

BUILDING A TEAM FOR RUBY PRINCESS

Passenger Services Director Dirk Brand discusses how Princess made the crew for its new ship into a team.

by
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When Ruby Princess went into service in early November 2008, she was met by positive reviews by the media and by outstanding ratings and comments by passengers. A few weeks later, this writer was on Ruby's fourth cruise and there were none of the service or technical problems one normally associates with a new ship. Indeed, it seemed like a ship that had been in service for several months manned by a veteran crew.

I asked Dirk Brand, Passenger Services Director of Ruby Princess, how Princess Cruises had managed to bring this about. Mr. Brand, a native of Germany who now resides in Spain, previously headed the hotel department on Cunard's Queen Mary 2 as well as the hotel departments of Princess' Grand Princess, Coral Princess, Diamond Princess and Caribbean Princess.

The process began by assembling a crew. While "there are new people on the ship to get some fresh blood, some new ideas," Princess took a large number of people who had had experienced bringing out new ships. In addition, they brought in a substantial number of people who had worked on the crews of Ruby Princess' close sister ships Crown Princess and Emerald Princess as well as the highly-rated Caribbean Princess. "They came with experience in the large

ships, Super Grand-class vessels. They know how the operation works here although we have implemented quite a few new service initiatives here on this ship as well."

"They choose a lot of strong key players that they knew would make it successful. A brand new ship with a lot of new concepts is a lot of responsibility and there are a lot of tasks for those people. We wanted to make sure that we started off on the right foot."

About two weeks before the ship was scheduled to leave the shipyard in Italy where she was being built, the crew started to move onboard. At that point, the ship was substantially complete as a vessel but it was up to the crew to move the furnishing onboard and make her into a place where someone would to spend their vacation. Brand believes that it was during this period that the crew started to come together as a team rather than a conglomeration of a number of disparate groups (e.g., Emerald veterans, Crown veterans and new people).

"It starts in the shipyard. If you build the ship, it is like it becomes your baby and it really bonds a team. We did a lot of crew motivation. The corporate office organized a filming of the [crew in the] shipyard called 'We are Ruby Princess.' We did a little ceremo-

ny for the crew, a little cocktail party event, some presents. For the inaugural, we gave them a backpack with 'Ruby Princess' on it and a tee shirt with 'Ruby Princess Inaugural Team' as a thank you for the launch and set up." In addition, the crew members received a copy of a group photograph of the ship's company taken on the open decks

Each individual crew member received a certificate of recognition from the ship's master and from Brand in "recognition of the hard work of launching the ship and to say thank you for their amazing work." It was an individual certificate so that the crewmember could include it in his or her personnel file or in their CV. "Those are the little things, trying to form the team and make them proud of the product and to have them involved."

"I am a great believer that the way you treat the crew is the way the crew is going to treat our guests. If they are happy on the ship, they will make a happy customer." Accordingly, "we have a crew deck forward with Jacuzzis and pools. We have separate rooms for the crew -- crew messes, crew bars, a conference room, an Internet room, a training room where they can do training and studying, we have a gym, a disco. We do a lot of crew activities as well -- crew tours, crew events, crew shows."

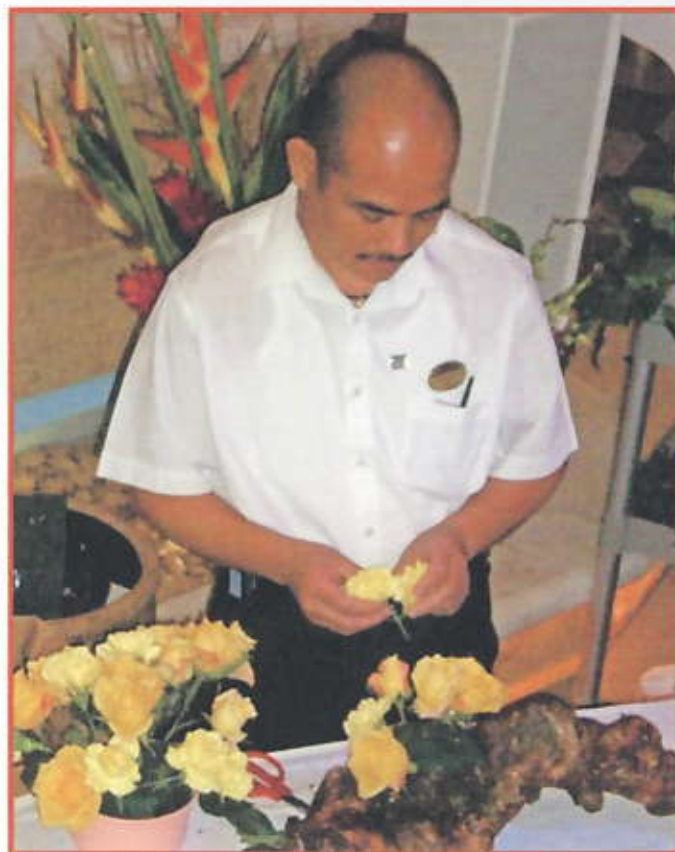
Beyond these tangible rewards, Brand also believes that the fact that officers, managers, and crew all had to pitch in to finish the ship, helped to bond the team. "It doesn't matter how many stripes you have, in the shipyard, everybody helps together. I pushed and lifted palettes or boxes, picked things up and helped with things. If this comes from the senior management, it shows a lot of respect for the team and it bonds and makes a happy family. It doesn't matter who you are at the top of the team, motivate them, say thank you."

"On this ship, we have a very good management team which is relaxed. We let the good and strong people do their job. We don't have to be all the time on their backs or looking over their shoulder. We are not afraid to be hands on and help the person rather than to poke him on his shoulder and say: 'Hey, why didn't you do this' rather than say: "How can I help you?" If the crew feels that it is a happy smiling crew and a relaxed team. There has to be the right balance of assisting, monitoring, giving positive recognition. It



Above: Ruby Princess Passenger Services Director Dirk Brand.

Below: A crew member demonstrates how to arrange flowers..



works. The positive feedback comes back. What you give comes back to you. I live it everyday and I believe in that. My team is managing the same way."

Ruby Princess was delivered to Princess in Italy and thus she had to cross the Atlantic before her maiden voyage out of Florida to the Caribbean. The crossing was made without passengers and so this time was used to train the crew. As part of this, Brand opened the ship's restaurants, including the specialty restaurants, the bars and lounges to the ship's officers and crew. The production shows were performed in the theater and movies were shown in the outdoor Movies Under The Stars. The spa and the Sanctuary adults-only retreat area were also opened to the crew during this voyage. This accomplished three things:

First, "the crew in the outlets, [were able to] train, cook, exercise and practice and so we [were able to] find out before customers came on the ship if it all was working well. If you wait until the day the [first] cruise starts, you will have a lot of problems and glitches."

Second, "the crew and the officers became familiar with the ship so they know what is where, they know the product. They had a taste of the experience so they can recommend it to the guests. They are knowledgeable about the locations, of what it costs, what is included."

Third, it was "a thank you for their good hard work. As a result, they own the product more. They get proud of it."

Following the crossing, "the ship came out it was successful, we received outstanding comments from the corporate guests we had onboard, from the press, from the media. It was fantastic from day one. We had great reviews and really outstanding scores with regard to passenger satisfaction and crew attitude."

"We started off really, really good without any problems or issues - - seamless, very smooth. But we are constantly reviewing based on guest feedback - - if we can improve, if we can learn, if we need to make something different. We are learning day to day."



Above: Forward on Ruby Princess is a pool and two hot tubs for the exclusive use of the crew.