

How Andrew Ritzer became concierge to the city's concierges

By **James H. Burnett III** | GLOBE STAFF JANUARY 29, 2014

On a Tuesday afternoon, Andrew Ritzer pulled off the Southeast Expressway in his pearl black Mercedes and rolled into a parking lot near Andrew Square. His cellphone was ringing. It was an emergency.

Ritzer spoke soothingly, urging the caller to calm down. Seconds later he asked: "What model, what color?" Then, "It has to be one of them?" Finally he said, "No problem. Give me 30 minutes."

Ritzer is not a private eye, nor is he ensnared in a web of international intrigue. He's a problem solver, a deal maker, a guy others turn to when they need a little help. In fact, if you or someone you know has ever stayed at a high-end Boston hotel and been wowed by something a concierge was able to do for you, you probably have Ritzer to thank.

On this day, for example, a VIP guest had just checked in at a Back Bay luxury hotel and wanted a sightseeing tour of the city by car. The guest insisted the tour be led only by one or two individuals he'd heard about from a colleague. And the car *had* to be a Mercedes S550 sedan.

Ritzer calmly hung up, combed through a little black book, and dialed a Mercedes dealership in Cambridge. He described the car he needed, named the hotel, and thanked the person on the other end. Then he thumbed through the book again. In a moment, he'd secured his tour guide.

Thirty-five minutes later, the car and the guide were at the hotel.

His name isn't well known in the city, but for nearly 25 years, Ritzer, a smiling, slim man of 46, has been building and shaping Boston's concierges into a community.



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Andrew Ritzer improves the Boston hospitality experience one relationship at a time.

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A quarter century ago, industry veterans say, half the high-end hotels in Boston didn't have full-time concierges. The other half were fiercely competitive. Today, Hub concierges have a trade group of sorts, the Greater Boston Concierge Association, of which Ritzer was an influential founding member. They meet regularly to compare notes, discuss the industry and how to keep guests happy — even at competing hotels.

Ritzer, meanwhile, runs International Concierge Associates, a one-man operation in which he acts as liaison between clients in the hotel and business communities, particularly restaurants and entertainment venues.

“Without him I'm not sure where this industry would be in Boston,” says Marc Simoneau, lead concierge at the Intercontinental Boston. “Andrew helps us do our job in a very unique way. And most of us know that we wouldn't be able to be so helpful without first having been groomed a bit by him. You hear people say, ‘Oh, this person or that is a good person to know?’ Well, in our business, Andrew Ritzer is the good person to know.”

For Ritzer, who was raised in New Jersey and later moved to Boston, the job is a perfect fit. While working toward his marketing degree at Boston University in the late '80s, Ritzer began working for his father, who organized conventions and conferences for corporate and nonprofit groups.

When a group would contract his father to arrange a convention, Ritzer would function as “advance man,” traveling to the host city and coordinating hotels, meeting halls, and even restaurants.

It occurred to him that things could run more smoothly if all of these groups could establish relationships with each other. The way to make it happen? Learn the concierge business and figure out a way to service it — though Ritzer has never worked as a concierge himself.

“I started this business when I was a kid a year or so out of college, basically, but I wasn't inexperienced,” says Ritzer, who lives in Dover with his wife and two kids.

Paul Phillips of the Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau says Ritzer's niche isn't something that's covered in college hospitality programs.

“What sets Andrew apart is his natural ability to get along. It's not forced,” Phillips says. “He's genuinely friendly and a nice guy. And people in high-stress jobs — jobs that are about pleasing others all the time — feed on real kindness. So it makes sense to me that people on multiple sides of our hospitality industry work through Andrew.”

One veteran concierge in Boston recalled the time that Fred Durst, former frontman for the rap-metal group Limp Bizkit, was staying at a



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Ritzer (center) introduces Jenn McDermott of Good Essen Communications to Vincent Lago, concierge at the Fairmont Copley Plaza.



downtown hotel and asked for reservations at Grill 23 & Bar. But there was a problem: Durst told the concierge he would not be removing his Red Sox baseball cap, and the restaurant had a strict no-hats policy. So the concierge called Ritzer, who promptly called Grill 23 and worked it out.

“I called him a few minutes later and told him that Durst could dine there and keep on his hat,” Ritzer said, “but he would have to slip discreetly into a back entrance and use a private dining room.”

The concierge chuckled at the memory.

“Andrew’s the only person I know who could have pulled that off.”

On a recent Friday morning, at the Fairmont Copley Plaza, Ritzer, kneeling on one knee, absentmindedly scratched Catie Copley, the hotel’s black lab “canine ambassador,” behind the ear while her caretaker and senior concierge Joseph Fallon chatted with Patricia LaBella, sales manager at Davio’s.

“Before he passed away, Paul Newman would stay at the Fairmont when he visited Boston,” LaBella said. “He liked to dine at Davio’s. One evening a newer concierge at the hotel looked up from the front desk to see Newman.”

The actor wanted to know if his “usual” reservation at Davio’s was all set. It wasn’t. And try as he might, the concierge couldn’t get a host or hostess at the restaurant to budge. An older concierge told him to call Ritzer, LaBella said.

Not only did Ritzer get Newman and his wife, Joanne Woodward, a table, he’d gotten them their favorite table.

Fallon says that Ritzer maintains his influence in the concierge community because he’s always looking for ways to make the concierge’s job easier. Dipping behind his counter for a moment and then returning with an old-fashioned giant, coffee table-style photo album, Fallon opened the book and revealed snapshots, placards, and brochures for restaurants, taverns, and more.

“This is what we used to use. And some concierges still prefer the old-fashioned way when looking for places to send guests,” he said. “But Andrew made us this iPad app that now has all of this stuff on it, and he updates it every week, so we always know what’s new — menus, you name it.”

Sometimes Ritzer’s assistance is about logistics — and access.

Keith Loveless, another veteran Boston concierge, remembered the time at his old hotel, the Langham, when a group of young male



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Ritzer and McDermott at the Westin.



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guests, in town for a bachelor party, asked him to
arrange for them to “swing a bat where the Red
Sox do.”

http://www.bostonglobe.com/lifestyle/style/2014/01/29/how-an...



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**Ritzer (right) is greeted as he arrives at
the Fairmont Copley Plaza.**

But Loveless learned quickly that it's nearly
impossible to get civilians onto the field at
Fenway Park, even when the Sox are traveling.
He rang up Ritzer.

Within an hour, Ritzer had worked out a deal: The young men would not traipse about
the field, but they would be allowed to take a few swings in the team's off-field private
batting cages. After that adventure, stadium staff shuttled the bachelor party to the
House of Blues for a concert.

“Vintage Andrew,” said Loveless, who now works at the Copley Square Hotel. “He finds
ways to keep everyone happy. And he talks a lot about so many relationships being
intertwined. Well, this was a good example.”

Ritzer's work includes consulting with restaurant and entertainment venue managers
about how to follow and spot trends. Guy Neil, a veteran general manager on the Boston
restaurant scene and now an executive with Andover-based Burton's Grill chain, has
never hired Ritzer but has watched him with great interest over the years.

“People are cynical,” Neil said. “There will always be those who complain about middle
men and insist they can do just as good a job. But the fact is without people like Andrew
— without Andrew — things would just move a lot slower.”

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