



mas and had over a thousand participants. That's the region's premier gathering to do business. We bring suppliers—suppliers being the hotels throughout the region, some of the local tour operators, attractions, and providers - together with buyers, which include, primarily, leading tour operators and wholesalers from around the world, for two days of intense appointments for buying, selling, negotiating, making new contacts, and so on. We have an education component layered in that's very much directed to sales and marketing kinds of training and support, and this year, we also had 14 ministers or heads of tourism in governments throughout the Caribbean join us. So, that's the primary event.

"We also do an event called CHIEF, the Caribbean Hospitality Industry Exchange Forum, which is very much professional development and education-oriented. We started that event last October in Puerto Rico and it was very successful – the feedback was terrific. In that, we have household names from every kind of company imaginable doing workshops and seminars for our people, and a buying element for our allied members with a tradeshow component to it. We'll be

repeating that again, this year, in the same location, the first couple of days in October.

"We also do an event called "Taste of the Caribbean." We've been doing that for over 20 years. It's held in Miami and is a combination of a couple of things, including a competitive culinary event for the chefs. We have chefs from national teams throughout the Caribbean who come together for three days of intense competition for the rights of calling themselves the Caribbean Culinary Team of the Year, the Chef of the Year, the Pastry Chef of the Year, the Bartender of the Year. It follows international standards in judging and there's a range of awards that are offered. Woven around that event are several other related events, showcasing culinary and cultural aspects of the Caribbean. We have education sessions for professional development for chefs, and food and beverage managers, and other personnel in the F & B industry. And we also have a consumer component, where the public's invited, called "Taste of the Islands." It's a Caribbean tapas event with music and festive atmosphere. We have various countries throughout the Caribbean showcasing some of their best, national dishes.

"The fourth signature event that we have is the Caribbean Hotel Investment Conference and Operations Summit that's held in November. That's done primarily by a company called HVS and we, along with the Caribbean Tourism Organization, are host sponsors, as well. Those make up the bulk of our major activities and events."

#### **How else do you communicate with the membership?**

"We probably communicate with them about four or five times a week. We try to balance it so we don't over-communicate, but we have various ways. We do webinars, email, and social media. At our Caribbean Travel Marketplace, we had over nine million social media hits on that event; it was quite exciting to see that kind of engagement."

#### **The Great Recession harmed tourism pretty much everywhere, but particularly in the Caribbean. What does the landscape look like for the industry over the next several years, and how do you see the Association continuing to be a viable voice for the sector?**

"We just completed our first annual 'Industry Performance and Outlook Study.' The findings really showed that we're continuing on an upward path that started about three years ago for the region as an aggregate. Some destinations did okay during the Recession, some struggled quite a bit, and some came out of it earlier than others. Collectively, the region really came out of it about three years ago, and we've seen a good upward trend line. More than half the hotels reported strong to moderate performance in 2015. With increased occupancies and arrivals, most hotels also increased their employment rolls. So there was some robust hiring, last year.

"Also, one of the things that happened during the Recession is we saw a retrenchment in capital expenditures. We're starting to see people coming out of that, and last year, they came out of it quite significantly. So, capital expenditures and investments in hotel properties were up, last year, and are projected to increase in 2016. The profit picture is a little unsettling, yet, in part because of people still struggling. There are a lot of back payments and things that were put on hold. And because of the Recession, we were not able to