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Well-traveled Mish finds home in city

PROFILE

By Bob Gary
Jr.

Staff Writer

Just short of earning his bachelor's degree more than 20 years ago, Bill Mish changed a lot more than his major.

"I went to college to be a forester and wound up spending 22 years in the hotel industry," said Mr. Mish, who's set in January to become president of the Chattanooga Hotel and Lodging Association.

Mr. Mish, 43, said that in 1981, with his degree in sight, he joined several of his Grand Valley (Mich.) State University friends for a trip to Arizona. He said one of his buddies told the group they all were set with nice-paying jobs busing tables at an exclusive resort.

"So a bunch of us loaded into a '67 Cutlass and drove from Michigan to Arizona," Mr. Mish said. "It seemed that every 300 miles or so, the dollar amount (of the jobs) went down. When we got there, it turned out we didn't even have the jobs." Mr. Mish said the man he and his friends were expecting to work for wound up hiring them when he learned they were from Michigan, as he was. Mr. Mish's friends left after a season, but he stayed seven years.

He said while managing various hotels in California, he first started to hear about Chattanooga. His brother, Chattanoogaan Vince Mish, would tell him about the Tennessee Aquarium.

"I thought, 'Here are all these convention centers adding on just to book gun and knife shows, and here's Chattanooga building an aquarium with private money,'" he said. "I thought it was fascinating." Mr. Mish said he took a job in Biloxi, Miss., in 1994, and traveled to Chattanooga occasionally to see his brother. He said he met his future wife, Cheryl, on one of those trips.

In January 2002, he said, he came to Chattanooga to marry and settle down. His job search brought him to Mitch Patel of the Vision Hospitality Group, who hired him in March to run the group's Homewood Suites at Hamilton Place property.

"I've really been impressed with Chattanooga," Mr. Mish said. "You go into the loneliest gas station in the middle of nowhere, and the person behind the counter is a pleasure to deal with.

"It's so warm and friendly, it just took me away," he said.

Mr. Mish is set to succeed Jim Bambrey, his counterpart at the Choo-Choo Holiday Inn, as head of the Chattanooga Hotel and Lodging Association.

Bob Doak, president of the Chattanooga Area Convention and

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Visitors Bureau, said Mr. Mish is up to the task.

"He's an experienced hotelier and a smart, organized guy," said Mr. Doak, a former association president. Mr. Doak gave Mr. Mish credit for pushing the federal General Services Administration to raise the per diem rate for federal employees staying in Chattanooga from \$55 per night to \$84 per night.

"We'll now go out and chase those (government) groups, which never made sense before," Mr. Doak said. "It will bring more people to town."

Mr. Mish, an avid golfer and fisherman, said his goals for the association include having more and better-informed members.

"We have about 50 hotels, but we have the potential to have about 100 in the association," he said.

"We'll also have people in our meetings to talk about things like technology and wireless. The small (hotel) owner doesn't have the ability to learn all those things because they don't have somebody like Hilton behind them like we do," he said.

E-mail Bob Gary at bgary@timesfreepress.com **Personal glance**

Name:

Bill Mish **Age:**

43 **Education:**

Attended Grand Valley (Mich.) State University **Career:**

The Wigwam resort in Arizona, 1981-87 ; managed properties in California 1987-94, managed properties in Mississippi 1994-2002, joined Vision Hospitality Group in Chattanooga in March 2002.

Personal:

Mr. Mish lives in East Brainerd with his wife, Cheryl; their 3-month old son, Garrett, and Mrs. Mish's sons, Austin and Cody Hammond.

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