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A COMBINATION OF ON-PROPERTY RESOURCES AND FOOD SERVICE BEST PRACTICES OPTIMIZE RETURNS FOR HOTEL RESTAURANTS **BY ROBIN MCLAUGHLIN**

IN THE 1990S, HOTEL RESTAURANT DINING had a bad reputation. During this era, most hotel food and beverage programs were designed strictly to be enjoyed by in-house guests during their stays, and they did not welcome local foodies. And, because hotel restaurants were not pulling in outside revenue or retaining customers, food and beverage programs suffered severely. These financially unstable hotel restaurants were economically problematic in that they made it impossible for fully functioning food and beverage operations to have sufficient margins.

The new generation is bouncing back from this phenomenon, as hotels strive to establish locally known and embraced dining options within their walls. Larry Spelts, vice president

of business development at Mt. Pleasant, S.C.-based management company Charlestowne Hotels, says, "The ideal and super-successful hotel restaurant has strong local support, but that has to be created. Obviously, first you have to have a good product, a good concept, and you have to execute it well, but you also have to build that relationship and build that exposure in the local community."

Achieving this goal is a feat that has eluded many hotels in recent years. In Spelts' experience, the way locals are most effectively drawn to hotel restaurants is through soft openings. Instead of immediately opening to the public, Spelts suggests having invitation-only benefits for local charities when the restaurant is ready to open. Choosing charities that have a →

