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**Business**

# Hospitality is Massachusetts' 3rd largest industry: Outlook 2020 Viewpoint Mary Kay Wydra

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Mary Kay Wydra, president of the Greater Springfield Convention & Visitors Bureau, addresses the audience at a Bright Nights Appreciation Breakfast sponsored by the Spirit of Springfield at the Sheraton Springfield Tuesday. (Frederick Gore Photo)

NEW!

**By Mary Kay Wydra/president | Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau**

As I considered the topic of “Jobs and Education in the 21st Century” and its relevance to tourism, my thoughts quickly turned to the Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau Board of Directors. Today, this group is a veritable who’s who of business leaders in Western Massachusetts, yet, interestingly, many of them began their careers in entry-level jobs in the hospitality industry.

It would be difficult to find a group of regional business leaders more visible than Gene Cassidy, of the Eastern States Exposition, Brenda McGiverin, of WWLP, Andy Yee, of the Bean Restaurant Group, or Peter Rosskothan, of the Log Cabin & Delaney House. Each is responsible for the fortunes of expansive, multimillion-dollar operations, with large numbers of employees.

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Each of these accomplished professionals started out at the very first rung in the hospitality and tourism industry.

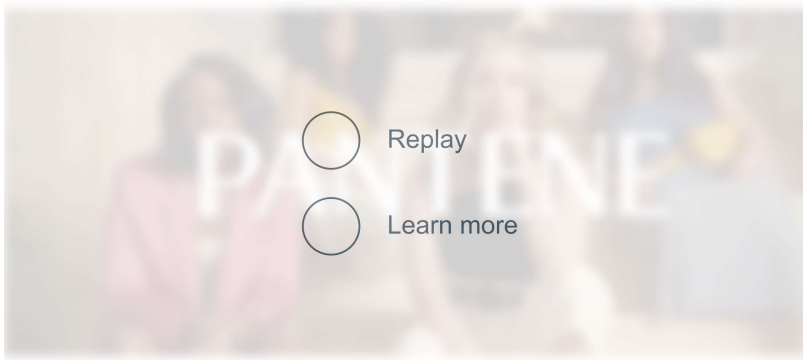
Cassidy began as a 15 year old, bussing tables at the Monte Carlo restaurant, virtually across the street from his present office on Memorial Avenue in West Springfield.

McGiverin sold tickets and popcorn at the Holyoke Merry-Go-Round.

Yee was sweeping floors and toting trash at 14 years old at his family’s Hu Ke Lau restaurant in Chicopee.

And, Rosskothan was a banquet server at the Springfield Marriott early in his career.

There were many others who had entry-level jobs as diverse as driving motor coaches, lifeguarding, running roller coasters and doling out maps to drivers in the days before the internet. All recall that their formative years in hospitality taught them important business and life lessons that have stayed with them through their careers.



### The big takeaway?

While dire predictions of artificial intelligence and robotics hurting job opportunities in the future may prove true to varying degrees in some fields, outgoing people with “service heart” are – and will always be – quite welcome in travel and tourism.

There is definitely a labor shortage today in most of New England. And with nearly 8% of our region’s labor force working in hospitality, we absolutely need bodies. Ours is an industry where the human interaction itself is often a critical part of the experience.

Front-line service personnel can make a vital difference when visitors assess their satisfaction with a destination. In an online world where reviews and opinions are a huge part of consumer decisions, the attitude and performance of hospitality workers can absolutely “make or break” a guest’s impressions and impact future spending.

The good news for job seekers is that the hospitality industry offers tremendous opportunity at the entry- and near entry-level. Formal schooling is typically not required to be an excellent, promotable hospitality worker.

It’s also an industry that rewards effort with many climbing the ladder into higher positions. These “smile-required” jobs will not easily be replaced by robotics or advancing technology.

In 2018, the University of Massachusetts' Donahue Institute issued an important report, "The Work of Leisure: Behind the Scenes of the Massachusetts Leisure, Hospitality and Tourism Industry."

It points out that the industry "is the third-largest industry in the commonwealth, employs more than one in 10 Massachusetts residents and has grown steadily since at least 2000. Employment in (leisure, hospitality and tourism) has also been more resilient to economic shocks than other Massachusetts industries."

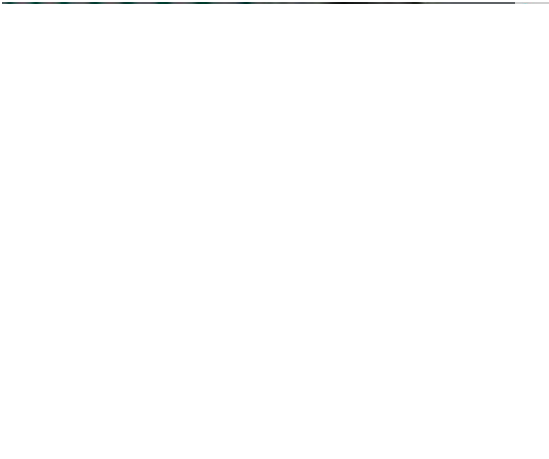
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Additionally, "One of the most striking features of the (leisure, hospitality and tourism) industry is its overwhelming significance to the broader Massachusetts economy. The Bay State is widely known for its strengths in higher education, health care, biotech, and finance. So it often comes as a surprise to learn that the (leisure, hospitality and tourism) industry accounts for over 10 percent of the state's total employment, providing more than 376,000 jobs. The (leisure, hospitality and tourism) industry is outranked in employment by Education & Health Care and Professional & Business Services (including life sciences), but ahead of such major employers as Finance, Retail, Wholesale Trade, and Manufacturing."

A regional tourism industry comprised of literally hundreds of distinctive attractions, accommodations, eateries, event venues and much more, all knit together by rivers, roads and railways and set in a beautiful four-season landscape is not about to be relocated as the result of some corporate board decision. Western Mass is staying in Western Mass.

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Finally, the Greater Springfield Convention & Visitors Bureau has long recognized the tangible economic value of customer-first attitudes, establishing the Howdy Awards for Hospitality Excellence 25 years ago. We'll continue to support programs that will help driven, willing workers to advance in their careers in hospitality and be rewarded for providing outstanding service.

We're especially proud that many of our Howdy nominees and winners have themselves gone on to professional positions in hospitality, with plenty right here in our region. Our consistent goal is to keep Western Massachusetts competitive and memorable, to strengthen our economy and reinforce our reputation as a great place to live, work and visit.

Mary Kay Wydra is the president of Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau; to learn more about the bureau, go online to [explorewestern mass.com](http://explorewesternmass.com).

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