

LODGING

Passion, Grit, and Growth: One Leader's Hospitality Journey

Kristie Rasheed, Vice President of Operations, Olympia Hospitality

By **LODGING Staff** - March 23, 2026

What initially inspired you to get into the hospitality business?

When I was growing up, my favorite moments were always tied to travel, whether it was with family, traveling with friends for sports, or simply a fun vacation. When I started college at the University of South Carolina as an undecided freshman, I explored several paths, including economics, teaching, and business.

It all seemed to click when I was introduced to the School of Hotel, Restaurant, and Tourism Management. The chance to study and fully immerse myself in one of my greatest passions made the decision easy. I was fortunate to learn from exceptional industry experts and gain meaningful hands-on experience while I studied. Today, I love having opportunities to give back to hospitality programs that do the same for other budding professionals and connect with many of those who helped shape my path. Go Gamecocks!



Kristie Rasheed

Who were some of your mentors or role models, male or female, and what were their most valuable lessons?

Early in my career, I was fortunate to work alongside exceptional leaders, all people who believed in me more than I believed in myself. Each invested the time to teach me and trusted me with increasingly complex opportunities. At 22, I joined Wild Dunes Resort in Charleston, South Carolina, as reservations manager, where I spent 12 years expanding my role into revenue optimization and resort development.

At the time, the resort was led by Managing Director Terri Haack. Her accomplishments paved the way for so many women in hospitality leadership. Terri instilled in me a deep sense of professionalism and several core mantras that have stuck with me: never give anyone a reason to question your knowledge. Be prepared. Be polished. Be confident. All characteristics and qualities she exemplifies with remarkable grace.

Frank Fredericks and Ken Widmaier taught me the operational discipline and strategic thinking required to run a successful business. They consistently offered opportunity and plenty of responsibility, understanding that meaningful challenges are what drive growth for me.

And finally, my husband, Charly, is my coach and sounding board. This industry is tough and demands balance across team members, guests, owners, and family. As a mental performance coach and elite athlete, he helps me see situations through a humanistic lens. I appreciate his support in both strategy and goals, providing clarity and confidence to call an audible when needed.

Can you share a few of your career highlights?

Navigating uncertainty with steadiness and focus has shaped both my leadership style and my perspective. Throughout my career, one of my proudest accomplishments has been remaining optimistic, resilient, and gritty during the most challenging economic circumstances, all while continuing to motivate teams to perform at their best under pressure.

Another highlight has been hiring, mentoring, and developing individuals who continue to excel in the hospitality industry. I feel incredibly fortunate to watch so many talented professionals grow into leadership roles of their own.

Today, serving in my current role leading operations for more than 40 hotels at Olympia Hospitality represents the culmination of 25 years of hard work, continuous learning, and dedication. This opportunity has opened new adventures for my family, expanded my professional network, and deepened my love for hospitality and travel.

In your opinion, how did the lodging industry perform in 2025 in terms of getting women into leadership positions?

Women continue to represent the majority of the lodging workforce, yet there is still meaningful work to be done regarding representation at the leadership level. That said, each year we are seeing progress, with more women stepping into senior roles and gradually shifting the statistics in the right direction.

It is encouraging to see so many companies increasingly recognize that successful hospitality leaders must be resilient, creative, and possess a high degree of emotional intelligence, qualities that many women consistently bring to the table. The momentum is there, but continued focus and intentional development will be key to sustaining it.

What's your outlook for 2026 and beyond with regard to diversity and inclusion within hospitality?

Awareness is the first step in building a meaningful and effective DEI roadmap. While women remain underrepresented in executive and board roles, I see tangible momentum building across the hospitality industry. Professional networks, mentorship programs, and clearly defined leadership pathways for women are expanding, with initiatives such as executive coaching, mentorship cohorts, and global networking forums gaining traction.

I'm optimistic that these efforts will continue to accelerate, creating more equitable access to leadership opportunities in 2026 and beyond.

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