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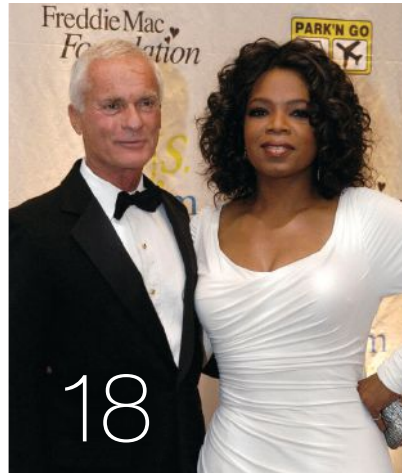
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Rosen Hotels & Resorts' HARRIS ROSEN

Celebrating the hotel company's 45th year and his 80th on the planet, the owner/operator—and philanthropist—embodies a 'hospitality heart'



Harris Rosen [bottom] jumps to it on his 80th birthday at Fort Bragg in North Carolina.

BY STEFANI C. O'CONNOR
@STEFANI_C_

It's largely thought if you're wealthy, you can pretty much do what you want. Take Harris Rosen for example. Each year he insists anyone coming to his birthday bash needs to wear a suit—women included. It's an outdoor affair, so you can ditch the tie, but you'd better have that suit.

That's because you'll be hurtling through the clouds at a silly rate of speed, having jumped out of a plane to follow Rosen, who has been marking his nativity by skydiving every year. Couldn't fit into your jumpsuit this year? Perhaps try for 2020, when Rosen turns 81.

The enthusiastic founder/president/COO of the eponymous Rosen Hotels & Resorts is nothing if not an entrepreneurial risk-taker who, like many successful industry executives, pulled himself up and out of a hardscrabble beginning to become an iconic hotelier, one whose influence has extended, and continues to extend, way beyond hospitality.

And yes, he's wealthy. And yes, he pretty much does what he wants. And yes, you can believe he's gotten a reputation because of it.

But he gives time, guidance, mentorship, expertise and—to the benefit of many—money.

In addition to wrangling eight Florida hotels, including three that bear his name—Rosen Centre, Rosen Plaza and Rosen Shingle Creek—the executive has made a point of spreading the fruits of his labor across a swath of endeavors.

In particular, Rosen supports education and health

with his philanthropy. Almost 30 years ago, he created a self-insuring health-care program for his employees that includes an on-site medical center. Fifteen years ago, he donated 20 acres to the University of Central Florida for the Rosen College of Hospitality Management, plus \$10 million to construct it, and most recently provided a \$2 million scholarship endowment for UCF that was matched by the state.

Among his most well-known projects is the Tangelo Park Pilot Program, an 18-year-old initiative that provides free preschool for neighborhood toddlers and an all-expenses-paid college education—from books to board—for those living in the neighborhood and accepted into qualifying schools; some 350 students have been provided with full scholarships. The scholarship program also extends to associates and their families who work for the hotel company. Rosen has established a similar program in Orlando's Paramore neighborhood and two years ago created three scholarships available to students at Rollins College in Winter Park.

Rosen has donated to and/or fundraised money for myriad causes, and continues to do so, both in and out of the limelight.

ROOTED IN REALITY

Perhaps seeing the potential of those in need stems from his early days on New York City's Lower East Side. Born to Lee and Jack, parents with roots in Austria-Hungary and Russia, Rosen grew up watching his father work hard at The Waldorf-Astoria, where he was a sign painter.

"I inherited, I'm sure, some of his artistic ability," said Rosen, who applied to fine arts colleges in his youth. "But I was intrigued with the hotel business. I worked with Dad on Saturdays ... he would explain the business to me and I thought it sounded like fun."

He asked his Dad if he would mind if he applied to a

hotel school. The pivotal response came back: "No. Not at all."

Rosen attended the Cornell School of Hotel Administration and graduated with a bachelor's degree and, via an ROTC program, as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army, serving in Germany and South Korea.

He began his career back at The Waldorf-Astoria as a file clerk in the personnel department, later becoming a convention salesman, then entering the Hilton Hotels management training program, giving him the opportunity to travel before circling back to the U.S., where he became assistant GM of the Dallas Statler Hotel. While with Hilton, he served in a variety of management roles at properties including the New Yorker, Cape Kennedy Hilton and Pittsburgh Hilton.

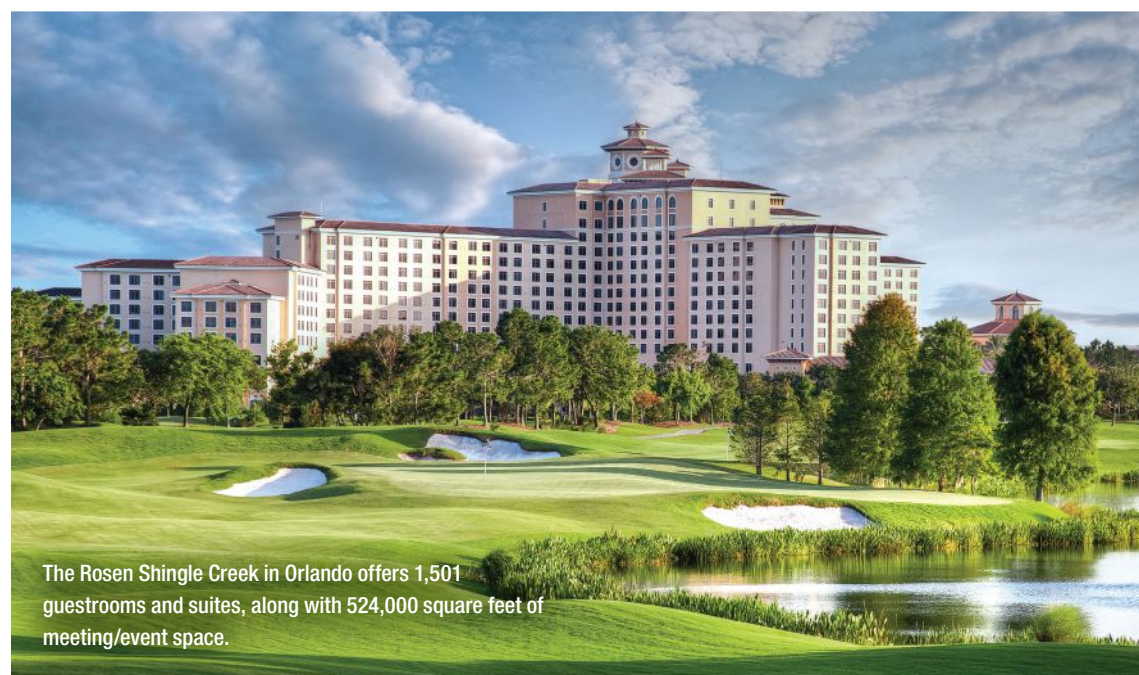
Career moves placed him in Mexico for the Post Co. and California for the Walt Disney Co., working on hotel projects, ultimately landing in Orlando, where he was involved with the Contemporary Resort and Polynesian Village Hotels at Walt Disney World.

The Florida move helped fuel Rosen's destiny. In 1974, at the height of the oil embargo and gas crisis in the U.S., he spotted a Quality Inn on International Drive and decided he would buy the 256-room property, which was in bankruptcy. The thought, coming from someone who readily admits to being "fired three or four times," puts in perspective Rosen's "it-can-be-done" attitude. "I determined the best hope I had to succeed was to have my own little business."

Over the years since then, while accumulating more hotels, a "grander" lifestyle and increasing his largesse, Rosen has held fast to his original office, set up almost five decades ago in the then-Quality Inn. It's filled with the day-to-day agenda, the smiling faces of family and friends peering down from photographs, surrounding him as he works.

Rosen is keenly aware of the importance of the work/life balance and taking time to be with family. Last November, the father of four had to face the loss of his 26-year-old son, Adam, to brain cancer. "The Rosen family will never be the same without him," said the COO.

But in true Rosen form, the family has established the Adam Michael Rosen Foundation. Its goal? To help others afflicted with the disease, additionally delivering the true essence of a hospitality heart. **HM**



The Rosen Shingle Creek in Orlando offers 1,501 guestrooms and suites, along with 524,000 square feet of meeting/event space.

ROSEN HOTELS & RESORTS

Headquarters: Orlando

Structure: Owner/operator

Portfolio: 6,694 guestrooms at eight hotels

Website: www.rosenhoteles.com