



Caribbean National Team - WINNER – Bahamas (left to right): In photo: Emil Lee, CHTA President; Frank Comito, CHTA CEO; Team Bahamas (Jamal Small, Charon McKenzie, Sheldon Tracey Sweeting, Richmond Fowler II, Marv Cunningham, Crystal Morley); Peter Olsacher, Judge.



Chef of the Year - WINNER Puerto Rico (left to right): Frank Comito, CHTA CEO; Emil Lee, CHTA President; Jonathan Hernandez, Team Puerto Rico, 2015 Caribbean Chef of the Year; Peter Olsacher, Judge.



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and profitability of the industry, and recognizing that it's the primary employment generator of tax revenue for the region. That's not necessarily acknowledged in practice by many governments in the region, and we've worked hard with our counterpart organization, the Caribbean Tourism Organization, which represents government interests in the tourism industry, to provide information and facts about its economic impact. We've worked closely with the World Travel and Tourism Council and groups like Oxford Economics to garner and support the development of the necessary research to show the broad economic impact of tourism in our various jurisdictions in the Caribbean. That's been absolutely necessary because we're faced constantly with issues of high taxation and high costs of doing business in the Caribbean, which have corresponding effects on our rates and our profitability. We have to be on top of that all of the time and work hard to make sure governments are aware of how policies and regulatory matters affect our industry. So, advocacy plays a very key role in everything that we do. We operate under seven guiding strategy objectives and

right in there is advocacy and representation."

You also mentioned research and the dissemination of information as part of the Association's mission. Any recent initiatives in that area?

"We've done research and position papers on the lifting of the U.S. embargo on Cuba and offered some positive and constructive ways in which individual jurisdictions in the region can address the impending changes. We're finalizing an advocacy paper, right now, on the sharing economy – groups like Uber and AirBnB – and how they may be effectively integrated into the industry with standards, regulations, and some fair play on taxation, to not only protect the reputation of the industry, but also to help to develop that subsector of the accommodations sector, as well.

The Zika virus has been in the news lately and it's realistic to think that it will have an impact on travel and tourism in the region. How has the Association responded?

We've been working for the past four weeks on the

Zika virus situation, which has required some advocacy and outreach. It's been a coordinated effort, a partnership effort between the public and private sectors, working in collaboration with the regional umbrella group, called CARPHA, the Caribbean Public Health Agency organization that represents ministries of health throughout the Caribbean. We've been working diligently on education, training, getting the right kind of information out there – mitigation and effective control techniques – and looking at it not only from the hotel and tourism industry's point of view, but looking at it as a broader collaborative response by governments, communities, and our industry in the private sector, in dealing with a matter that, if it's not handled as well as it could, might have broad consequences on our economies and our industry, and, quite frankly, the social health and welfare of the residents of the Caribbean.

Can you talk a little about the nuts and bolts of the Association? Who are your members and are their different tiers of membership?

We're a federation of national hotel and tourism associations, so the region's national hotel and tourism associations are members. We also have over 600 hotel members from the Caribbean and another 400 allied members, both within the Caribbean as well as external partners – tour operators, wholesalers, airlines, people who do business with the tourism industry, even banks and other kinds of financial institutions. We also have what we call partner organizations that we work with like the Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association; the Caribbean and Central American Action, based out of Washington; the Caribbean Council, based out of the United Kingdom; and IATA, the International Air Transport Association. So we have a number of affiliated memberships, which are really reciprocal memberships – there's quite a few of those.

What kind of events do you hold for your members?

"We have four key events throughout the year. We just completed our annual marketing event called Caribbean Travel Marketplace, which was held in the Baha-