

# CLEANING THEIR ROOMS

Some hotel owners are clearing out the porn channels — even when they have to take a financial hit to do so.

by *Daniel Weiss*



In the heart of Boston, along the famed Freedom Trail, sits an inn worthy of its location. Opened in 1855, the Omni Parker House is the oldest continuously operating hotel in America. As upscale establishments go, it is affluent without being opulent, a stately blend of Puritan thrift and Old World riches.

It was at Parker House that Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was inspired to write his poem *Paul Revere's Ride*, and where Charles Dickens gave his first American reading of *A Christmas Carol*.

Every U.S. president since Ulysses S. Grant has lodged, dined or met there.

In 1999, the Parker House distinguished itself in another way. The owner, Omni Hotels, removed hard-core, pay-per-view (PPV) pornography from all of the hotel's rooms.

The call was made by the chain's new owner, Bob Rowling, a Christian, shortly after he witnessed the depravity firsthand at one of his own hotels.

"I wondered what in the world we were doing as a company giving this kind of option to anybody, particularly

**OUT WITH THE PORN:** The management of Colorado Springs' five-star Broadmoor Hotel followed its conscience and got rid of in-room "adult" movies.

young kids," he said. "It just isn't the right thing to do for us, or really, for anybody."

That decision brought an outpouring of gratitude from the public — Omni received more than 200,000 letters of support — but it costs the company about \$1 million a year in lost revenue and equipment costs, according to Jim Caldwell, chief executive officer.

"We're proud of what we did, because it was the right thing to do," Caldwell told *Citizen*. "On the other hand, it's kind of a sad commentary on our society that this is such a rare thing."

Rare, but not unheard of. The Web site CleanHotels.com lists about 14,000 porn-free hotels, mostly smaller chains. And while even many clean hotels remain reluctant to discuss the issue ("No comment at the inn," December 2006 *Citizen*), those that are up front about their stand are moving others to be similarly bold.

Omni's gutsy decision swayed another lodging executive — Stephen Bartolin Jr., chief executive officer of the five-star Broadmoor Hotel in Colorado Springs.

"Families are a big part of our business. We're working hard to do things that cultivate more to that business," Bartolin told *Citizen*. "Offering adult movie channels goes against what we're trying to accomplish."

That decision also came at great cost: \$50,000 a year to ensure that the 700-room hotel's entertainment provider blocks all hard-core porn.

But Bartolin's just sorry he didn't make the move earlier. "You really do have a choice," he said. "You get so desensitized because everybody has (pornography channels). But at the end of the day, you don't need to have those. And we finally figured that out."

## REVOLTING CONDITIONS

Christians who think porn cannot be uprooted from major hotel chains like Marriott and Hilton should consider what's happened recently in the Land of Uninhibited Sex — Sweden. Hotel workers there reported assaults by male guests who had watched porn on PPV. The government responded by prohibiting all state employees from staying at hotels offering pornographic selections.

Hopes that the U.S. government would take similar action have thus far

been unfulfilled, even though the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 30 years ago in *Miller v. California* that a state could regulate:

- Patently offensive representations or descriptions of ultimate sexual acts, normal or perverted, actual or simulated.
- Patently offensive representations or descriptions of masturbation, excretory functions and lewd exhibition of the genitals.

*"Offering adult movie channels goes against what we're trying to accomplish."*

*Stephen Bartolin Jr.  
Broadmoor Hotel*

According to Vickie Burress, who tracks the hotel industry for Citizens for Community Values (CCV) in Cincinnati, U.S. hotels offer hard-core material that clearly violates obscenity standards.

"We are not talking about soft-core HBO or *Playboy*-type pornography," she told *Citizen*. LodgeNet, the nation's leading supplier of in-room porn, "offers between 25-58 different movies featuring almost every fetish you can imagine."

The content of these films ranges from group sex to sexual violence to graphically homosexual material.

In-room porn is a robust business. In the *Frontline* documentary *American*

*Porn*, industry analyst Dennis McAlpine said, "If you go to a businessman's hotel, you'll see a very high percentage of adult programming. In fact, it probably generates 80 percent of the profits of that system."

With its recent purchase of rival On Command, South Dakota-based LodgeNet is by far the leading provider of in-room porn.

According to its 2006 annual report, LodgeNet earned \$277.4 million from in-room entertainment. Of this, PPV movies accounted for 75 percent of sales, or about \$210 million. An estimated 70 percent of that number, or about \$145 million, came from the sale of hard-core material.

Upon assuming control of On Command's customer base — 832,000 hotel rooms — LodgeNet soon will be pumping porn into nearly 2 million of the estimated 4.9 million hotel rooms in the United States.

## A COMMON PROBLEM

Travel often enough and you start to understand how hotels lure so many guests to pay for hard-core porn.

Many in-room systems are programmed to give guests provocative summaries of the porn movies the moment they push the power button. Many hotels limit the number of free channels to increase the likelihood that a bored and weary traveler will buy a depraved film. Some hotels offer a full minute of free hard-core viewing before guests' credit cards are billed — which, given porn's well-established addictive nature, can be a lot like offering an alcoholic a free whiskey shot.

Even those guests who try to avoid in-room pornography will find the task difficult. Some clerks claim they are unable to turn off the adult selections from the front desk, meaning a traveler must risk exposure from someone else's porn binge.

Burress said it's a common problem.

"Most hotels offer 24-hour porn. You pay one price, and it stays on 24 hours," she said. "Supposedly it shuts off when you check out, but we have had several calls from parents and business travelers who say that as soon as they turned the TV on, the porn came up. It was because the 24-hour porn was ordered."

And it may get much worse. Gregory Clayman, the owner of the live-action company Video Secrets, told *The New York Times* that the time was right for hotels to start broadcasting live sex acts.

## THE CLEAN ALTERNATIVE

With all that porn around, what can people do to avoid it?

To aid conscientious travelers, Citizens for Community Values has developed CleanHotels.com, a searchable — and bookable — travel Web site similar to Expedia or Travelocity.

"We are offering a positive alternative to people who want to stay in a safe environment," Burress said. "Our whole goal in this is to give people an alternative as to where they can stay and to take the money away from the guys that are selling pornography and give it to the good guys."

Launched in 2002, CleanHotels began simply as an online list of the porn-free — or "clean" — hotels in the United States. Since 2005, CleanHotels.com has provided online hotel bookings, drawing from a database of approximately 15,000 porn-free facilities.

Chris Meyer, whose company Tripium worked with CCV to build the CleanHotels Web site, hopes more organizations start thinking about the implications of sending staff to pornographic hotels.

"Do they want their employees staying at hotels with the temptation, and do they want their employees watching porn?" he said. "Is that good business? Is that healthy? If they don't think it is, they should enact policies that require their employees to stay at hotels that don't offer porn."

Even with relatively small numbers, CleanHotels is starting to influence the lodging industry.

"The hotel industry is talking about this," Burress said. "It's a conversation

## WHAT CAN ONE PERSON DO?

- 1) Stay in a clean hotel whenever possible.
- 2) Thank the manager of a clean hotel.
- 3) If a hotel listed on CleanHotels.com offers porn, report it at CleanHotels.com.
- 4) If a hotel without hard-core porn is not listed on CleanHotels.com, report it at the Web site.
- 5) If you stay in a hotel that carries hard-core pornography, express your disappointment to the front desk or manager when you leave. ●

## WHAT CAN CORPORATIONS, NON-PROFITS AND CHURCHES DO?

- 1) Require employees to stay at porn-free hotels whenever possible.
- 2) Stop referring visitors to local hotels that offer hard-core pornography.
- 3) Schedule conventions and large meetings at porn-free hotels — and inform other properties of their lost business. ●

at almost every trade show: "Did you hear about those people who are trying to get us to stop selling our pornography?"

"I think we're making a difference."

Industry insiders say a hotel receives \$1 to \$2 per film, a small amount when compared with the potential loss of guests who choose not to stay at a hotel that's profiting from porn.

"How many times does a hotel have to lose a room for the \$2 they make on a porn movie?" Burress asked. "We will see a huge difference when Christian groups and churches and organizations start booking their conscience."

According to The Broadmoor's Bartolin, people have more power over hotels than they realize.

"Hotels really listen when it comes from their guests. If their guests are telling them this — and it has an impact on their business — they'll listen," he said. "It costs money to recycle, but if enough guests tell hotels they want to see that in places they stay,

hotels will recycle. I think the same thing has application with this decision. I think once guests speak out about their feelings, ultimately, the hotels will take note."

Meyer expects that many Christians will struggle with their consciences.

"Changing behavior is hard to do," he said. "People have got to want to, and people have got to start standing up and saying, 'enough is enough.' You're going to have to sacrifice something."

Burress said any sacrifice is minimal when compared to the costs of family breakdown.

"We would ask anyone traveling this simple question: 'Why would you give your money to pornographers, when you have the opportunity to choose a hotel that does not profit from selling hard-core pornography?'" ●

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