

Mount Nelson adopts 5-star jobs strategy

BY SARAH-JANE BOSCH

THE WORLD'S biggest sporting event is now less than two years away for South Africa and the Cape Town tourism industry is gearing up towards what is set to be its busiest season ever.

An estimated three million tourists are expected to visit the country during the tournament – many for the first time – and the hospitality industry is hoping to put on a show that will entice many of them to return in the future. This is one of the key ways to ensure that the Fifa World Cup leaves a lasting legacy and continues to benefit the economy long after the final whistle has blown.

By the same token, a bad experience could create negative publicity worldwide and hamper the industry's future growth, so it is vital that each visitor's stay is a first-class experience.

Training is to play a major part in achieving that goal and many hotels are preparing staff development programmes to ensure their service meets the highest standards come tournament time.

Susan Willmore, training manager at the Mount Nelson Hotel, says although the hotel hopes to attract a more varied clientele during the tournament, it is still focusing on its core customer-base, many of whom are regular visitors.

"We continually work towards empowering staff to host visitors as they would do in their own homes," says Willmore.

"This service-focus is paying



GRAND OLD LADY: Hospitality industry leaders like the Mount Nelson are training staff in preparation for 2010

real dividends and the lesson can be applied at every level of the market, despite the challenges of high staff turnover and the mix of permanent and contract workers in this industry."

Willmore says the Mount Nelson has been successful at overcoming

these problems by encouraging internal promotion and staff development. Training programmes play an integral role in the success of this HR policy and take place across all levels of the business.

"To meet our service excellence objectives training takes place at

the hotel at least once a month," she says. "One of our most recent programmes was for junior or supervisory levels of management – crucial tiers that often don't get the training they require."

"Our policy of internal promotion means that very often super-

visors are not adequately trained to fulfil their new role, even though they understand the work that they supervise very well," says Willmore. "Moving from a position of waiter to supervisor requires a new way of thinking."

This year, Willmore decided to facilitate this mindshift with a customised programme from corporate training company Learn to Lead. Louise Hullock, programme director at Learn to Lead, says the company focuses on experiential learning.

Learn to Lead designed a four module programme to teach participants how to manage themselves, lead others successfully, solve problems and think strategically – skills that are crucial for effective management at this level.

Willmore says: "We really wanted staff to understand that supervisory positions come with a great deal of responsibility and they are held accountable for their own actions and those of their team."

Five of the newly trained supervisors have been promoted since the programme.

Hullock maintains that there is a greater level of commitment when staff realise their actions are important and have an impact on the company as a whole.

"Training is often needed to get new managers or staff to understand that the decisions they make every day are important to the business as a whole. This big-picture thinking often results in more motivated and inspired workers."



Mount Nelson adopts 5-star jobs strategy