

## Mike 'Shiny' Dimond: One of the Great Hotel Sales Impresarios - By David M. Brudney

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I have this great photo hanging on my office wall. It brings such a smile to my face every time I look at it. The smile will be mixed now with the pain of losing a dear friend and colleague and the memories of a 40-year relationship.

The photo was taken of Hyatt's first ever corporate booth at the 1972 ASAE convention in Honolulu. Hyatt was becoming a major player for the first time and was capturing the attention of planners and competitors everywhere.

And there in that booth - - prophetically, no doubt - - is Mike Dimond standing in the center, flanked by four of his Hyatt sales colleagues. We were on a roll and we were having the times of our lives. I remember Mike turning to me and saying, 'Bruds, it doesn't get any better than this, my friend.'

Little did he - - nor we - - realize back then that this was just the beginning for Mike.

Mike Dimond's life and his long, illustrious career in our frenetic hotel sales game came to an end in Colorado this week as suddenly as a large convention's late cancellation or a corporate incentive group booking that falls into your lap without any notice or effort.

Mike - - known universally as 'Shiny' by the legion of meeting and event planners and fellow hoteliers whose respect and relationships he earned and developed - - will best be remembered for the masterful selling jobs he did for two American hotel and resort icons.

Mike was a very dear friend and valued colleague who during his final innings with us became a damn good consultant. I admired his ability to think big while always keeping his feet firmly rooted to the ground. But best of all was the way he could point out our shortcomings in such a way that he had you laughing with and later loving him more.

Much will be written and spoken about my friend Mike in the days and weeks that follow. I will leave it to others to write about all of his many distinguished awards and testimonials. This piece is dedicated to the relationship I enjoyed with him.

Those who were much closer with him over the past three decades will speak about how he and my former Westin colleague Jack Vaughn put the Gaylord Hotel & Convention Center on the map in Nashville.

And testimonials will come forth on how Shiny and his Opryland colleague Steve Bartolin brought new life and wild success back to that storied Colorado resort, The Broadmoor. But that's just part of the story of Mike Dimond.

### **The Holiday Inn room clerk in Dayton, OH**

My memories of Mike go back to a time when his career was just getting started, after Bill Hughes thought a Dayton, OH Holiday Inn room clerk had a future in hotel sales. Hughes dispatched Shiny to join the sales team at what is now the Hyatt Regency Atlanta.

The late Don Pritzker had big dreams back then - - growing a small west coast airport hotel and motel company in the mid-to-late '60s into a major hotel chain with Hyatt Regency hotels in every major metropolitan market, spectacular hotels with great meeting space that would rock the very foundations of Hilton and Sheraton, the only 'big city hotel' established brands at that time.

By 1968 Shiny had moved to the West Coast and was based (temporarily) at what was then the City of Commerce Hyatt House in East Los Angeles. Years later, I thought that Bill Hughes wanted Shiny to experience Hyatt's very humble roots - - especially after completing his Hyatt Regency Atlanta tour. There's not a doubt in my mind that the time Shiny spent selling the City of Commerce Hyatt House helped develop his great selling skills and his lifelong appreciation for the high-end properties he would later represent.

### **That very first impression**

It was during his time in Los Angeles that I got to meet Mike for the very first time. I was a member of Dave Evans' sales team at what was then Western International Hotel's Century Plaza Hotel - - a \$42 million Alcoa development, 750 rooms, a 24,000 square foot ballroom, built on the back lot of 20th Century Fox studios.

We were the talk of the hotel industry and by then had stolen the thunder from the Hyatt in Atlanta, until then the hotel to see and be seen. As the late Brooklyn Dodgers radio voice Red Barber would say, we were 'in high cotton' and 'sitting in the catbird's seat.' Competitors thought us quasi-arrogant. Admittedly, we were a bit 'full of ourselves.'

I remember looking up from my desk one afternoon and seeing Mike Dimond for the first time. Forty years later and I can still picture him - - mid-20s, already balding, confident, poised, enthusiastic and filled with passion. He was a natural, a poster child for making good, memorable sales calls. We were together for only a minute or two, but I knew then intuitively I had met somebody special in hotel sales.

He knocked once and walked right into my office, stuck out his hand and said, 'Hi, Dave, I'm Mike Dimond with Hyatt and just wanted to say hello.' He complimented the hotel, we made some small talk, he handed me his business card, wished me continued success, and then he left.

I looked at his card that read, 'City of Commerce Hyatt House.' I thought, wow, this guy has some real hutzpah, coming in here, making cold calls on the Century Plaza. It was years later that I realized the lessons learned from Mike that day.

Mike was new to L.A. and he must have made up his mind that he needed to 'check us out' and meet the sales team in person. I think Mike had two reasons for calling on us that day: 1) curiosity to see the Century Plaza first hand and 2) to meet and 'measure' the sales team.

I learned also that no matter what property a hotel sales professional is representing, you are first and last representing yourself and if you have pride in yourself, confidence and poise plus a genuine interest in meeting not just potential clients but competitors as well, you have a strong foundation for future success.

By the time I joined Hyatt Mike had opened Hyatt's first ever New York City office. A Trump Tower location it was not. If memory serves me, his office was on the back side of a second floor of an antiquated office building next to or adjoining the original Tudor Hotel on East 42nd. Didn't faze Mike one bit. He went right to work introducing Tri-City and Northeast associations and corporations to all the new properties coming online.

It was 1971 and I had become Director of Sales of what is today the Grand Hyatt San Francisco and my G.M., the late Ed 'Sully' Sullivan, agreed with me that the insurance industry meetings and incentive trip business should be a highly targeted market, what with our new hotel sitting on San Francisco's famed Union Square.

The very first thing I did was contact Mike who by then had already cultivated relationships within the rich and deep northeast insurance company market.

I asked Mike for his help in getting San Francisco some much needed exposure and he called back a few days later with his idea of putting together one of Hyatt's first ever northeast insurance company meeting planner Fam Trips to what was then the Mills Hyatt House in Charleston, SC.

The trip was a huge success and led to several future bookings for my yet-to-open San Francisco hotel. Typically of Mike, he introduced me to the planners as the co-sponsor of the event.

### **Mike takes his act to Nashville and beyond**

Many thought Mike and Jack Vaughn were crazy to think a hotel with 650 rooms and more than 100,000 square feet of meeting space in - - of all places - - Nashville, TN could make it. And did it ever! According to a cover story on Mike in Corporate & Incentive Travel, November 2006, Mike's sales team put more than 600,000 definite group room nights on the books prior to opening its doors in 1977.

While forging new relationships with country music stars Johnny Cash, Minnie Pearl and Grandpa Jones, Mike leveraged the popularity and brand power of Grand Ole Opry and its country music television channel in creating Opryland's highly acclaimed 'Country Christmas' family entertainment show, driving December room nights for decades.

As a result of its success, Gaylord Opryland became a business model for hotel chains that began adding bigger ballrooms, more breakout space and exhibit halls.

After plying his craft in Florida and Las Vegas, Mike reconnected with Steve Bartolin at the fabled Broadmoor in Colorado Springs. It was there that Mike introduced The Broadmoor's 'War on Room Nights' and created events including 'The Bob Hope Christmas TV Special', 'Colorado Christmas,' and its popular 'Weekend of Jazz' programs. Bartolin, a former baseballer himself, said working with Shiny was like working with Hall of Famers Ted Williams and Joe DiMaggio.

### **One of the original hotel sales 'free agents'**

It didn't matter where Mike worked, Doral, Saddlebrook, Boca Raton, Caesars Palace and eventually The Broadmoor. Mike was one of the original hotel sales 'free agents' who created his own brand. He became a 'brand' before the hotel industry knew what branding was all about. He had developed such strong relationships that clients followed him no matter where he worked.

Opryland gave Mike a platform to create his own brand, but Mike's brand transcended Opryland, Gaylord, Boca, Caesars and even later on The Broadmoor.

Mike was bigger than Boca, bigger than Gaylord, even bigger than Vegas. But he never lost touch with his Holiday Inn room clerk roots. He cared as deeply about serving the customer as he did in his philosophy, 'if you market it they will come.'

It's been written that yesterday is a memory, tomorrow is a mystery, and that today is a gift. Mike Dimond was a gift to all of us fortunate to have known him.

Oh, how Mike could light up a room.

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