

# CHECK IN

BOSTON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF HOSPITALITY ADMINISTRATION

FALL 2002

## Marketing Marvel Irma Mann

By Jean Hennelly Keith

Irma Mann stays ahead of the curve. In 1975 she became the first woman vice president of a publicly held hotel company. As senior vice president of Sonesta International Hotels Corporation, she ran advertising, public relations, and marketing for this major chain in the United States, Europe, Bermuda, and the Middle East for nearly a decade. In 1984 she founded her own company, Irma S. Mann, Strategic Marketing, Inc.

(ISM), a full-service international advertising, marketing, and communications business, with numerous clients in the hospitality and travel industry, including Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, the Islands of the Bahamas, and Foxwoods Resort Casino, as well as others outside of hospitality, such as Tiffany & Co., Cartier, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, and Harvard Medical School.

As its CEO, Mann developed ISM into the largest woman-owned marketing company in New England. When she sold it in 1999, it had grown from three to one hundred employees and had reached annual sales exceeding \$85 million. Now as president of IRMA, Inc., her new company, she applies her marketing expertise to hospitality, destinations, and real estate enterprises while branching out to new realms: biomedical research, high tech, and education. She's eager to market the results of cutting-edge research and development: "There are scientific advances taking place right in front of our eyes that can save people's lives," she says.

Her ability to break through gender barriers in business Mann attributes to her ambition, the encouragement she received from her boss at Sonesta, then-president Paul Sonnabend, and her extreme preparedness. "I try to do more than is expected, and I seem to have an understanding of how to drill down into complicated issues and arrive at basic truths," Mann says. And, she adds emphatically, "I'm very comfortable with power." High energy also helps Mann stay in the lead. The petite, physically fit executive begins her day on the tennis court early before she heads to her office in the financial district with a majestic view of Boston Harbor. There she orchestrates projects for a wide mix of clients, including Duke University, Rowes

*Continued inside*

### INSIDE

Greetings from the Dean

Making Guests Happy

A Love of Food and Service

Alum Notes

A Taste of the Grape



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Rooting for the home team: New York City alums at the Yankees-Red Sox game at Yankee Stadium on September 4. PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY OF ANTHONY BARBUTO

## AUCTION

As we go to press, the Boston University School of Hospitality Administration is planning to host a benefit auction and reception at the Omni Parker House in Boston on November 14 to honor the memory of Lisa Frost (SHA'01, COM'01) and Heather Ho (CGS'89, SHA'92), who lost their lives in the September 11 tragedy. Proceeds from the event will go toward the creation of a memorial for Lisa and Heather and the Lisa Frost Memorial Scholarship. Please look in the next edition of *Check-In* for coverage and photos from the event.

## CONNECTING SHA'S NEW YORK ALUMS AND STUDENTS



The NYC SHA Alumni Board has been created to foster unity among SHA alums and students from the New York metro area. The Alumni Board plans to develop a strong networking program between alums and students, as well as an alum mentorship program for students. The Board encourages all SHA alums in the New York City metro area to become active members of the School community through participation in the Alumni Association.

The Board hosted a happy hour networking event at the Turtle Bay Grille in October. Social outings and fundraising activities are among other suggestions for upcoming events. In addition, the NYC Alumni Association is participating in the Boston SHA Alumni Association's planned reception and auction on November 14 at the Omni Parker House (see Auction box for more details).

If you are interested in becoming involved with the NYC SHA Alumni Association, please e-mail Amanda Wolfe at [wolfea@citi.com](mailto:wolfea@citi.com). Your name will be added to an e-mail list and information on upcoming SHA events will be sent to you.

## Notes

**David Waronker** (CGS'82, SHA'84) of Celebration, Fla., lives with his wife, Ruth, and four children, Ryan, Kyle, Hayley, and Kayla. His business, CBD Development Group, based in New Jersey, develops residential housing throughout New Jersey, eastern Pennsylvania, and south, central, and southwestern Florida.

**Mark Siegel** (SHA'96) of Johnston, R.I., married Michelle Mercier in July 1999. Mark and Michelle own two Jersey Mike's Subs franchises and have plans to open three more. Mark would love to hear from any former classmates and friends at [mich.mar@att.net](mailto:mich.mar@att.net).

**Amy Thomas** (SHA'99) of New York, N.Y., is back to work at a Marriott hotel in New York after spending about a year working on a special project at Marriott headquarters in Washington, D.C. E-mail her at [thomasamy@yahoo.com](mailto:thomasamy@yahoo.com).

**Evan Lau Sarkis** (SHA'00) of London, England, married Walid Sarkis on August 18, 2001, in Beaulieu, a town in the South of France. She looks forward to living in Boston again someday. E-mail Evan at [evanlau@aol.com](mailto:evanlau@aol.com).

**Roger Wong** (SHA'01) of Boulder, Colo., is a consultant for HVS International, a global hospitality consulting firm. Roger extends a message to **Lisa Frost** (SHA'01, COM'01), who died September 11 on United Airlines flight 175, from all who were touched by her warmth and love: "We miss you, and our love will be with you always." Roger would love to hear from BU friends, especially from SHA, and to meet with any BU alumni in the Denver and Boulder area. E-mail him at [Roger\\_K\\_Wong@hotmail.com](mailto:Roger_K_Wong@hotmail.com).



Marcus Ong ('99) enjoys sampling a German Riesling at SHA's Rieslings of the World wine tasting in New York last spring.

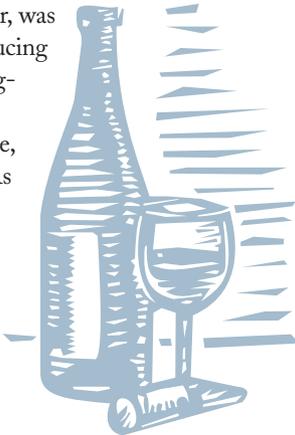
PHOTOGRAPH: ANTHONY BARBUTO

# A Taste of the Grape

By Dale Chick

Last May, the Boston University NYC SHA Alumni Board held one of my favorite sports events: wine tasting. The challenge was to taste eighteen wines in two and a half hours and still learn something about our subject: Rieslings of the World. We could not have asked for finer surroundings for this rousing event. The Mark Hotel, one of New York City's finest boutique hotels, graciously provided us with a wonderful setting to swirl, sniff, and debate such subtleties as the difference between a German Spätlese and a French Vendage Tardive. The contending wines ranged in age from twenty-five to about sixty-five years.

Richard Dean, the Mark Hotel's master sommelier, was an excellent host, introducing us to the various Riesling-producing regions in Germany, Austria, France, and the United States. As our spirited contest progressed, pronouncing such terms as Trockenbeerenauslese may have grown more challenging, but the contest ended in a tie. Or did the Mosel really win?



## ALUMNI TO WATCH

**George Poll** (CGS '82, SHA'85) owns several restaurants, including Bryant & Cooper, which was recently rated the number one steak house on Long Island by *The New York Times* and was featured on the cover of the 2003 *Great Restaurants of Long Island* magazine.

**Valerie Hayman Sklar** (SHA'87) is president of Corporate Specialties, a worldwide consultant and supplier of corporate products located in Troy, Mich.

**James Apteker** (SHA'88) owns two exclusive function facilities, Veronique Ballroom and Longwood Catering in Brookline, Mass. He is the first recipient of the SHA Alumni Award for Distinguished Service, in 2000; president of the SHA Alumni Association; and a SHA Advisory Board member.

**Scott Cutaneo** (SHA'89) is the award-winning chef-owner of Le Petit Chateau in Bernardsville, N.J. He has worked in some of the best kitchens stateside and abroad. Le Petit Chateau has received many awards, including the AAA Four-Diamond Award. His White Truffle Risotto with Porcinis and White Truffles was featured in the October 2001 *Wine Enthusiast* and received a *Wine Spectator's* Best of Award of Excellence in 2000 and 2001.

**Gil Forer** (SHA'91, GSM'94) is a partner with Ernst & Young and global leader of its Venture Capital Advisory Group. After living in Israel for five years, he and his wife, **Kira Rukin-Forer** (SHA'91), now reside in Rye, N.Y., with their two children, Reni and Kobi.

**Jeffrey Selden** (SHA'91) is the executive director of catering at the New York Palace, one of New York City's finest hotels.

**Geoff Gardner** (SHA'94) is the chef-owner of Sel de la Terre in Boston, Mass. He was formerly the sous-chef at Boston's elegant L'Espalier.

*If you are doing something special and would like your colleagues to know about it, please contact Anthony Barbuto at [abarbuto@bu.edu](mailto:abarbuto@bu.edu) or 617-353-2976.*

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PHOTOGRAPH: LEN RUBENSTEIN

# From the Dean

Dear Friends:

This fall we welcomed fifty-eight freshmen and thirty-five transfer students (thirty-one from within the University and four external transfers), totaling ninety-three new students — the largest class ever. Academically, they also were the most qualified students to enroll at SHA. In fact, SHA was one of only two schools at the University this year that increased enrollments and academic qualifications!

We have begun fundraising to renovate space for a new home for SHA to accommodate our increased needs and to create a more fitting environment to showcase our program. We are well into the planning stage of the multimillion-dollar campaign, concentrating on leadership gifts from Advisory Board members, corporations, and foundations. I will keep you posted on the results and stages of the campaign.

I am pleased with the progress our Alumni Association is making, with the help of Anthony Barbuto, our alumni and development officer. I also would like to note the great efforts of the NYC SHA Alumni Board in creating a strong student-alumni network and well-organized mentorship program. Special thanks to the SHA alumni and friends who planned and organized the reception and auction at the Omni Parker House hotel in downtown Boston on November 14 to benefit a physical memorial to Lisa Frost (SHA'01, COM'01) and Heather Ho (CGS'89, SHA'92) and the Lisa Frost Memorial Scholarship. The event, hosted by a stellar committee, features a list of auction items from more than a hundred local, national, and international supporters.

And finally, we had a wonderful 2002 Commencement. Seventy-one students graduated and thoroughly enjoyed the remarks of our speaker, Wolf Hengst, president of worldwide hotel operations, Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts.

I hope you are well and urge you to continue your support for the School.

Sincerely,

James T. Stamas, Dean

*Irma Mann continued from front page*

Wharf, Charles River Laboratories, Sonesta Hotels, and Hill, Holliday. She is undaunted by the range and complexity of their various products. "My skill is marketing," she says. "It's moving a product or service into the marketplace and understanding what customers think, feel, want, and will buy."

After absorbing a client presentation, she does the research to make sure she knows the market, including its fears. She notes how the country's current malaise is affecting businesses, particularly in the travel industry, and adjusts her marketing strategies accordingly. "People are afraid; they're hunkering down," she says. Safety concerns and economic factors cause people to want to be with their families and friends, which in the travel business translates into "driving to Cape Cod rather than flying to Europe," says Mann.

Influenced by her father, "who made his money in bricks and mortar and never went to college, but gave Brandeis a physics department," Mann highly values education and holds leadership roles at a long list of Boston-area institutions. She is a fellow of Brandeis University, an overseer of Tufts University, vice president of the Boston Center for Adult Education, and chairman emeritus of Emerson College. Her list of awards is equally distinguished and includes the 1999 Hall of Fame Award from the Hospitality

Sales and Marketing Association International, the highest award given in the industry.

An organization she greatly values is the Commonwealth Institute. On its founding Board of Directors, Mann describes Commonwealth's founders as "women about my age who have turned around the role that women play in today's business world. We were pioneers who stood for change, and despite major personal and professional roadblocks, we grew our companies and took our place next to our male colleagues. Knowing how difficult this was, we wanted to help other women and inspire them to grow their own companies as well."

Mann's decade-long association with Boston University's School of Hospitality Administration includes recruiting members of the SHA Advisory Board and teaching. As an adjunct professor, she teaches marketing, using hospitality businesses, like the super-successful Legal Seafood restaurants and Boston's Fairmont Copley Plaza as case studies. She is the enthusiastic chairman of SHA's Advisory Board: "I'm ecstatic that we are on the BU campus in Boston, which offers internships at lots of hotels and restaurants. SHA is a sensation because it has both the attractiveness of Boston and students from all over the world. My mission is to help SHA grow, and I'm delighted to work with a wonderful board and an exceptional dean."

# Making Guests Happy

## RESTAURATEUR ROCCO DISPIRITO GOES OUT OF HIS WAY TO PLEASE CUSTOMERS

By Jean Hennelly Keith

Step by step, Rocco DiSpirito (SHA'90) rose to become the nationally acclaimed young chef and proprietor of Union Pacific, a French-Asian restaurant in New York's fashionable Gramercy Park area. The son of Italian immigrants, he began his ascent at eleven years old, slicing pizza and making Italian ices in a pizzeria in his Queens neighborhood. Each summer while a teenager, he worked in successively more sophisticated kitchens, eventually working in a "real restaurant" in a Long Island inn under a European-trained chef, whose serious training of his young helper once extended to smacking him with a bunch of celery for a mistake.

DiSpirito detailed his sometimes-challenging



PHOTOGRAPH: HENRY LEUTWYLER

journey in a master class for School of Hospitality Administration students last April, describing what it takes to be a good restaurateur. "Chefs are taste-makers today," he says. "You need to be passionate about your work." After graduating from the Culinary Institute of America in 1986, DiSpirito headed to Paris to study classical cooking under Dominique Cécillon at Jardin de Cygne. In Europe, he also learned the importance of focusing on the guest experience, which he has imported to Union Pacific. "Our business is a service business," he emphasized. "You need to pay attention to the subtleties, from the way the hostess says hello to how the check is presented. You need to deliver on all of the levels, all cylinders."

After training in Paris, DiSpirito entered the School of Hospitality Administration to learn how to manage a business. He then polished his training in New York under a series of top chefs; Gray Kunz of Lespinasse, whose synergistic approach to cooking appealed to DiSpirito, became his mentor. Being a chef and an owner are two very different jobs, DiSpirito pointed out to his audience. The chef uses the left brain to create new dishes, write menu descriptions, and decide a restaurant's look and décor. In contrast, the owner uses the right brain, managing a budget, resources, and time. DiSpirito estimated that he spends 30 percent of each day writing and reading spreadsheets, as well as making myriad financial decisions. He emphasized the critical importance of marketing and public relations in the restaurant business, pointing out that in one year alone, 600 new restaurant seats were added on Union Pacific's block. "We had to distinguish ourselves; I had to figure out how to get a bigger share of the market. All of my decisions are informed by the notion: You make people really happy." At Union Pacific, poised and positive wait staff often bring a surprise to diners, from a free appetizer or dessert to a wine being considered.

Not only must DiSpirito balance use of the two sides of his brain, he also must balance his time among multiple other projects aimed at attracting new customers. He has become a media celebrity, with rave reviews in *Gourmet* and *Food & Wine*, and on television as host of *Melting Pot: Mediterranean* and as a frequent guest chef, most notably on *Good Morning, America* and David Letterman's *Late Show*. For each television appearance, he spends many hours rehearsing and preparing recipes to demonstrate before 20 million viewers. He also is writing two cookbooks and researching the prospects for opening an Italian restaurant. He's made a hit at his alma mater too, where he received the Young Alumni Award in October.

DiSpirito's advice to students: "Find out what makes you happy. If you settle for anything that doesn't, you'll complain a lot and you'll feel stuck. You need to be brave to pursue your inner passion and have the courage to dream big dreams."

# A Love of Food and Service

By Cynthia K. Buccini

Food always brought Kiran Pinto's family together. Her father, a native of India who loves to experiment in the kitchen, began giving her culinary pointers when she was a child. "I remember living in our very first house and having this little chef's hat," says Pinto (SHA'03). "We would pull a chair up to the stove, I'd put on the hat, and my dad and I would make eggs." As she got older, Pinto helped out when relatives gathered at her parents' Peoria, Illinois, home to mark birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, and other occasions. "You name it, we were celebrating it," she says. "It was a huge celebration, days in the planning, and it was just something that came second nature to me. I was the kid who helped organize it or made the dessert."

When Pinto decided she would major in culinary arts in college, many of the programs she looked into didn't appear to be academically challenging. BU offered that challenge along with the opportunity to gain valuable experience in the field, and Pinto, who describes SHA as a close-knit family, has excelled. Last year, she received a Scarlet Key Award, which recognizes students who show exceptional leadership in student activities, service to their school, and scholarship. She has been student government president, a teaching assistant, a peer advisor, a resident assistant for the Hospitality House, and a student advisor during summer orientation.

Summer is just as busy as the academic year for Pinto. For example, between her freshman and sophomore years, she put in more than seventy hours a week at Radius, a posh restaurant in downtown Boston. "I worked pastry half the time and front of house the rest of the time, waiting tables or food running," she says. "It was an interesting, extremely dynamic place to work."

This fall, Pinto is completing an internship in London, and then she's off to Sydney for the spring semester. After graduation next May, she may go to work for the Houston's Restaurants chain, which has offered her a spot in its management training program in Napa Valley.

Eventually, Pinto says, she wants to run her own small restaurant, offering intimate dining and, possibly, French cuisine. "I'm a true lover of French food, something you can bite into and say Oh my gosh, that's a carrot, but that's the best carrot I've had in my entire life." And somewhere along the line, she'd like to find a chef who shares her passion for food



Kiran Pinto (SHA'03), in the kitchen at Boston's Radius, would like to run her own restaurant some day. PHOTOGRAPH: DAN COURTER

and its thoughtful preparation. She explains her philosophy this way: "If you're making a stock, which is the base of a lot of sauces and dishes and a huge flavoring item, it's meant to be clear — a beautiful stock is meant to be clear. It's a slow process. It can't be boiled. I've worked in kitchens where they were short on time and they didn't think about it so they just jacked up the heat, and there's no real love for what they're putting out. I have a fundamental love of food and service and restaurants in general, so I'm willing to take that time."

Working in both the kitchen and the front of house at Radius has given Pinto not only broad hands-on experience but also has helped put her career into perspective. "I would like to be the type of owner or manager who can go into the kitchen and say I think we need to change this, maybe this would make things better," she says. "A lot of the time, the front-of-house people aren't educated at all about what's going on in the kitchen, and that's where things often fail, because they're spending too much money on the food, or things aren't moving fast enough. To be able to come in and give my opinion or just have some input could help me immensely." Besides, she adds, "I like to have my hands in everything...and it's very hard because chefs and restaurateurs are very territorial people."

Pinto says that spending time at the stove with her father, preparing and cooking for those big family parties, and even sitting down for dinner every night with her parents, brother, and sister, also helped shaped her goals. "This was just something I found a love for," she says. "And everyone always says you're supposed to do what you love."