

The Times-Picayune

» [More From The Times-Picayune](#)

News

Maissen heads out West for an office with a view

The timing is right for ex-N.O. resident

Thursday March 06, 2003

By Dave Lagarde

Staff writer

NEWPORT COAST, CALIF. -- The distance between Pelican Hill Golf Club in Newport Coast, Calif., and Galatoire's Restaurant on Bourbon Street is, give or take a par-5 or two, approximately 2,000 miles.

But the great half-continent divide between the two might as well be measured in light-years, as decidedly different as they are.

One spot usually is crawling with golfers, who come to sample the Pacific Ocean coastline delights of two masterfully designed 18-hole tracks by noted golf course architect Tom Fazio. The other is normally wall-to-wall with old-line New Orleanians and dining-savvy tourists, who come to partake in scrumptious Creole cuisine in the often raucous, always satisfying restaurant's French Quarter environment.

But give Hans Maissen credit. Maissen, who served as the general manager of the highly acclaimed Windsor Court Hotel for seven years, has found a way to carry a staunch Crescent City tradition to the West Coast.

Maissen still does his Friday lunch. It's just that he mixes business with pleasure on the verdant fairways and Poa Annua greens at Pelican Hill rather than the white-linen tablecloths at Galatoire's, one of his former end-of-the-work-week haunts. All that's missing at Pelican Hill are the tuxedoed wait staff and the trout almondine.

Maissen heads out West for an office with a view

Here's the thing: Had someone told Switzerland native Maissen he'd be in this particular place at this particular time doing what he's doing as general manager of Golf Properties for The Irvine Company, he would have thought that particular someone surely was certifiable.

See, Maissen didn't know a Titleist from a titmouse six years ago. But the golf hook was set when New Orleanians Kelly Gibson and Bob Kennedy gave their hotelier friend a swift indoctrination to the game, so swift in fact he participated in the pro-am of the New Orleans PGA Tour stop six months after first picking up a club.

Maissen, who played ice hockey as a boy, remembers his first lesson with the late Tommy Moore like it was yesterday. He does everything right-handed, but felt more comfortable when he swung at a golf ball from the left side.

"I thought the game was too easy," he said, offering his standard explanation for standing on the wrong side of the ball.

Maissen is joshing, of course. But he constantly works on his game with a stated goal of reducing his handicap to single digits. One thing is certain, he's in the right spot to do it. Pelican Hill, with its breathtaking ocean views, is the best public facility in Orange County.

"I pinch myself when I wake up in the morning," said Maissen, 57, who has been immersed in the hotel and service industry for 38 years, working in 12 countries on four continents. "It's certainly more fun to come to work now than ever."

Maissen's office looks out over the 18th green on The Ocean South Course. He is 5 miles from the other Irvine Company property he also manages, Oak Creek Golf Club.

Maissen took a roundabout journey to Pelican Hill via Tucson, Ariz. He left the Windsor Court to oversee the start up of a 15,000-acre hotel/golf/spa resort in the desert, where the objective was to create the most posh atmosphere in the world.

"People asked why I left, and I told them I loved the challenge of something new," he said.

The project hummed along until Sept. 11, 2001, the day the world changed forever. The resort became a casualty. The opportunity to move to Pelican Hill came about a year later.

"Like everything in life it's all about timing," he said. "I couldn't think of anything more fabulous."

Maissen felt his experience dovetailed perfectly into what he's doing today.

"Managing a business is managing a business," he said. "So many of the things we did at fine hotels translate into a golfer's experience at a high-end course like Pelican Hill. I've taken my expertise in hospitality outside.

"To sustain the rates we charge (\$175 Monday through Thursday and

Maissen heads out West for an office with a view

\$250 on the weekends) we have to provide something special. We want a golfer to enjoy the whole experience, from the time he drops off his clubs to the time he leaves. We're in the service industry."

Maissen learned some of the nuances of his job on the fly and is deeply involved in every aspect of the golf course. He recently oversaw the redoing of the bunkers (new sand, new contouring) on the South Course. He traveled to many of the finer resorts, including Shadow Creek in Las Vegas, searching for the right sand and the right people to do the job.

Maissen smiled broadly after conducting a tour of the South Course after he finished 18 holes on the North.

"Look at where I go to work and where I get to play," he said.

There are worse places on Earth.

.....

Dave Lagarde can be reached at dlagarde@timespicayune.com or (504) 826-3811.