

RIT students create a ‘missing link’ for the world’s hospitality industry

BY JOHN FOLLACO, July 17, 2008 —

Three RIT graduates from the class of 2008 have transformed a key portion of how Rochester-area hotels do business—and they’re looking to expand their impact across the country.

Breana Sniezek, Chris Geiss and Marc Baumbach have teamed to create a Web site, HotelProxy.com, which revolutionizes the way hotels communicate with one another.

Hotels have traditionally relied on phone calls as its primary method of communication, meaning each hotel must spend hours on the phone to ascertain rate and availability information from other hotels within their market.

Sniezek, who graduated with a degree in hotel and resort management, has worked at various Rochester-area hotels during her time at RIT.

“One night we were all talking, and Chris and Marc asked me what part of my job I disliked the most,” Sniezek says. “I thought about it for a minute, and then I immediately said the ‘call-around’ system. I hated having to walk away from customers to answer the phone.”

Geiss and Baumbach thought the problem sounded easy to solve. They spent two straight weeks, working 60 hours a week, developing HotelProxy.com. Meanwhile, Sniezek conducted a feasibility study as part of her senior project, which is a requirement for all graduates in the School of Hospitality and Service Management. Then the trio presented its beta Web version of Hotel Proxy to the Rochester Hotel Association. Soon, more than 30 hotels signed up for the service.

Hospitality and Service Management professor David Crumb, who has served as an advisor to the group, thinks Hotel Proxy will fill a void in the hospitality industry.

“It’s a perfect case of high-tech and high touch coming together and coming up with something useful,” Crumb says. “It’s



Photo by A. Sue Weisler | photographer

From left, RIT School of Hospitality and Service Management professor David Crumb, software engineering students Marc Baumbach and Chris Geiss, hospitality student Breana Sniezek and Courtyard by Marriot General Manager Jeff Shutt have been instrumental in the success of Hotel Proxy. Baumbach, Geiss and Sniezek developed the program.

simple, it's needed and it's working. They've really done their craft well.”

Jeff Schutt, an alumnus of the School of Hospitality and Service Management and the general manager of the Greece Courtyard by Marriott, has been one of Hotel Proxy's biggest advocates.

“We've got one person at our front desk, checking people in, checking people out, and completing various other tasks. Before, we'd be getting more than 20 calls a day from other hotels inquiring about our rates and availability. We'd have to stop what we were doing to answer that call,” Schutt says. “Hotel Proxy has really got rid of those annoying phone calls.”

Geiss says the group has received similar feedback from other users.

“We recently completed a survey of all our users and the results were very positive,” he says. “One woman said we need to get all hotels to use Hotel Proxy.”

Geiss and Baumbach have accepted software engineering positions with IBM in Raleigh, N.C. Therefore, the group hopes to begin rolling out Hotel Proxy there, next. Soon, they hope to take Hotel Proxy national.

Snizek will pursue her master's degree in business administration at RIT's Saunders College of Business.