

Former car valet finds himself in the driver's seat for Lone Star Court hotel

BY HELEN ANDERS - AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Ten years ago, Marcus Latner earned a living valet-parking people's cars at San Antonio's Hotel Valencia Riverwalk, dashing around at warp speed in 100-degree heat, schlepping suitcases and smiling, smiling, smiling.

By summer's end, he'll be running the show as general manager of the Lone Star Court Hotel, the Valencia Group's new hotel at the Domain. He's smiling, smiling, smiling — and sweating less than in the valet days.



"I'm excited," says the University of Texas graduate. "I always wanted to get back to Austin."

What he didn't expect was that he'd be coming back in the hotel business. After earning a master's degree in business communication from Monmouth University in New Jersey, he was eager to get a

job in the magazine business. He had trouble finding a job, though, so when a friend told him the Valencia needed car valets — what the heck? — he signed on.

"I never really thought about the hospitality" as a career, he says. "But I like working with people. It's something different every day. Every person has some sort of entertaining quality."

Many hoteliers would put that more bluntly, but clearly Latner made the decision early on to consider hotel guests intriguing rather than annoying as he moved up the ranks from front desk to night manager to conference services manager to assistant housekeeper manager to front office manager, the title he currently holds at Valencia Group's Houston property, the Hotel Sorella Citycentre.

His front desk days, he says, convinced him the hotel business was right for him.

“The things I was learning were things I could take anywhere,” such as problem solving and time management, he says.

The job that kept him hopping the most, he says, was housekeeping, managing a staff of 25 people.

“You’re running around the whole day,” he says. Housekeeping is a bit of a treasure hunt for left-behind items. “You have to look under the beds, behind the couch cushions, everywhere.”

A personal highlight, he says, was a weekend when, as conference services manager, he found himself wrangling a hotel full of stars for the local premiere of “The Alamo.” Every actor wanted a suite, but the hotel had only four suites.

“I had this idea of taking two rooms that connect and making them suites,” he says. “I rented furniture and set everything up. I got to go to the premiere, and I felt like a star.”

He’ll have achieved hospitality star status with the August opening of Lone Star Court — an upscale hotel with Texas and Austin touches such as Hill Country décor, live music and food trailers.

“I’m looking forward to it,” he says. “And my friends are excited I’ll be in Austin. They all want to come visit.”