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Students visit The Cavalier to find out the real work of hospitality industry

By Lee Belote
Correspondent
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The Cavalier Hotel had 50 extra guests on a recent Monday morning. Rather than checking in to the hotel, the guests were checking out the property through tours, history lessons and presentations.

The guests were students from Virginia Beach area high schools that were participating in Junior Achievement's Job Shadow Day.

Junior Achievement, a nonprofit organization that teaches K-12 classes financial literacy, work readiness and entrepreneurship, partnered with The Cavalier Hotel and the Virginia Beach Hotel Association with the goal of helping students recognize potential job opportunities in the hospitality industry.

Students started their school day in The Cavalier's plush ballroom surrounded by crystal chandeliers while Diana Burke, executive director of the Virginia Beach Hotel Association, touted the benefits of working in the hospitality industry. She said there are 14,000 jobs in Virginia Beach that are supported by the local tourism industry.

Brad Cance, The Cavalier's general manager, schooled the students in what it takes to run a hotel and the importance of customer service.

"The Cavalier is in the business of creating an exceptional experience," said Cance.

The morning introduction ended with a video sharing the hotel's rich history and recent \$80 million renovation.

Miranda Mendoza, a junior at First Colonial, said she's interested in working in hospitality and has already interned at a Holiday Inn.

"I've learned what it means to be a five-star hotel," said Mendoza. "I'm excited to see how this place operates and how they make it all happen."

The remainder of the day, students were guided on personal tours of the guest rooms, spa, pool, kitchens, restaurants and even the basement.

Hotel employees shared their favorite aspects of the job.

Nick Nations, hospitality director, gave a passionate speech about working in the front office. He said it's a great area for those who love a dynamic work environment and lots of guest interaction.

“You have to prioritize the daily business demands while also making sure the customer is satisfied,” said Nations. “Your work ethic is the most important thing in this industry.”

John Koehler, engineering director, took the students behind and below the scenes when they toured the hotel's basement. They saw everything from the boilers to the distillery and learned when you work behind the scenes, your accomplishments are on display for all to see. While riding on the elevator he told the group that the cars were original but the cables and motors were new.

“Back in the day, they knew how to makes things last,” he said.

Burke said that hoteliers have been striving for years to better communicate the positive attributes of tourism to students in our area.

“We decided to go big or go home as they say,” said Burke. “The Cavalier makes such a tremendous statement, so we hope their hospitality options left the students with a lasting impact. It's not always easy understanding career opportunities at a young age. We hope their few hours exploring The Cavalier were beneficial.”

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Lee Belote is a Bay Island resident who loves writing about her hometown for the Virginia Beach Beacon section of The Virginian-Pilot.

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