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Industry leaders examine global hospitality during student-run Hotel Ezra Cornell

By Ashlee McGandy

The educational panels, speaker presentations, leisure activities and other events at the 86th annual Hotel Ezra Cornell (HEC) centered on the hospitality industry's role in international business and the global economy. Led by Managing Director Willis Cheng '11, students in the School of Hotel Administration spent the past year planning every detail of the April 7-10 industry conference.

"This is the right topic for the moment," said Ed Fuller, managing director and president of Marriott Lodging International, during the HEC keynote speech. The global hospitality industry is growing and changing, Fuller said, citing statistics on the high rate of tourism in China, the growing use of mobile devices for travel planning and booking, and the increasing importance travelers place on sustainability.

Fuller pointed out that, from the point of view of U.S.-based companies, the global hospitality industry will grow in two ways -- the United States will see an increase in inbound travelers, and U.S. companies will pursue



Jason Koski/University Photography

Edwin Fuller, managing director and president, Marriott Lodging International, gave the keynote address at the 86th annual Hotel Ezra Cornell on April 8.



Jason Koski/University Photography

"Building Brands Across Borders," in which panelists discussed growth and development strategies for different hospitality companies on April 9.

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development opportunities outside the country. He stressed that both sides of the international hospitality business require cultural sensitivity and an understanding of history.

"If you need to understand your customer, you need to understand their culture. If you need to understand their culture, you need to understand their history," he said.

Kevin Jacobs '94, senior vice president of corporate strategy and treasurer for Hilton Worldwide, commended students for choosing the theme of global growth and "putting together HEC content that is very topical."



Lindsay France/University Photography

Hotel student Ellie Procter '11 plates dishes served at "The Reinvention of Cultures" dinner on April 8. The dishes were inspired by Japanese and French cuisine.

Jacobs moderated the discussion "Building Brands Across Borders," in which panelists discussed growth and development strategies for different hospitality companies. Steve Haggerty '90, global head of real estate and development, Hyatt; Nancy Johnson, executive vice president and chief development officer, Carlson Hotels Worldwide; and Gerald Lawless, chairman, Jumeirah, were panelists.

For "Exploring Emerging Markets," a panel of senior leaders from the airline, consulting, technology and hospitality analytics industries noted that the United States and Europe are no longer the markets in which hospitality companies have the most potential for growth. Konstanze Auernheimer, director of marketing and research at STR Global, said that the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) are among the markets that now top the list.

Michael D. Johnson, dean and E.M. Statler Professor of Hotel Administration, addressed global initiatives taking place within the Hotel School involving the undergraduate experience, the Master of Management in Hospitality program, research, content and executive education.

Other HEC speakers included Scott Berman '84, principal and hospitality industry leader, PricewaterhouseCoopers; Suzanne Boda, senior vice president, airport customer service, international and cargo, US Airways; Larry Hall '81, president and CEO, PAR-Springer Miller Systems Inc.; Patricia Harris, global chief diversity officer of McDonald's Corp.; Ben Justus '08, founder of EGBOK (Everything's Gonna Be OK) Mission; and Dave Pavelko, head of travel, Google Inc.

In addition to the lineup of educational events, students also planned a series of international food and beverage events and leisure activities that included wine and tea tastings and an interactive cooking demonstration with Stephen Lewandowski, executive chef of Tribeca Grill, and Drew Nieporent '77, owner of Myriad Restaurant Group.

New to the HEC schedule this year was the inaugural Cornell Hospitality Business Plan Competition, sponsored by the Pillsbury Institute for Hospitality Entrepreneurship. Three student teams presented their original business ideas in the final round of the competition. The winning concept was Fushi Sushi, created by Sam Booschever '11 and Daniel Mann '11.

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