



## **GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY PARTNER'S WITH DISNEY TO IMPROVE HOSPITALITY IN SENIOR HOUSING**

FAIRFAX, Va.---An innovative partnership between George Mason University and Walt Disney World Resorts holds promise for improving hospitality services within the rapidly expanding senior housing industry. The program sends students majoring in assisted living administration to Orlando, Fla., to study and gain experience in the Disney approach to hospitality and guest management.

"Most Americans don't realize that assisted living communities now outnumber nursing homes in the United States by a 2-to-1 margin," says Andrew Carle, assistant professor and coordinator for Mason's program in assisted living administration. "At the same time, these communities are principally private pay and can cost from \$25,000 to more than \$60,000 a year--the same as a luxury car or country club membership. Seniors and their adult children have come to expect a high degree of hospitality, as well as personal care services from these communities."

In recognition of the rapid growth of the industry, Mason developed the nation's first undergraduate and graduate curricula dedicated exclusively to the field of assisted living in 2001. The Program in Assisted Living Administration allows students to complete "hospitality service" internships through the university's participation in the national Disney College Partners Program. The first Mason student on location at Disney World is Alex Morales of Fairfax, Va., a physical therapy assistant by training. Morales has been stationed at Disney's Caribbean Resort since January and will continue working there through mid-August. He is the only assisted living intern out of more than 4,200 students employed at Disney World for the spring/summer semesters.

Mason and Disney have established a unique "Shared Functional Areas" (SFAs) structure for the internships. Students work at Disney resort locations, with shared areas between assisted living communities and the resorts including concierge/front desk, guest relations, food and dining, housekeeping, maintenance, security and transportation services.

As part of their internship, Mason students also must complete Disney-provided course work in both hospitality and human resource management. Both courses are approved by the American Council on Education (ACE) and are worth three credit hours of study toward the student's degree.

## **Mason/Disney con't...**

Carle says that the needs of seniors looking for a resort and entertainment experience can be significant and Mason students contribute to Disney World, which is located in the state with the highest ratio of seniors. "When seniors go to Disney, they look for easy ways to get around--ADA accessible transportation and short walking distances with lots of benches. When it's time to eat, their dietary preferences may be affected by age, medications or dietary restrictions, and their merchandise preferences are toward nostalgia and small gifts for others. Our students understand and have experience with these needs and can help."

For Morales, the results have been tangible. "Nothing they do is by accident and being here really brings that home," he says. "There is so much in the way they approach guests that is relevant to the way we should respect and treat seniors. Nobody does hospitality like Disney."

### Media Contact:

Daniel Walsch, (703) 993-8785 or [dwalsch@gmu.edu](mailto:dwalsch@gmu.edu)