

How the Hilton Anatole's general manager brings in big groups with big names

Running and maintaining one of Dallas' premier hotels is no easy feat, but Harold Rapoza uses a lifetime of experience to keep the 1,606-room operation humming.

Some of Rapoza's earliest memories are running through hotels in Hawaii where his father served as general manager. As a teenager, Rapoza used his father's connections to work with other hoteliers and learn the ins and outs of the business, from room service and food preparation to taking reservations.



A multimillion-dollar resort pool is next on Harold Rapoza's wish list for the Anatole.

JAKE DEAN

In 1991, Rapoza was recruited by Hilton and shipped to Portland, where he started his career as a front office manager. In the 24 years since, he has worked in Hilton locations around the country and worked his way to the top of hotel management, joining the Anatole four years ago.

*The **Hilton Anatole** was built in 1979 by Dallas real estate giants, the Crow family, who later contracted with Hilton as the hotel's management company. Today, it is one of Hilton's most unique holdings, housing thousands of pieces of Asian art and other artifacts, including slabs of the Berlin Wall. It is also one of Hilton's top 10 earning hotels bringing in more than \$150 million in total revenue in 2014.*

Who are your competitors, and what makes the Anatole more attractive? We compete not just with Dallas, but with other cities, because we are a convention hotel. Locally, our competitors are the Gaylord Texan, the Omni, the Sheraton and the Hyatt. We're the big-box hotels that drive citywide conventions and events.

What we have over our competitors is our meeting space. We have 350,000 square feet of meeting space and it's laid out horizontally, so we can fit three or four smaller groups in the hotel without them being all over each other. Most of our business is done with groups of 400 people or less, which is unusual for a 1,600-room hotel.

How much of the hotel's business is done around conventions? Around 75 percent of our business is convention-related. We bring in corporate groups, associations, sports, military, educational and religious groups. The other 25 percent are transient guests, either business or leisure travelers.

What do you do to bring those events to the Anatole? We have a strong sales team on the property, and we have a strong sales engine nationally with Hilton. Our biggest feeder markets are Washington, D.C. and Chicago, so we have doubled up resources in those areas. We have people who live in those markets to canvas and be there in front of customers. Dallas has this perception that there's not a lot to do here, so showing customers what we have to offer is important to us. Around 60 percent of my time is spent on face-to-face interaction with customers and sales.

How often do you interact with the Crow family as the hotel's owners? They're very involved in the projects for the hotel, anything that has to do with reinvesting capital, redoing the rooms and meeting space, anything we do that's new. As far as the operating component, they really leave it up to Hilton to do the day-to-day. We do have monthly meetings to talk about the revenues and profits, service, sales and strategic action plans.

What big projects is the hotel planning? Our owners are our original owners, and you don't see that in the hospitality industry. There's still a lot of pride and passion in this hotel. They've spent about \$150 million over the past five or six years in upgrades, new restaurants and other projects.

The one piece I think we're missing here is a resort pool, so we're in conversations with a designer and are looking for an architect to build a \$12 million to \$15 million pool in the 7-acre sculpture garden we have on the hotel grounds.

Our pool is undersized right now, and we need to build demand during the summer periods. Our occupancy in Dallas is fairly low in the summer because of the heat, and a pool will drive traffic. We're on track to break ground in October and hopefully will have it open by Memorial Day in 2016.

Harold Rapoza

*General manager of the **Hilton Anatole***

- **Education:** Bachelor's degree in hotel management from Hawaii Pacific University
- **Family:** Wife Michele and three children
- **Ideal vacation spot:** St. John Island in the Virgin Islands
- **Favorite place in the Anatole:** The Gossip Bar for pastries
- **Hobbies:** Tennis, golf, sampling food and wine, traveling