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Rene Hernandez and His Facilities Team:**KEEPING HOTEL
GUESTS COMING BACK**

BY RICHARD BENNETT

Member profiles spotlight the diverse talents, training and careers of
AFE members working in a wide variety of facilities-related occupations

Many people think the main responsibility of a hotel's chief engineer is to change the light bulbs in guest rooms. But Rene Hernandez, chief engineer of the 167-room Doubletree Club by Hilton - Orange County Airport, begs to differ.

"The overall job of a chief building engineer is to make sure that guests want to come back," Hernandez said recently. "So, hotel chief engineers have to do everything we can to prevent emergencies. We need to make sure that all our boilers and air conditioning units are properly maintained and operating, the elevators are running right, and the pool is ready for swimmers."

For Hernandez and his team of five building engineers, every aspect of a guest's stay is important. "We do everything we can

to make sure our guests want to come back here and not go to our competitors' properties," he said. "That means gaining the trust of every guest every time they stay here. After all, how would you like to wake up at 5 am to take your shower and have no hot water? There are a lot of things to take care of in a place like this if we want our guests to come back."

The Doubletree Club has a full-service restaurant, and its proximity to the airport and the University of California Irvine's sports facility makes it popular with sports teams from Texas to San Diego when they play on regional and divisional levels. "Many soccer, baseball, tennis, softball, and cross country teams have stayed at the hotel every year for more than 15 years," said Hernandez. "At the end of their stay one year, they book for the following year."

That kind of loyalty from guests doesn't come by accident, according to Hernandez. Hilton ensures that the hotel is up to the highest quality assurance levels by inspecting the hotel on a regular and comprehensive basis, and by hiring a division of Ecolab to thoroughly inspect the restaurant. "Someone could walk into the hotel at any time of day or night to inspect us," Hernandez said — so he and his team take a "no chances approach" to facilities management, making sure that every aspect of the hotel is in as perfect a condition as possible at all times.

Cost control is another aspect of the hotel facility management team for which Hernandez has responsibility. Much of that work is done on a computer, but that doesn't faze Hernandez. As a former computer IT consultant, he has no problem working the databases that Hilton supplies to input its gas bill, water consumption, and the other information it requires to track and benchmark gas, electric and other costs. The information is used by Hilton to calculate energy and water consumption for each room on a daily and monthly basis. Maintenance software is used to ensure that boilers are up to maintenance standards and air conditioning units are properly maintained and operating smoothly.

Energy and resource efficiency is one of the keys to operating a successful hotel, according to Hernandez, and the hotel

**RENE HERNANDEZ**

itself has made a number of changes to improve the environment, including:

- Retrofitted with water saving shower heads (Hilton standard)
- Changed 85 percent of the lights to LED bulbs and T8 energy efficient fluorescents
- Changed the exterior hotel signs from neon to energy saving LED units
- Implemented computer programs to control water temperature throughout the hotel, pool and restaurant, saving on both water and gas consumption

Hernandez is not alone when it comes to chief engineers keeping track of resource use at their hotels, and it's becoming mandatory across all major chains, in order to comply with government standards.


"A lot of major hotels have to keep track of all the energy and water consumption information," he said. "There's no longer any difference between what a facilities engineer at a hotel would do than a chief facilities engineer at any major facility."

What is the best advice Hernandez can give to other chief facilities engineers who supervise a team of maintenance professionals? "It's making sure everyone is kept busy at all times," he said. "You have to plan things right so that everybody is working diligently and doing what they need to be doing. That's

"It's a great feeling to know that I can help other members when they call me with a facilities question."

what keeps the hotel operating smoothly—and what keeps the guests coming back."

Hernandez believes it is vitally important for facilities engineers and chief building managers to become involved in organizations such as the Association for Facilities Engineering, where he is active on a local and national level. "I especially enjoy the camaraderie and networking of AFE. It's great to know that if there is a problem at the hotel that I haven't dealt with before, I can call another member, whether they are here in California, or on the East Coast, and know someone will have an answer for me," noted Hernandez, who has been chair both of AFE's Maintenance and Hospitality Councils. "It's also a great feeling to know that I can help other members when they call me with a facilities question."

For attendees of Facilities America, Hernandez also has some advice: "Facilities America is a great opportunity to join AFE and build your network in an organization that is growing and about to see even better days ahead," he said. "And if you aren't already AFE Certified, why not take the review class and become certified in one of the strongest programs available for facilities engineers?" 

Richard Bennett is a freelance writer specializing in building energy and resource issues.



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