



## 2024 Golden Pineapple Award Honorees

### **Outstanding Back Office Employee of the Year**

Laura Grisales, Loews Hotels at Universal Orlando - Lakewood



Laura, who was recognized as the **Outstanding Back Office Employee of the Year**, consistently demonstrates how to exceed expectations and has been recognized for her outstanding service, dedication, and loyalty to the team.

As a valuable asset, Laura has faced every challenge with a positive attitude and resilience, including taking on and conquering many new tasks over the past year. With Loews Hotels at Universal Orlando continuing to grow, Laura has contributed to the seamless transition along the way.

Last year, Loews Hotels announced the opening of a new laundry facility. Laura was the first team member to raise her hand to assist with the opening of the property and showed an eagerness to assist where she could. Additionally, Laura assisted with the onboarding of all new team members in order to ensure that they felt comfortable in the workplace and made them feel like family.

While her daily tasks focused on scheduling, tracking attendance, communicating any management changes and updates to all team members, as well as ensuring all laundry attendants have the proper training, Laura was happy to step into any role when needed. This was clear during the opening of the laundry facility. After four months into the opening of the new property, the chef left the company which put the property in a bind as the management company provides a free shift meal to all team members.

Since there was limited staff support, Laura immediately took the initiative to start mopping the floors, prepping, emptying the trash and cleaning the cafeteria, which was all part of the chef's responsibilities. After more than two decades as a team member at Loews Hotels at Universal Orlando Resort, this is just one of the many reasons Laura was nominated multiple times as team member of the month and a two-time golden pineapple award nominee (now winner in 2024).

## **Outstanding Bell Person/Concierge Employee of the Year**

Anthony Dunn, Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress



As the Outstanding Bell Person / Concierge employee of the year, Anthony can always be seen with a smile on his face, laughing, telling jokes, and engaging with all guests in any way possible.

He takes ownership of his job by getting to know each individual guest, their plans, preferences and most importantly, remembering each guest by their name as they enter or exit the hotel lobby.

With more than 20 years of dedication and commitment to the Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress, Anthony has also upheld another important and critical aspect of their role by ensuring that the front drive is clear for first responders any time they are called out to the property in an emergency.

Anthony always reacts promptly by having guests remove their cars and clear people out of the way for the first responders to move quickly. These actions have helped save lives on several occasions, as minutes truly matter in a life and death situation.

By loving what he does and treating the front drive like their own home, Anthony has consistently left a positive impact on the guests' he interacts with and has been mentioned in surveys more than 50 times – with all positive comments and thanks for his impeccable service and friendly attitude.

## Outstanding Community Service Employee of the Year

Steve Averitt, Reunion Resort & Spa



Steve, the recipient of the **Community Service Employee of the Year**, is a shining example of someone who utilizes their hospitality talents both on the job and for the betterment of our community.

As a dedicated team player, Steve consistently jumps at the opportunity to assist colleagues and other departments, showcasing his commitment to teamwork and unwavering positivity. Plus, his compassion towards others extends beyond the property and into the community, where Steve lends a hand at the local homeless shelter at least twice a month.

By selflessly volunteering his time at this local homeless shelter, Steve shares his passion for cooking and bringing warmth and nourishment to those in need. Not to mention, he will go through his own neighborhood asking for donations to assist critical areas of need at the shelter.

Additionally, on another occasion, Steve has helped an individual receive their driver's license by not only bringing them to the DMV, but also sitting with them throughout the entire process in order to ensure they understood and could obtain a proper driver's license.

Furthermore, in addition to volunteering at the homeless shelter, Steve delivers food to workers at various construction sites and volunteers at an assisted living property by helping with landscape work and other odd jobs.

Overall, Steve is a one-of-a-kind and well-rounded culinary star that not only brings positive energy and talents to the work environment but also pays it forward to the outside community. This is just one of the many reasons he was recently given the aces award by Reunion Resort & Spa for going above and beyond to assist the department and be a shining example to other team members.

## **Outstanding Convention Center / Banquet Employee of the Year**

David Munoz, Ritz-Carlton Orlando, Grande Lakes



David, our **Outstanding Convention Center / Banquet Employee of the Year**, has impacted millions of visitors and is the perfect symbol of quality service who does so with a smile and a kind word.

His attention to detail, kindness, creativity, and anticipation of the guests' needs is just one of the many reasons why he continues to receive high recognition from meeting planners and has left many with lifelong memories.

Additionally, David has assisted with the training of thousands of new banquet servers at several iconic properties, over his 27-year career in the Central Florida hospitality industry.

Lastly, this passionate and high performing individual is consistently seen exceeding normal job duties and is a member of the department's employee action committee which focuses on employee satisfaction on property.

**Outstanding Culinary Employee of the Year**  
Maria Sandoval, JW Marriott Orlando, Grande Lakes



Maria, the **Outstanding Culinary Employee of the Year**, has been an outstanding team member that plays a pivotal role in training new hires, skillfully coaching them on the company's expectations and standards, and delighting her guests with exceptional service.

Initially, Maria started her career in teaching. After moving to the United States, she decided to transition into the hospitality industry and began her journey into the culinary department.

Since joining the team, Maria has consistently exceeded expectations and demonstrated her genuine care for other team members when they needed help.

Fast forward two years later and she has immersed herself into the culinary world, ready to embrace the art of cooking and showcase her culinary skills.

She stands out as an exceptional worker and an even more remarkable individual. Maria's passion for the kitchen is evident as she finds joy in keeping busy and ensuring guests leave satisfied with the service provided.

Furthermore, her accomplishments also extend beyond her professional achievements, as she is actively engaged in impactful volunteer work within her community and supports various religious missionaries in their efforts to combat hunger. Additionally, Maria dedicates her time to volunteer at Second Harvest Food Bank, where she strives to make a positive impact on the lives of others within our community.

Lastly, Maria is the perfect example of living the American dream. At the age of 75, she continues to work full-time, driven by their resilience and strong work ethic, along with their desire to contribute. Furthermore, after winning five diamonds of the year and being a two- time golden pineapple award nominee (and now winner), her dedication and excellence should serve as an inspiring testament to the next generation of hospitality and culinary professionals.

**Outstanding Engineering Employee of the Year**  
William "Bill" Warren, Sheraton Suites Orlando Airport



The word "no" is not Bill's vocabulary when it comes to the property, any needs from guests, and any of his teammates that need assistance.

As the **Outstanding Engineering Employee of the Year**, Bill is always willing to lend a helping hand, and goes above and beyond no matter how big or small the task may be. He also walks around the hotel with the same enthusiasm, pride, and passion as day 1.

For example, as Floridians, we have all seen our fair share of hurricanes and powerful storms that move through Central Florida on an annual basis. It's during these times that you can always count on Bill to be on property making sure that the hotel is secure, and the guests are safe.

During one particular storm, Bill's own home was substantially affected. However, Bill put a tarp on his roof, left it behind and ran to the hotel to assist when the entire third floor incurred significant damage to the roof and had water pouring in. Also, when Hurricane Irma blew through in 2017, this individual was on hand when the hotel sustained quite a bit of damage. Bill worked tirelessly before, during and after the hurricane to repair the damage to the hotel and get it back fully operational.

Additionally, during the pandemic he played an essential role. Along with the maintenance crew, Bill stayed on when the hotel shut down for nine months to ensure the hotel was secure and stayed in great condition until it re-opened.

Did we mention he has been with the Sheraton Suites Orlando Airport for over almost 23 years, was associate of the year more than five times and served in the U.S. Air Force for years as a B52 engine mechanic?



**Outstanding Food & Beverage Service Employee of the Year**  
Leidy "Paola" Marin, Homewood Suites Orlando I-Drive Convention Center



Paola, the recipient of the **Outstanding Food and Beverage Employee of the Year**, simply excels at anything she puts her mind to.

Paola has received praise from dozens of positive reviews for her professionalism and ongoing commitment to thinking about the guest first.

In the food and beverage service, Paola has the unique opportunity to greet and welcome guests from all around the world and does so with pride and a smile on their face. Plus, she is always creating new ways to share the warmth of hospitality with them.

Paola is also knowledgeable about all aspects of the department and now trains new team members on the importance of food safety and proper buffet setup.

Furthermore, she has become the unofficial ambassador for international guests, specifically those that speak Portuguese, not only helping them translate the language barrier but does so with open arms making them truly feel at home. A short time ago, a local family of five stayed at the Homewood Suites Orlando I-Drive Convention Center after being displaced by a fire at their home. Each morning their two children would run down the hall excited to see their favorite person and give her a big hug.

Another example of Paola's commitment came during a hurricane when she had just finished her shift and noticed a woman that needed help. The guest was walking their dog in the wind and rain and had fallen and sustained an injury. Paola ran out to assist the guest and was able to keep her and her dog calm while calling 9-1-1 for medical attention. This was an incredible example of quickly deescalating the situation and putting the guest at ease in a frightening situation.

Furthermore, a recent video posted on YouTube went viral in Brazil praising Paola for her hospitality and thoughtfulness. Due to this video, 90% of guests traveling from Brazil stop by the front desk requesting her by name. Additionally, the property has seen a 50% boost in business from international travelers due to this video.

These are just a few of the examples of her outstanding commitment to guest satisfaction and one of the many reasons she has won employee of the year for two years in a row. There are so many positive comments left at the front desk daily and on social media that set her above the rest.

**Outstanding Front Office Employee of the Year**  
Glenda Baker, Marriott's Royal, Sabal & Imperial Palms



Glenda, this year's **Outstanding Front Office Employee of the Year**, specializes in taking care of every guest's needs - from start to finish - and has a passion for personalizing and creating memorable experiences.

Over the past 13 years, she has worked in various front office positions such as tiki bar attendant, shuttle driver, and her latest position as a front desk agent.

While Glenda has seen many changes over the years, one thing has remained the same. That is her passion for personally taking interest in every stage of an owners' and guest's vacation experience. This includes proactively contacting them pre-arrival for room location preferences, providing local recommendations, and communicating the latest resort updates.

Glenda will also continue to remain in touch with the guests throughout their stay and check in periodically to see if there is anything they may need.

Additionally, she has made so many personal connections over the years that many owners choose to only communicate with Glenda for their vacation needs. Hundreds of guests have written in the post-stay survey that Glenda went above and beyond to make their vacation incredibly unique and memorable.

Furthermore, Glenda takes the initiative to make a connection with families and their little ones, by putting together special welcome bags with candy and small stickers or toys that the children will like during special holidays such as Easter and Christmas.

Moreover, last year, Glenda had to take a few months off work for personal reasons. Looking ahead to her departure, she reached out to the owners that would be staying during that time and let them know she would be out. Additionally, she went even further and communicated all their preferences to the team, so that nothing would slip through the cracks while she was on leave. Because of Glenda's foresight and initiative, she continued to receive positive feedback from their owners even while she was out. Some even rescheduled their vacations until she came back to work.



**Outstanding Housekeeping Employee of the Year**  
Camille Hall, Holiday Inn Orlando International Airport



Camille's love for meeting new people from around the globe is what initially drew her to the hospitality industry. After being a tour guide for more than a decade and facing the need to access better healthcare for her daughter, Camille decided to immigrate to the United States and ultimately become a room attendant upon moving to Florida.

As **Outstanding Housekeeping Employee of the Year**, Camille has consistently stood out due to her high job performance and constantly going above and beyond in her job responsibilities. A few examples include keeping the engineering department updated on any needed repairs, communicating with the front desk staff as needed, and completing lost and found requests, among other guest needs.

Also, as one of the only English speakers in her department, Camille has also started to learn Spanish and is now able to understand and communicate better with her peers and team.

Additionally, Camille is a dedicated employee who does not let her personal life affect her performance and mood at work. Her daughter has had a medical diagnosis that needs to be continually followed up on and requires multiple medical exams throughout the year. Even facing these challenges at home, Camille is never late, doesn't call out and is the most genuinely kind person in her department. Respected by her peers and leaders for her consistency in quality work and attention to detail, she has also been recently assigned to the VIP section due to her outstanding performance.

Lastly, Camille currently takes a two-hour bus ride to and from work daily. When asked why she isn't finding another property closer to where she lives, her response is that the Holiday Inn Orlando International Airport feels like home. On multiple occasions she was even offered the position of housekeeping supervisor but declined due to the scheduling challenge with the bus and her prioritization of taking care of her daughter.

Now that her daughter is getting older, Camille is considering taking driving lessons so that she can be more flexible in her schedule and finally become the housekeeping supervisor that she's earned.

## Outstanding Laundry Employee of the Year

Zenaida Ibanez Gamboa, Hampton Inn & Suites Orlando / East UCF Area



Zenaida, our recipient for **Outstanding Laundry Employee of the Year**, exemplifies hospitality by wearing her uniform and name tag with pride and gratitude. Zenaida has also been described by her peers as “tiny is mighty,” as she possesses a strong work ethic, humility and leads a life of service to others, both at work and within the community.

Additionally, as a Cuban immigrant who just became a U.S. citizen last year, there is a language barrier. However, that doesn’t deter her from always being kind and smiling, as she will even use sign language to offer assistance if she doesn’t understand. And if Zenaida ever finishes her laundry early, she will help any other position within the hotel where help is needed.

At nearly 77 years old, Zenaida also keenly understands the value of work, dependability and has a work pace to be envied. With the Hampton Inn & Suites Orlando / East UCF Area currently undergoing renovations, she has volunteered to help to disassemble the rooms and suites, which is no small feat.

On multiple occasions Zenaida has discovered cell phones, ear buds, watches, jewelry and even a wedding band embedded in the dirty laundry coming down the laundry chute and is quick to ensure that it is returned to the guest as quickly as possible.

Furthermore, outside of her job responsibilities, she also volunteers at events with the hotel’s CFHLA Adopt-A-School partner, Arbor Ridge K-8, by bringing in extra food for a team member who was struggling to make ends meet, delivering baby clothes that her grandchildren outgrew for other team member’s children in need, and participates in many other hotel charity events.

Lastly, Zenaida was nominated for this year’s Golden Pineapple Award by her peers. Team members were asked to nominate someone they felt should be recognized for their hard work and dependability. Countless letters were submitted nominating her and many examples were provided of how she helped others.

**Outstanding Recreational Employee of the Year**  
Travis Buffenbarger, Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center



Travis, this year's **Outstanding Recreational Employee of the Year**, is an indispensable member of the team who consistently exceeds the expectations of his co-workers and guests.

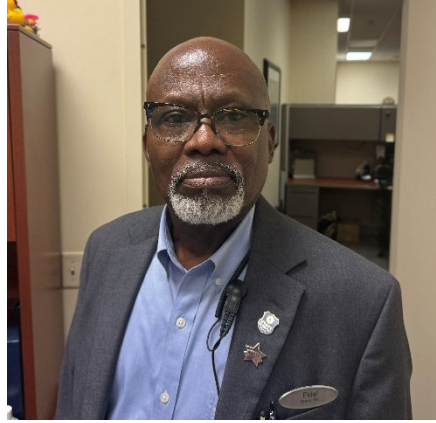
In addition to his regular duties, Travis ensures a welcoming environment for his entire team and serves as a trainer, providing knowledge and resources which has led to the overall team's success.

Post pandemic, he also played a vital role in the re-opening of the pool, by acquiring new skills that would help him facilitate the process and being versatile enough to showcase his commitment to the team's health and well-being.

Furthermore, Travis was instrumental in the launch of the new river attraction at the Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center and has played a key role in the implementation of the real time reservation system. His dedication to the hotel and guests was demonstrated when he became the first expert and single-handedly updated the seating map for the new system.

Lastly, with only eight years of experience in the hospitality industry, Travis was awarded the Gaylord Palms Values Award, which was a testament to his embodiment of passion, respect, integrity, citizenship, creativity, excellence and service.

**Outstanding Security / Loss Prevention Employee of the Year**  
Fidel Cosbert, Hyatt Regency Orlando



Fidel, the recipient for **Outstanding Security & Loss Prevention Employee of the Year**, has been a pillar of excellence for more than 25 years and has received consistent positive feedback from guests who call him out by name.

In a role that requires employees to respond to sometimes very negative situations and disturbances, Fidel has been described by guests as a kind, caring, loving, amazing, empathetic, and world-class professional.

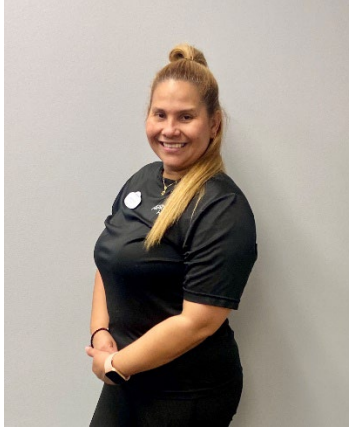
With security certifications in three states, Fidel treats every guest as his family member, and focuses on care and kindness above all else. This is why most recently, he championed a new initiative, labeled the “lobby ambassador program,” with the intention of preventing more guest incidents before they even start.

Additionally, on multiple occasions Fidel has turned down the opportunity to pursue a supervisor level position because he wanted to remain closer to the guest facing activities.

This is just one of the many reasons Fidel was nominated six times (and won twice) in six years, for employee of the month at the Hyatt Regency Orlando.

## **Outstanding Steward / Dishwasher Employee of the Year**

Weendy Gomez De Lopez, Universal's Aventura Hotel at Universal Orlando Resort



Weendy, this year's recipient of the **Outstanding Steward / Dishwasher Employee of the Year**, has become a rising star in her department.

She leads by example and often runs into guests who request something that is above and beyond the call of duty. Weendy has not only received tremendous respect for her job performance from the team, but also from all supervisors and managers throughout Universal's Aventura Hotel. She is always trying to help or assist with advice and tips on how to get the job done correctly.

One example is when Weendy used her critical thinking skills (which saved the department a lot of time) by reorganizing how and where equipment is placed, as well as the order it is placed in. And another time, Weendy approached a manager with a new way of storing pots and pans that would make it easier and safer for the team. She even reorganized it by herself!

Furthermore, being deaf, Weendy has faced daily challenges in the workplace. However, she has an incredible work ethic and overcomes them with ease by taking on additional tasks to make the department run smoothly.

Since joining the team two years ago, she has also bridged the gap between departments. By relying on reading lips of Spanish speakers, Weendy has created a great relationship not just with the culinary team that she works closely with, but also with all departments.