

Hilton Phoenix Chandler manages to beat all odds

by **Luci Scott** - Apr. 9, 2010 02:02 PM
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The Hilton Phoenix Chandler is a 13-month-old toddler, but it is running circles around some other Valley hotels.

- Its occupancy rate in March was 85 percent, compared with 80.7 percent (through March 27) in metro Phoenix.
- The Hilton recently began a popular Sunday champagne brunch for \$19 that has lured people who were regulars at the famous brunch at the Camelback Inn in Paradise Valley that costs \$59.
- The Chandler property is a star in the Hilton galaxy. Of the company's 296 full-service Hiltons in North and South America, the Chandler site ranked No. 8 last year in customer-satisfaction surveys. In the first two months of this year, it rose to No. 2.
- On the tripadvisor.com, the Hilton ranks No. 1 of 24 hotels in Chandler.
- The Hilton's June calendar is nearly full with weddings. Holiday parties are being booked for December.

The 197-room hotel opened at an inauspicious time - February 2009. But construction had begun before the economy tanked.

"When the hotel opened, the lodging industry was particularly devastated, particularly in Phoenix," said general manager Jim Ryan, who joined the company in June. "It wasn't the greatest time."

But the hotel, at Price and Frye roads, hit the ground running.

By August, Ryan said, "we were getting more than our fair share of our competitive market. We're still growing that share."

That's in spite of four hotels opening in the Hilton's backyard near Loops 101 and 202 in October: Courtyard by Marriott, Fairfield Inn & Suites, Homewood Suites and Hampton Inn.

Ryan attributes the March occupancy rate of 85 percent to his full-service hotel's offerings and character.

"It's a boutique-like hotel that provides a sense of intimacy that a large full-service hotel can't offer," he said.

"We focus on added service and added value."

The hotel offers room service, a full-service bar and restaurant, a Starbucks, catering space, bellman service, executive floor and executive lounge.

"We're 100 percent focused on the guest experience," Ryan said. "That's how we're making a difference."

The hotel's new Sunday brunch has proved a winner. Easter Sunday was the fifth such brunch orchestrated by executive chef Bill Cornelison.

The first Sunday, 50 diners showed up. The second Sunday, the hotel fed 100, Ryan said. That number doubled on the fourth Sunday, and Easter reached a capacity of 400 reservations plus a waiting list.

"We wanted to make Champagne Sundays to be emotionally engaging on different levels," Ryan said. "We define that as visual, taste, sound, smell and smile."

Beyond the brunch, Ryan said businesses in Chandler have responded by holding conferences and booking out-of-town travelers.

Clients include Avnet, Microchip, Intel, Freescale, Amkor, Wells Fargo, Bank of America, Pearson, Edward Jones, Liberty Distribution, Healthways and Mediserve.

The Hilton has developed a working friendship with Air Products, its neighbor to the north across Frye Road. (Air Products provides nitrogen, oxygen and argon to businesses throughout the Southwest through high-purity underground pipelines.)

"We've done open-house tours for the Hilton . . . and we've worked up a great partnership, being side by side," said Air Products' site manager Richard Jordan.

Air Products recently expanded, and its construction team stayed at the Hilton.

"We've educated our whole hotel about that white structure; I tell (employees) it's like looking at the Taj Mahal," Ryan said.

He said Air Products "drives the technology engine of the Price Corridor - they've been very loyal to us with room nights and the catering business."

The hotel also hosts social functions including quinceañeras, first-birthday parties, bar mitzvahs and baptisms.

Another popular offering is the happy hour from 4 to 7 p.m. daily with special pricing.

"That's been extraordinarily well received by the community," Ryan said.

<http://www.azcentral.com/community/chandler/articles/2010/04/09/20100409chandler-hilton.html>