

John Ruzic

John Ruzic is a retired hotel and restaurant owner/operator, and formerly an executive for a nationwide hotel chain and several management companies. The motivation to do better was implanted when he was a student at Triton. John witnessed Triton culinary faculty Jens Neilsen earn his master's degree at Florida International University. Neilsen spent time away from his young family to work on his degree at FIU each summer. Bearing witness to that inspired Ruzic to put the pedal to the metal and he and Jens graduated together. John completed that degree in just nine months, while balancing work, being newly married and writing a thesis. The rigorous energy and desire John observed, pushed him to do even more.

By age 27, Ruzic rose to regional VP at Ramada Inns and while being too young to admit what he didn't know, he managed to stay awake more than others, allowing him to catch up on what he didn't know. That learning experience of baptism by fire pushed John into team development. John was constantly asked to take on the harder assignments and tackling those pushed him up the ladder.

Surround yourself with folks who are not only smarter than you, but also those who are just as hungry. That philosophy became the engine for him to not only build his own hotel and restaurants, but also to take on defaulting bank loan properties. Putting those teams together allowed John to have the ultimate reward of winning 35 business and community service awards in a 13-year period. His honors include: Hotel of The Year – North America, Small Business of the Year – Tampa; Citizen of the Year – Temple Terrace; and Hotelier of the Year – State of Florida.

John has served on many business, community, state and international boards including as president of the Owner's Council of Choice Hotels, thereby being the spokesperson for all their franchise flags in North America, over 3,000 hotels. Never one to say no, Tom Olson, the president of the Triton College Foundation, asked John to sit on the Foundation board, too. So now he's back at Triton helping, but never when it snows.

Billy Graham once said "The good lord gave us all two hands, one to take and the other to give. Never EVER forget the latter." In that vein, John and his wife Cynthia have endowed many scholarships and helped with a few buildings. Most recently, they have fully endowed \$50,000 to ensure an annual \$1,000 scholarship in each of the arenas of culinary, restaurant and hotel majors. In their estate planning they have committed another \$200,000. John, along with Tom Olson at our Foundation are working on a project together with a LeRoy Neiman art collection which they hope will boost the kitty significantly.

John, his bride Cynthia and their proud pooch Meatball are retired and live in Naples, Fla., helping Triton raise Foundation money and forever working on their golf game. Knowing John and Cynthia, the Nassau bet is usually quite interesting.