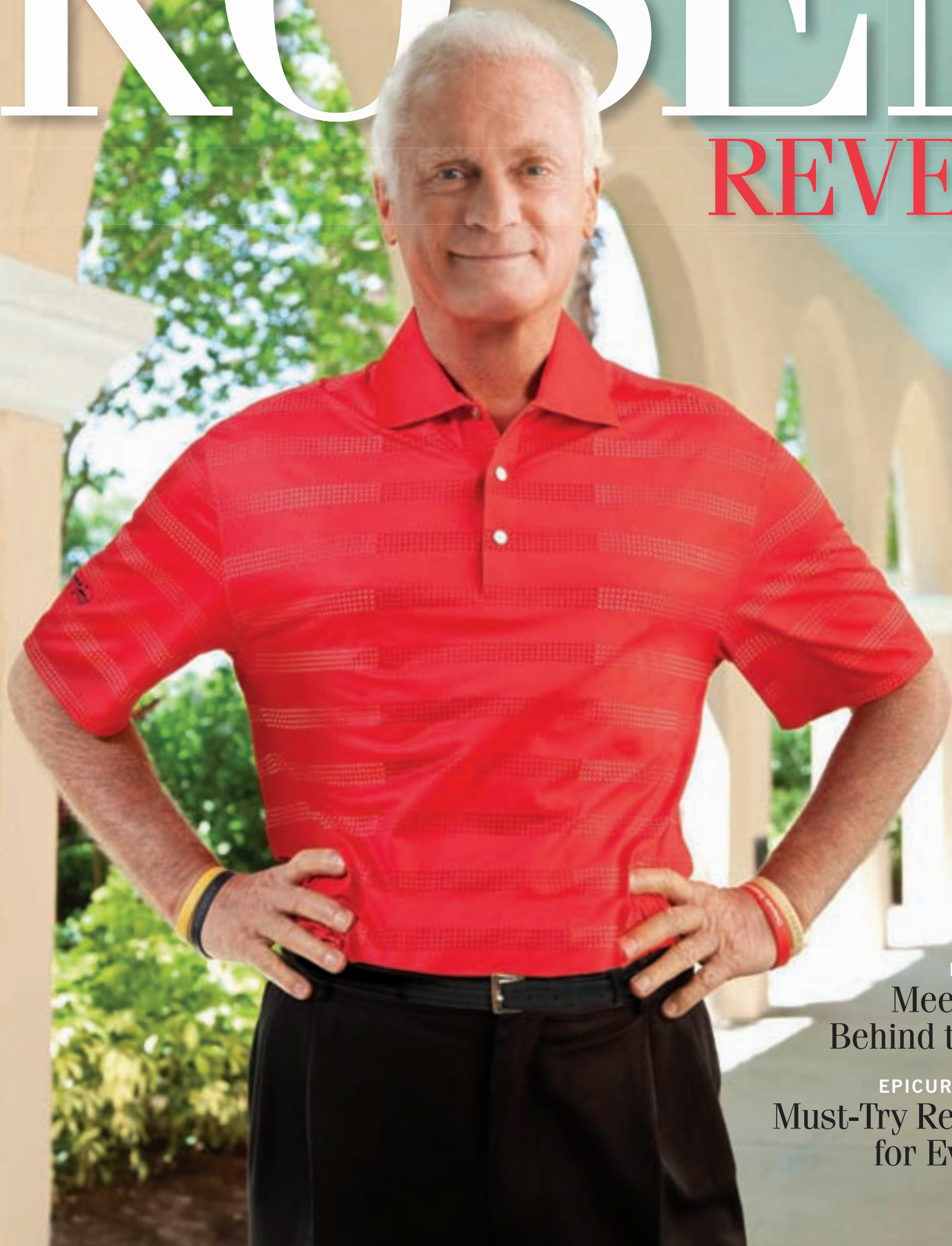


# ROSEN

REVEAL



HARRIS ROSEN

Meet the Man  
Behind the Hotels

EPICUREAN DELIGHTS

Must-Try Restaurants  
for Every Taste

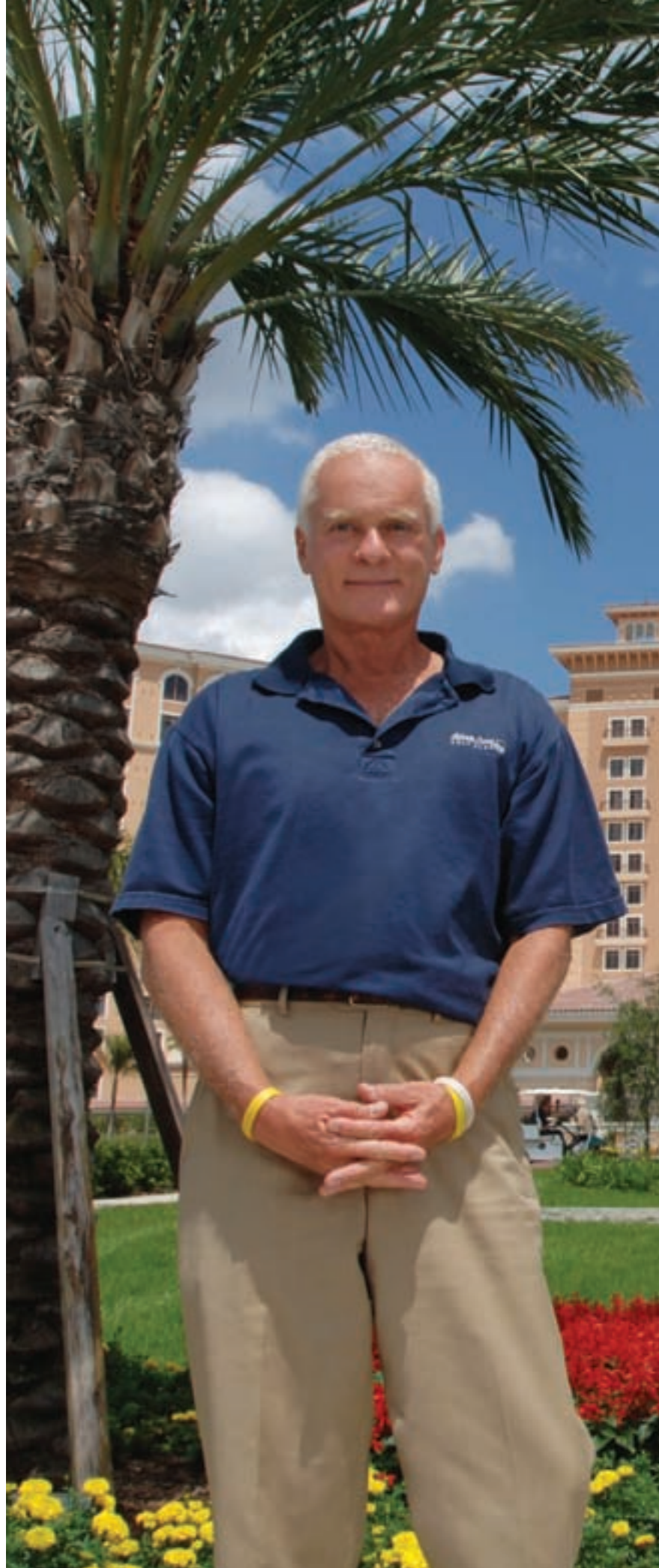
# BUILDING A DREAM

My Journey from  
Hell's Kitchen to the  
Hotel Business

By Harris Rosen

MY STORY BEGINS in the early 1900s, when my grandfather, Harry Rosenofsky, arrived at Ellis Island to start a new life. Harry left his wife and four sons in Russia (the Ukraine) because he believed there was no future for his family there. Around the same time, a captain in the Austrian Cavalry, Samuel Rosenhaus, had left behind his wife and three daughters to forge a better life for them here. During the immigration process at Ellis Island, both men's last names were shortened to "Rosen," and they both settled in small apartments on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, alongside many thousands of immigrants from Italy, Ireland and Eastern Europe. And eventually, both men achieved some semblance of the American dream.

Harry eventually rented a storefront on Hester Street and opened a small, 15-seat restaurant. He was the restaurant's sole employee—the only server, the night cleaner, the cook, and he also did the ordering and more. Samuel, on the other hand, started his career as an apprentice barrel maker in a small shop near the Fulton Fish Market. He worked directly for the owner. When the owner died suddenly, Samuel, much to his own surprise, became the sole owner of the business. Almost three years after their arrival, both men sent for their wives and children. Within several years, there were additions to both families. Harry had a fifth son, Jack; and Samuel had a fourth daughter, Lena.







Jack and Lena met shortly after Jack's high school graduation. They dated, fell in love, married, and shortly thereafter, I was born. We all lived in a rented apartment on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, an area commonly referred to as Hell's Kitchen. Our apartment on the seventh floor was located between the East River, Little Italy, the Bowery and Chinatown to the west. Five years later my brother, Ron, was born.



I remember spending weekends with my dad at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, where he worked as a safety engineer. Dad was very artistic and supplemented his pay by doing posters and place cards for banquets. My weekend job was to take each place card, erase the name of the guest Dad had first written in pencil and then go over it in ink. I would then fold the card and place it in alphabetical order, in a shoebox.

During the months I worked for my dad at the Waldorf Astoria, we would on occasion meet famous people in the elevator. We met General Douglas MacArthur, Ty Cobb, Jackie Robinson and Pope John. One day, a most beautiful lady was in the elevator with a very tall, distinguished gentleman. I was only eight years old, but I whispered to dad, "Can you introduce me?" Dad said, "Sure." He first introduced me to Joseph Kennedy, then the ambassador to Great Britain (Bobby and John Kennedy's father). And then he said, "Harris, I would like you to meet Marilyn Monroe."

What a thrill that was! At the time I did not realize the relationship Marilyn had with the Kennedy men—the dad and his two sons, Bobby and John. After meeting Marilyn Monroe, it occurred to me that even though I inherited some of dad's artistic ability, perhaps a career in the hotel industry would be more interesting than a career in art.



I left the Army after spending three-plus years overseas in Asia and Europe and started my career at my favorite hotel, the Waldorf Astoria. I started as a file clerk in the personnel department. Although they said I was overqualified for the job, I happily accepted it. Within a few months I was offered a position in the convention sales department as a banquet setup supervisor. The reason I was able to exit human resources so quickly was because as a file clerk, it was my responsibility to file all new job openings. I must confess that I did not file an application if I had an interest in that job.

One day while setting up a meeting room, I met the director of sales, Mr. Xavier Lividini, and after a lengthy conversation, he expressed surprise that I was a graduate of Cornell University's Hotel School and had also served in the Army as an officer. He asked why I was working as a meeting setup person. I explained that it was the only job available for me at the time, but my dream was to one day become a sales manager at the Waldorf. He, in turn, surprised me by indicating that he would offer me a sales position as soon as one became available. Within a few months, a miracle happened—an opening in sales occurred and I was offered the job.

I made sure to work harder than anyone else, and it paid off. Within six months I became one of the top convention salesmen by booking more business than anyone else in the department. Within a year I was offered a great opportunity to attend the University of Virginia's Advanced Management School on a Hilton scholarship, which of course I accepted. Soon after, I was offered another wonderful opportunity to participate in the Hilton Hotel's Management Training Program.



If I was going to be happy and fulfilled, I had to consider being in business for myself.

**IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE:** (From left) A young Harris Rosen explores a New York City playground, May 1941; looking sharp in a suit and tie at age eight, 1947; on his tricycle at age two, December 1941; with his mother, April 1941; working in the garden in the mid-1970s; the Rosen family in 2013; on the lawn of his Orlando Comfort Inn, mid-1980s. (Previous pages) The man who started it all stands in front of Rosen Shingle Creek.

Over the next several years, I eagerly accepted a multitude of assignments, each lasting four months to one year: resident manager of the New Yorker Hotel in New York City; food and beverage manager of the Pittsburgh Hilton; assistant general manager at the Buffalo Statler; resident manager of the Cape Kennedy Hilton; and finally, resident manager at the Dallas Statler, where a very successful local real estate developer offered me a job managing a new resort in Acapulco.

Torn between this fantastic opportunity and being loyal to the Hilton Corporation, after much thought and seeking advice from friends inside and outside of Hilton, I accepted the position in Acapulco and spent one incredible year there. But after Mexico elected a new president, strict new laws were put into place stipulating that only Mexican nationals could own more than 50 percent of a real estate property in Mexico, forcing my boss to sell a majority interest in the resort. When the new ownership arrived, I was terminated and most likely replaced by a Mexican citizen. With much sadness I headed to California to seek my fortune.

The morning after landing in Los Angeles, I read in the local paper that Disney was planning a huge development in Florida called Disney World. Shortly after driving to Disney Headquarters in Burbank and applying for a job, I was hired as administrator of hotel planning for the Walt Disney World hotel group, which would include the Contemporary Hotel, the Polynesian Resort, The Golf Resort and the Ft. Wilderness Campground.

It was late 1969, and I worked closely with the architects in

California, helping with the final design of the hotels and the campground, while also establishing detailed operating procedures for each property. We also created a central reservation system and were one of the first hotel companies to introduce computers at the front desk and in the central reservations department.

In early 1970, I left California for Orlando to help in the final stages of construction, and in October of 1971 the hotels and campground opened to much acclaim, running virtually full year round.

Sadly, I left Disney in 1973, but not voluntarily. It was explained in my exit interview that although I did a great job and met all goals, it had become apparent to the Disney hierarchy that I “most likely would never become a fully integrated Disney person.” I sealed my fate by asking rather sarcastically if the real reason I was being terminated was because my ears were too small. The person discussing the situation with me responded quite sternly: “Harris, that is the kind of B.S. we’re talking about. It has become obvious to us that you don’t really respect the Mouse, so today will be your last day.”

I was fired for not respecting the Mouse. It became apparent that if I was going to be happy and fulfilled, I had to consider being in business for myself. I loved Orlando and wanted to stay, but the current economic situation was terrible.



Beginning in late 1973 and into 1974, the Central Florida hotel industry was in shambles. With the stock market decline and the Arab



**MAKING MEMORIES:** (Counterclockwise from top left) Franklin Graham, president and CEO of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, visited with Harris Rosen to discuss efforts to support Haiti; with the Reverend Jesse Jackson at the Tangelo Park Elementary School library; Rosen with Tangelo Park Elementary School students; reclining on the balcony outside his office with his Yorkipoo, Apple.

oil embargo, virtually every hotel in Orlando was in serious financial difficulty with foreclosures and bankruptcies looming. It was during this time that I decided to buy a small, 256-room Quality Inn that fronted both Interstate 4 and International Drive. In early May 1974, I met with the owner, Mr. Jim Morgan, who was so pleased to have a buyer that he hugged me, saying God must have sent me.

A week later, Morgan, myself and a mortgage broker from Travelers Insurance Company met to discuss my interest in the hotel. The Travelers rep asked how much money I had in the bank, which was a rather strange question, but believing it was perhaps important knowledge for him to have, I answered, "Twenty thousand dollars." The rep quickly extended his hand, saying, "Harris, it looks like we have a deal. Congratulations! The down payment will be \$20,000 and we will ask you to assume the mortgage of \$2.5 million."

The closing occurred on June 24, 1974, and I became the proud

**I walked into my new office, put my head on the desk and cried, believing I had just done the dumbest thing in my life. But I did have a plan of action.**

owner of the Quality Inn. But realizing I had just given away all the money I had in the world for a hotel running at a 15 percent occupancy and hemorrhaging cash badly, I walked into my new office, put my head on the desk and cried, believing I had just done the dumbest thing in my life. But I did have a plan of action: to meet with the top motorcoach companies in New England, New Jersey and New York, and to convince them to use my new hotel for all of their bus tours to Orlando.

Because I didn't have enough money to fly, I hitchhiked to New York City. I cannot express how kind the motorcoach companies were after they heard I had hitchhiked from Orlando. So kind were they, that in the four days I was

away, I was provided with overnight accommodations and free transportation wherever I needed to go.

I met with the top seven motorcoach companies on the East Coast and I must confess that they all received me with respect and a certain amount of curiosity. Prior to the trip, I had purchased business



I did have some help from a very large German Shepherd named Rin Tin Tin, who became my chief of security.

**TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS:** Rosen spends the morning in his office reviewing correspondence alongside his yellow Labrador, Bambi

cards that were presented to each. I told them to write down a room rate they felt comfortable with and let them know that rate would be honored for a minimum of one year. They were all very excited to write down their own rates, which ranged from \$7.25 to \$8.25 a night. They all filled out the cards and promised that if I honored the rate, they would use my hotel.

My last visit was with Paragon Tours in New Bedford, Massachusetts, where I met with Mr. Jim Penler, the president of the company, and Ed Camara, the chief operating officer. They were pleased to write a room rate of \$7.25, which I was happy to honor. My final meeting with Mr. Penler ended on a happy note when he said that he knew of a couple who were leaving the next morning for Florida, and that they would be happy to drive me home, if I would provide overnight accommodations for them at the Quality Inn. I was so appreciative. The next morning I left with the very nice couple who drove me back to Orlando. They stayed with us several weeks every year, as my guests at the Quality Inn, until they passed away almost 15 years ago. I will never forget how gracious they were to give me a ride back to Florida.

Within a few months, primarily because of the new motorcoach business, things were starting to look up. I was saving money, almost \$250,000 a year, by doing several jobs myself. I was the breakfast cook, the meat carver on the buffet at night, the gardener, general manager, food and beverage manager, director of sales and the security officer—although I must confess I did have some help from a very large German Shepherd named Rin Tin Tin, who became my chief of security. (Rinny was the best security officer I have ever had.)

Since I lived in the hotel—and I did for 16 years—I was also the night runner, which meant if anyone needed a toilet unstopped at 2:00 a.m., it was my phone that rang. I was also blessed because

the oil embargo had been lifted a few months earlier, and Orlando's economy was beginning to pick up again. Soon, my little hotel was profitable beyond my wildest dream. Since then I have been blessed with more success than I could have ever imagined.



Something important happened to me just about 20 years ago while sitting in my office dreaming of building even more hotels. I had five and was planning a sixth and dreaming of a seventh. It was time for me to start giving back, so I created the Harris Rosen Foundation, a philanthropic organization that provides funds for deserving organizations and initiatives. One of these is the Rosen College of Hospitality Management at the University of Central Florida, where we donated 25 acres of land and \$10 million to help build the college—which opened in 2004—and created a \$5 million endowment fund that provides 100 to 150 scholarships every year.

We also created the Tangelo Park Program and adopted a disadvantaged, high-crime neighborhood in Central Florida, where, for 20 years now, we have provided a free preschool education for every two-, three- and four-year-old, by creating 10 little schools in the neighborhood. Our elementary school has been an "A" FCAT school for the past seven years, and we also mentor our youngsters from kindergarten through high school, and provide parenting classes for moms and dads so that they are comfortable helping their youngsters with schoolwork.

The Tangelo Park Program provides a full college education—whether it be vocational training, community college or public college—including free tuition, room, board and books for every

Tangelo Park youngster who graduates from high school. Through the years, more than 200 of our youngsters have received scholarships, and 100 have graduated from college. Today, we graduate 100 percent of our high school students. When we started the program, that number was closer to 40 percent. And overall, neighborhood crime has dropped by 55 percent. It is our hope to replicate this program throughout the nation. We believe it has the power to dramatically change our society as we know it because it offers people hope.

And our philanthropic work continues. We recently built the Jack and Lee Rosen Southwest Orlando Jewish Community Center, which has an Early Childhood Learning Center and after-school program with 100 students, regarded as one of the best in Orange County. Just recently we returned from South Africa, where our mission was to help the local government create jobs and reduce unemployment from nearly 30 percent to less than 10 percent.

We have also been involved in Haiti for the past 20 years, providing our Haitian brothers and sisters with food, education and healthcare supplies, and more than 200 water filtration systems. Most recently, we started an initiative to build our Little Haiti House village, with an agricultural component like the kibbutzim in Israel. We will have fish ponds; a farm with goats, pigs and chickens; and we will grow papaya, mangos, bananas, coconuts, sugar and coffee. Our idea is for these little villages to become self-sufficient. When the population grows beyond a certain number, we will introduce schools and healthcare clinics, as well.

Looking back, had it not been for the many gracious men and women who helped me when I most needed it, we would not today have the means to offer our assistance to so many in need. I hope to continue our philanthropic endeavors into the future, and truly feel that giving back to others is the best investment we can make.



*Harris Rosen, president and COO of Rosen Hotels & Resorts, is a leader and philanthropic innovator in the Orlando area. He oversees the Harris Rosen Foundation and is also Honorary Consul General of Japan in Orlando.*