus on resort work when she graduates in December of 2016. “I hope to work up to a manager or director position at a resort,” she says. “I like the resort experience.”

While Hospitality Management students gain practical experience and a taste of the working world, the university benefits from the symbiotic relationship it fosters with local businesses in the industry. “Our industry is hands-on learning,” Dr. Barth says. “We couldn’t do without them. I can teach until I’m blue in the face, but unless our students get out there and start doing the work themselves, they can’t really take that theoretical knowledge and apply it.”

For their part, the Westin and other upscale restaurants and resorts benefit from hiring young, eager workers.

“One of the biggest things we gain is good talent,” says Phill Lovell, the Westin’s human resources manager. “The students who are coming out of USCB are not looking for a job, they’re looking for a career, so they have more passion, more enthusiasm and a desire to thrive in that position compared with someone who’s just looking for a seasonal position. Another benefit is that USCB students are so close geographically. They can come in and help us through the ‘shoulder season.’”

Most resorts along the Atlantic Seaboard operate on a season that extends from Memorial Day to Labor Day. But the Westin and other resorts are finding that the season really begins in February or March and extends into October—the “shoulders” of the bell curve.

“If we recruit someone from USC or UGA—from a school that’s several hours away—their students come in the middle of May and leave in early August because they have to go back to school,” Lovell says. “The benefit of hiring USCB students is, if the season starts in February or March, they can come

and get us through those times when we're getting really busy, especially since we haven't gotten the influx of other students for the season."

Case in point. The Hilton Head Westin recently played host to the Global Westin G.M. Summit, a gathering of general managers and senior executives from the Starwood organization and its properties around the world.

"It was an honor to have our hotel picked to host the event out of all the Westin properties in the world," Lovell says. "But it was in the middle of September when usually you lose a lot of your students. We had a lot of students from USCB who helped us through that.

"Our USCB students are fantastic! They were all very good. They did a very good job—good quality work, great personalities. They were hard-working and smart."

"There are a lot of opportunities in this field," Haley Brown says. "You can travel wherever you want to work. You can work in resorts, restaurants, on cruise ships. It's a great opportunity, especially for young people coming out of college. You can hop around and find out what you like, and then you'll know what you want to do."

Located in the heart of the Carolina Sea Islands, the University of South Carolina Beaufort (USCB) is a baccalaureate member of the USC system, serving the southeast coast of South Carolina and Georgia. Since 2002, USCB has tripled its academic degree programs, doubled its FTE enrollment, opened its first on-campus housing (now serving more than 750), joined the NAIA Sun Conference, and fielded conference and national award-winning Sand Shark athletes in nine sports. The university's two campuses serve a diverse student body of 1,980 students. The Hilton Head Gateway campus in Bluffton, SC, offers cutting-edge Computational Science and Nursing laboratories, and a broad range of academic degree programs. It is home to Sand Shark athletics. The Historic Beaufort campus, located on Beaufort's downtown waterfront, houses an innovative baccalaureate Studio Art program in close proximity to Beaufort's many art galleries. Students enjoy opportunities on Hilton Head Island, including the USCB Center for Event Management and a Coastal Ecology research partnership with Vagabond Cruise. USCB serves 1,500 Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) members, who participate in more than 1 million course hours annually, placing OLLI at USCB in the top 10 in the country. The University of South Carolina Beaufort offers students an exceptional place to learn and live in an environment focused on growth, preservation and opportunity.

For more information about the Hospitality Management Program at USCB, contact Dr. Sean Barth at 843-208-8212 or [barthse@uscb.edu](mailto:barthse@uscb.edu).

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