

Back to School

Experienced hotelier charts a new path at Algonquin College

BY KATY DE VRIES

was invaluable to me and further confirmed I had made the right career choice.”

Over the years, he held positions with both Westin and Fairmont Hotels, in Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Ottawa, South Korea and Johannesburg. Most recently, he was regional vice-president for the Pacific Northwest for Fairmont, based in Vancouver, until he got the call from Algonquin in September 2005.

“It’s always been lurking in the back of my mind that I’d like to spend the last 10 years of my career in academia,” says Kelly over the phone from his new office at the college.

“This was an opportunity to fulfill that dream and a way for my family to return home to Ottawa.”

He says learning the ropes at Algonquin has been intense, one of the steepest learning curves he’s gone through in his entire career. But he points out there are parallels between education and hospitality. Both are customer-oriented businesses, he says, and both revolve around people.

“Moving from hospitality to academia is really not that much of a stretch,” Kelly says. “Clearly, there are new processes to learn but you have employees and customers [in both arenas]. My performance is based on meeting financial targets, achieving student and employer satisfaction and growing the business which isn’t dissimilar to my recent industry role,” he says.

Kelly has high hopes for Algonquin’s department. “I want to bring our school closer to industry and work towards creating

a co-op option with all of our programs,” he says.

Another of the dean’s goals is to develop a four-year applied-degree program in hospitality and tourism management. “I think we are going to see applied-degree graduates as the most sought after people in our industry.”

He believes there are also niche opportunities for one-year post-graduate certificate programs that he would like to explore. “These initiatives will help address the skilled-employee shortage in our industry,” says Kelly. On one hand, the shortage means there will be lots of opportunities for graduating students. But it also puts greater pressure on colleges to graduate more students, even when enrolment numbers begin to decline because of demographics.

Although the 2005 fall enrolment was the highest it’s ever been at 970 full-time students, Kelly and his team are forging ahead to recruit more and create additional opportunities for the department. Under Kelly’s experienced guidance, it’s in capable hands. ♦



At 52, Pat Kelly, the new dean of Hospitality and Tourism for Algonquin College in Ottawa, feels like a kid again. He’s attending classes, roaming the campus in search of classrooms and acquainting himself with everything the institution has to offer — just as he did when he entered the hallways of Toronto-based Ryerson University as a freshman 30 years ago.

Kelly left Ryerson’s hospitality and tourism management program in 1977 with diploma in hand to begin his career in the hotel business. He moved back to the Ottawa area, taking a sales position with the Skyline hotel in Brockville, Ont., the same hotel where he spent summers as a store-room clerk to put himself through school. It’s also where he continued to whet his appetite for a career in hospitality, eventually being promoted to general manager.

“Being the GM of a small, 75-room hotel means you are essentially occupying just about every position in the hotel at one point or another,” says Kelly. “The experience