This week I was very pleased to be present when senior executives from the Hilton Garden Inn brand of the Hilton Corporation honored Gian Gandolfo as General Manager of the Year for his work at the 157-room Hilton Garden Inn Denver Airport.

Mark Nogal, Hilton Garden Inn’s Vice President of Hotel Performance and Sales Support, and Adrian Kurre, its Senior Vice President for Brand Management, made a special trip to Denver and arrived in a snowstorm to present the award. Also attending was Stanley Gallery, a member of the hotel ownership team, plus members of the hotel executive committee. I represented Outrigger Lodging Services, which manages the property.

This is a tremendous award. The general managers of over 300 Hilton Garden Inn locations in the Americas are eligible for the honor. The selection process is very detailed and is based on a number of factors, including financial performance, property cleanliness and maintenance, and guest service. Most of these factors are ranked throughout the year by the brand’s rigorous inspection process.

In the third quarter of 2006, Gian’s hotel had a Total Quality Score (TQS) that ranked 39th out of 284 reporting Hilton Garden Inns. According to John Fitts, CEO of Outrigger Lodging Services, this is an amazing record for an airport hotel where the length of stay runs between 1.1 and 1.3 nights. Unlike other properties, such as resorts, where longer stays allow many opportunities for guest interaction, guests at airport hotels often arrive late, go to their rooms, and then depart early in the morning.

The hotel’s other scores—for cleanliness, condition, and service—were equally high.

Financial results were also impressive. RevPAR index, which compares Revenue Per Available Room with nearby competing hotels, was 117 percent through the third quarter. With the competition including a deluxe Marriott full-service property and a two-year-old Embassy Suites, that is a significant achievement.

Gian and his team have also been involved in the local community. They work every year with a nearby elementary school in a garden-growing project. They also work with the hospitality programs at the University of Denver and Johnson/Wales College, as well as other charity and community activities.

Gian has tremendous rapport with the hotel’s team members. The employee turnover rate is just 2.8 percent. Thanks to Gian’s concern about staff safety, there are very, very few workplace injuries under his leadership. A year-and-a-half ago, he challenged his colleagues by proposing that if the property went five months without an employee injury, he would allow them to shave his head. The team went injury-free, and to everyone’s delight, Gian was ceremoniously given a Marine-style haircut.

John Fitts says, “That’s the kind of guy he is. He goes above and beyond the call of duty, always tries to make everything fun, and never, ever differentiates himself from his employees or other members of the management team.”

Gian was raised in Southern California and attended Whittier College. He started with Outrigger Lodging Services as the Rooms Division Manager of the Ontario (California) Airport Marriott, where he and his team received numerous awards. He has held other positions at the Beverly Carlton in Los Angeles, Clarion Universal Orlando, and Hampton SeaWorld San Diego. He has raised and shown champion dogs and is a fanatic about ice hockey and the LA Kings!

Congratulations, Gian, on your many accomplishments and this much-deserved, prestigious award!