

Wednesday 21 March, 2018

Executive Housekeeper, Environmental Manager and Matriarch of the James Cook Hotel Grand Chancellor Retires

The James Cook Hotel Grand Chancellor's Executive Housekeeper, Denise Thornton, retires this Friday after 44 years at the central Wellington Hotel. Commencing on the front desk in 1974, Denise remembers her first day at the 'Jimmy Cook' with nervous excitement, honoured to be working at one of the first international hotels to grace the capital. Fast-forwarding to present day, Denise has managed the Housekeeping department since 1986 and has been pivotal in developing the sustainable and collaborative culture at the Hotel.

Reflecting on her environmental ethos, Denise has always viewed the Hotel as the "big house on the hill". "It is important to understand the potential waste generation when operating 268 rooms, and therefore our sustainability efforts have to be considered, to minimise our effect on the environment and community we are a part of". Looking to the future, Denise believes changing people's attitudes to waste is vital. She came from a 'fix it' society, to a 'replacement society' however now sees the cycle reversing as the millennial generations focus on sustainability becomes apparent. The most recent positive change for the Hotel was purchasing over 100 reusable straws for the restaurant outlets (minimising the use of plastic), a move Denise strongly endorsed.

Leading one of the largest and most diverse teams as Executive Housekeeper, Denise has fostered a unique culture within her department. Along with providing a high standard of cleanliness throughout the Hotel, Denise encourages her team to interact with guests and to share their warm personalities through their work. She knows this is a good way for both guests and her staff to start the day, and she feels immense happiness when introverted team members gain more confidence after just a few weeks of employment. It is therefore the people Denise will miss most about her role, along with the stimulation and diversity a "different day every day" brings as Executive Housekeeper.

Additional achievements for Denise includes winning New Zealand Housekeeper of the Year in the 90's and being a finalist at the New Zealand Hotel Awards, 2016. She established the Wellington Housekeeping Forum and has seen the Hotel achieve EarthCheck EC3 and Qualmark GOLD certification. One of her unforgettable memories was conversing one on one with Cliff Richards and her favourite place at the Hotel is the level 26 Executive Club Lounge for its picturesque views over Wellington. Revealing why she has remained at the same work place for over 40 years, Denise has appreciated the Hotels continuous ability to keep up to date with the market and changing preferences, reflected by the regular guests who keep coming back. It is these guests Denise will miss the most, along with her work family and the "big house on the hill" that is that James Cook Hotel Grand Chancellor.

The James Cook Hotel Grand Chancellor is located in the heart of Wellington City, conveniently situated between the leading retail district of Lambton Quay and the business hub of The Terrace. The Hotel features 268 accommodation rooms, two restaurants and bars, Infuse Day Spa, an exclusive 26th floor Club Lounge and a complimentary in-house gymnasium.

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