

# OMNI<sup>®</sup> HOTELS & RESORTS

**Statement for the Record**

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**Omni Hotels & Resorts**

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United States House Committee on Ways and Means

Subcommittee on Human Resources

*Getting Incentives Right: Connecting Low-Income Individuals with Jobs*

Chairman Buchanan, Ranking Member Doggett and members of the Subcommittee on Human Resources, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Barbara Doucet and I am Corporate Director of Human Resources for Omni Hotels & Resorts based in Dallas, Texas. Currently, I serve on the American Hotel & Lodging Association's Human Resources Committee and as Board Member for Women with Promise. It is an honor to share with you Omni's success story of how we have connected low-income individuals with more than just jobs, but lifelong careers in the hotel industry, at two of our properties in Dallas and Fort Worth.

By way of background, Omni is a luxury hotel brand with 60 hotels in North America, and over 18,000 associates. We pride ourselves in leaving a lasting impression with every guest by exceeding their expectations, and inspiring and rewarding our associates.

My tenure with Omni began in 2008 as the director of human resources for the opening of the Omni Fort Worth Hotel, a 614 room downtown property located near the convention center. After serving there for three years, I relocated across the metroplex to open the Omni Dallas Hotel, a 1,001 room property located in the heart of downtown and tied to the convention center.

In my first role as director for Fort Worth, staffing a new hotel requiring roughly 465 employees is no easy task, and can only be done successfully with the support of the right team. As director at Fort Worth, I immediately recognized the need to seek out the right partnership that would help us be successful in that endeavor. Hence, the start of our long standing relationship with Workforce Solutions of Tarrant County.

Workforce Solutions of Tarrant County and Omni worked diligently together in various work subsidized programs, coordinating job fairs, placement of interns and served as the employer of the first four youth to finish the paid work experience program. Workforce Solutions was an essential partner in advertising and reaching candidates that Omni may not have been able to communicate with on our own. They screened and referred job seekers and proved to be a constant pipeline of new applicants for us. As a result of the partnership, the Omni Fort Worth Hotel was honored as the 2010 recipient of the Employer Award of Excellence for Workforce Solutions of Tarrant County and I was happy to serve on Tarrant County's Workforce Improvement Committee. We placed 16 interns through subsidized employment programs and hired six for permanent jobs.

The subsidized employment program provides on-the-job training where lower-income candidates can perform the daily tasks of the job for which they could ultimately be hired. Through this medium, we are able to train and teach these individuals the skills they need to be a successful room or laundry attendant, bar back, steward or other critical roles within the hospitality industry. This model has been a great success for Omni and is a source of pride for the company.

If the individual was not hired into a permanent position, we worked with the candidate and their counselor to help identify other opportunities. While managing these individuals and programs does take time and resources from multiple people inside and outside of the hotel, Omni encourages each hotel to be a leader in giving back to the greater community so much so that it is one of our core values, Local Market Leadership.

The relationship with Workforce Solutions continued into the new build of the Omni Dallas Hotel in downtown Dallas. As a larger hotel with double the employee population than Fort Worth, it was an even greater challenge to staff quickly, effectively and efficiently. The Workforce Solutions Greater Dallas proved to be a vital partner in the initial hiring events and remained a valuable contributor after the opening of the hotel. During our largest pre-opening job fair, Workforce Solutions provided 30 volunteers who assisted with the intake of the more than 3,000 job seekers over the course of three days. They assisted with advertising the event and the prescreening to ensure we had all of the necessary information prior to the interviewing stage. As a result, we hired over 250 individuals through the (TANF funded) *Texas Back to Work* program and Greater Dallas direct referrals. Additionally, we hired 18 at-risk Choices participants who gained skills training funded through a Workforce Solutions Self-Sufficiency Fund grant with H.I.S. Bridge Builders a Dallas-based Christian ministry and community service agency. Five additional youth were also offered full-time positions after being placed at Omni as a part of the Workforce Investment Act Youth Summer Work Experience Program. Once again, in 2012, Omni was honored with the Employer Award of Excellence for the Workforce Solutions Greater Dallas. Our work with Workforce Solutions also led us to partner with other community agencies including CitySquare, which provides food, health, housing and outreach services to the poor. We specifically assisted with the job placement and retention service provided to youth exiting the foster and juvenile care system in North Texas through CitySquare's Transition Resource Action Center.

In addition to Workforce Solutions of both cities, the Omni Dallas Hotel has continued success of working with H.I.S. Bridgebuilders, using training resources from the American Hotel

& Lodging Educational Institute (EI) to provide a pipeline of qualified, certified hospitality workers. Individuals of all ages and stages of life are referred to H.I.S. Bridgebuilders by other community service agencies, such as shelters, and transitional housing. After the individuals are accepted, they go through a five-week training program that include three weeks of life skills training, one week of vocational training using EI's online Train, Retain, Assess, and Certify (TRAC) programs for Guestroom Attendant and Restaurant Servers and then complete a week of job shadowing at the Omni Dallas. When program graduates begin to work at the Omni Dallas, they are technically on the payroll of H.I.S. Bridgebuilders. These individuals receive on-site job coaching and assistance making the transition to full-time employment. After 90 days, we had the opportunity to extend a job offer to the client. H.I.S. Bridgebuilders graduates are the first in line when job openings become available. These individuals started their hospitality program based on Omni Dallas' opening need for room attendants and it has since expanded to multiple positions, including laundry, stewarding, front desk, and phone operators. We provided assistance to the workforce program by setting up a mock hotel room, showing their clients the rooms, providing guest speakers, and offering on-site training.

Since the Omni Dallas started working with H.I.S. Bridgebuilders, 146 individuals have entered the program from the opening of the hotel on November 11, 2011. Approximately 70 individuals were hired as Omni employees from November 11, 2011 through March 13, 2013 and 76 from March 2013 through December 2015. Of the total individuals, 99 have been hired as full-time Omni employees and 23 of those are currently employed. In 2015, 10 new individuals are working, four as a temporary assignment and six as temporary with the potential for hire; there were four full-time hires. The Omni Dallas is currently working with a new

organization who partners with H.I.S. Bridgebuilders to place their candidates, Community Staffing Services (CSS). CSS works with several non-profit agencies to help place individuals in temporary assignments, temp to hire roles and direct hires. , The goal is to train the temps to become permanent associates. The property currently has H.I.S. Bridgebuilders clients in stewarding, laundry, Ideal Services, dining room attendants, housemen and one concierge. H.I.S. Bridgebuilder's goal is to increase the focus on housekeeping in 2016.

One of our Omni associates puts it in her own words, "I was unemployed at the time and receiving unemployment and it wasn't enough. So I wanted to continue my education, so I came to Bridgebuilders. I love Bridgebuilders! They made a big change and difference in my life. They (Omni) already told me they didn't want to me toward the back. They want me with the public because they told me they love my personality and I was like 'Wow!'" Another associate says, "I am a part of the H.I.S. Bridgebuilders Training Program. I am happy to say that I will be starting as a Turndown Attendant at the Omni Dallas Hotel. I am so excited about this position and it's going to open up doors for me and I am really looking forward to having a future at the Omni." I am proud and happy to share that this Omni family member was promoted to Operator just four months afterwards, then promoted to Supervisor of the Front Desk, and was promoted for a third time and currently serves as the department supervisor for all telephone operators at the Omni Dallas Hotel.

Our managers are empowered to treat each associate with the utmost care and concern, which naturally leads to caring for our associates as a valued member of the Omni family, another of our core values. I would urge the committee to explore federal legislative

funding that encourages subsidized employment programs which allow the low-income individual to receive authentic on-the-job training. Through *Texas Back to Work* program and other organizations such as H.I.S. Bridgebuilders and CitySquare we are able to train participants on their jobs and provide the tools and knowledge they need to be successful. In cases where the individual is not hired, they still walk away knowing in which specific area, task, or skill they need to improve upon in order to truly be an employable, self-sufficient individual. While we may not have hired each low-income individual who walked through our doors, the dignity and respect we showed them by taking the time to teach them a new task even just how to improve their soft skills gave them the opportunity they needed – a chance to be able to get back on their feet and earn a living on their own.