

Friday, June 1, 2012

Las Cruces Bulletin

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Profiles

Alejandra Castrellon: A champion for guests

Pets, people both receive her hospitality

Editor's note: This week's profiles are on two of the award winners of the Las Cruces Convention & Visitors Bureau's Stay Sunny award presented during National Tourism Week.

By **Alta LeCompte**
For the Las Cruces Bulletin

While May, a 4-pound teacup poodle, sat nestled in the crook of Mary Norfleet's arm, Norfleet completed the dog's registration paperwork at the new Holiday Inn Express on Telshor Court.

Helping the Norfleets check in was Alejandra Castrellon, the hotel's guest experience champion and a winner of the Las Cruces Convention & Visitors Bureau hospitality award presented during National Tourism Week in May.

Norfleet and her husband, paleontology researcher Michael Norfleet, were in Las Cruces mostly on business.

May, however, was about to have the vacation of a lifetime, thanks to Castrellon.

Castrellon offers to walk guests' dogs in the hotel's designated pet area while their humans are away.

It's a special service she first provided to help a nervous member of the housekeeping staff.

"One of the girls was scared of a dog in a room and called the desk to ask if I could take him out of there," she said. "I walked him, and he stayed down here with me. I even was teaching him a few tricks."

Castrellon, who believes in learning from everyday experiences, has since made sure to meet every canine guest and offer her special brand of hospitality.

Prior to coming to Las Cruces, she worked in a Roswell hotel owned by the family that owns the Holiday Inn Express. Castrellon asked for a slot on the start-up crew for the new property and started here in September 2011, two months prior to the opening. When the hotel opened, she stayed on the front desk.

She said the position of guest experience champion is one created at the beginning of the year by the company's hotel group.

"Little by little, the bosses started seeing my attitude and promoted me to GEC," she said. "They love how I can talk to people."

In nominating her for the CVB hospitality award, Holiday Inn Express general manager Victor Delgado cited her energy, compassion and dedication.

He noted she arrived at 2:30 a.m. the morning of the Bataan Memorial Death March to make breakfast for guests who were going on the march.

Castrellon loves the business and it shows. "My sister used to be a GM," she said. "When I was small she took me to work with her and I loved it. We're made for the business."

Her brother Raul also works in the industry in El Paso.

She spends most of each workday at the front desk dealing directly with guests.

"On the front desk, if I notice a guest is having a bad day I always throw in some humor," she said. "Check-in is most important, because they never forget how they were treated here."

In her relationships with employees, she finds humor essential to creating "an open, non-hostile environment."

"When people are comfortable, they are open to ideas," she said. "When employees are comfortable with each other, they portray that to our guests."

Using the know-how she acquired during her GEC training in Clute, Texas, and her background as her high school's head athletic trainer, she trained the hospitality staff at the hotel.

"I love to share my knowledge, to teach and mentor," she said. "And I love to learn. Each day is a learning experience."

Castrellon said the owners designed the hotel and it is beautiful. Amenities for humans include an "awesome" breakfast buffet, she said.

Although there are five other hotels clustered in the neighborhood just off Interstate 25, Castrellon said she doesn't think of them as competitors.

"We're all in this to help the guests," she said.

David Salcido: Branding the Rio Grande

Lure of Las Cruces brought NMSU grad back

By **Alta LeCompte**
For the Las Cruces Bulletin

David Salcido left Las Cruces more than 25 years ago with a New Mexico State University degree in creative writing and a compelling memory of the Organ Mountains.

The former took him far. The latter brought him back.

Salcido, the Rio Grande Theatre manager and a member of the Dona Ana County Arts Council staff, received the Las Cruces Convention & Visitors Bureau hospitality award during National Tourism Week. He was cited by the CVB for his "booking efforts, grassroots marketing and in particular his exceptional customer service."

Salcido, who returned to Las Cruces in the fall of 2008, was the only one outside the hotel industry to be honored.

Asked why he was chosen, Salcido shrugged and said he didn't really know.

"I actually asked that question myself," he said.

Salcido, after all, spends most of his days in a second floor office writing marketing materials for the theater and the arts council, arranging bookings that will make the theater a destination and working with community arts groups to ensure local talent has an opportunity to take the stage in New Mexico's only surviving adobe theater.

Anyone who has attended performances there has watched him move through the auditorium, troubleshooting and greeting while scanning the scene to identify who or what will need his attention next.

Standing on stage to introduce the evening's entertainment, he inspires the audience to attend more performances, buy more tickets and make heroic donations to maintain the 80-year-old building at 211 N. Main St.

In addition to his managerial responsibilities, booking and marketing the theater and overseeing its crew, Salcido is "the face" of the Rio Grande.

"I'm here for every single performance, greeting people, smiling and shaking hands, listening to their opinions," he said. "For the two or three hours they're here, we want them to feel

comfortable. We want them to come back."

What theatergoers see of him is just a fraction of his contribution to the local arts scene.

"This weekend we're building flats and sets," he said. "I don't know many theater people that do just one thing."

Salcido started the Film Las Cruces series at the theater on a hunch that many Las Cruces don't understand film and think it's a waste of money. He also gave the Howling Coyote open mic night a permanent venue at the Rio Grande. The group previously met at the Mastery in Life Center and the First Christian Church.

He was instrumental in creating a home for Driftwood Productions live musical theater at the Rio Grande and is working to strengthen ties with New Mexico State University's arts community.

Bridging the gap between campus and community is a natural role for NMSU alumnus Salcido. After graduating from NMSU and leaving Las Cruces, Salcido wrote for a living in Hollywood and Phoenix, easing himself into the world of theater.

He wrote marketing materials for Universal Studios for 10 years and freelanced for studios large and small.

Starting in the mid-1980s, he freelanced in Phoenix where he was "able to make a very good living." In Phoenix he founded a small gallery and performance space and co-founded three theater troops.

He has been in and out of the theater since age 8, when someone talked him into narrating a Christmas pageant.

"The city council is extremely arts-positive," he said. "I can't say that about other cities. Every one of the councilors and the mayor have been here to see shows and events. They come as patrons. That tells me a lot about the city."

On his nights off, Salcido attends productions at the university, the Black Box Theatre and other local venues. He loves the fact that so much theater is available in a city the size of Las Cruces.

On days off, he's likely to be hiking, savoring the distance he's put between himself and the Hollywood rat race.

"The mountains and the river and everything in between hung in my head for 25 years," he said.

Details



Alejandra "Ketchup" Castrellon
Guest Experience Champion

Company
Holiday Inn Express

Address
2142 Telshor Court

Details



David Salcido
Manager

Company
Rio Grande Theatre

Address
211 N. Main St.