



SCA eNews



To Promote the history and traditions of the Medical Service Corps, to enhance the continuing education, support social and recreational activities and reinforce camaraderie among our members

Summer 2022 In This Issue

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Your Officers:

President: Robert Howe
Vice President: Ed Hollingsworth
President Elect: Kim Aiello
Immediate Past President: Kyle D. Campbell
Leadership Engagement: MG (ret.) David Rubenstein
Secretary: Bryan Spear
Reunion: Herman Haggray
Treasurer: Tom Baker
SCS Liaison: Jarrod McGee

Serving the Army community of present and former US Army MSC officers

Address:

SCA, PO Box 18218
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From our President

Greetings Team SCA. Checking in from sunny Temple, Texas. I hope you and your Families were able safely celebrate our Nation's Independence over July 4th. I also want to wish everyone a hearty and Happy 105th Anniversary to the Army Medical Service Corps, celebrated as the most diverse branch in the U.S. Army!

The Team has been very busy over the last quarter, and I am excited to announce that we will conduct our SCA Reunion in San Antonio, October 26 -29, 2023. Herman Haggray will run point for us on this event and I am incredibly thankful for nearly 20 volunteers who have agreed to serve on this important event committee. We will hold the reunion at the newly renovated Marriott Airport Hotel. This is a terrific venue that offers superb amenities, including new rooms, free parking and airport shuttles. Please mark your calendars and plan to join us for our next reunion. It will be great to reconnect with old friends and make some new ones!

I encourage everyone to stay engaged. Check out our SCA LinkedIn page or listen to our SCA Podcasts for some extra motivation! Dave Parramore continues to capture terrific MSC stories, so checkout our SCA Podcast. He most recently dropped a terrific discussion with COL(Ret) Vaseal Montgomery. You can hear their discussion at the following link or wherever you receive your podcasts:

<https://episodes.castos.com/5fa97354ea5170-21056612/1/37e80193-c4ba-40de-a789-40b83de7fa2d/Vaseal-Montgomery.m4a>. Vaseal is the former CIO for Army Medicine and the former 70D Consultant. Listen-in on her storied 30-year career and please let us know if you would like to share your service journey.

Thank you for your continued support of this team. We are 750 members strong but want to grow our membership to continue this legacy. Whether you submit a charitable donation, recruit new members, or volunteer to serve on a committee, I appreciate all that you do for our Team. There are many opportunities to connect and support and we are always open to your suggestions and feedback.

I remain honored to represent you and commit to carrying on the proud legacy of those who came before us.

With my respect,

Colonel Robert F. Howe, USA Retired
President, Silver Caduceus Association

NOTICE!!! NOTICE!!! NOTICE!!!

***The SCA Scholarship Application Deadline is 31 JULY 2022
All applications plus letters of recommendation must be post marked by
JULY 31st***

SCA Membership Update: As I mentioned in the last e-News Letter, our membership has been on a steady increase over the last year or so. We have 756 members as of 9 Jul 2022. That is an increase of 150 members in the last 18 months. While we are happy with our growth via the addition of new members, we must not lose sight of retaining members who have been with us for a while and have a scheduled expiration date.

All non-Lifetime memberships expire on the last day of December in the year assigned based on the length of membership they opted to pay for with their initial membership or a renewal, (i.e., 1, 2, 3, 5 years, etc.). Of our 756 current members, 527 of those memberships have a December expiration date between 2021 and 2031. SCA policy allows us to keep members on the SCA roster for one year beyond their scheduled expiration date. This extends their membership one additional year and allows the member to continue to receive all SCA messages and e-News Letters. However, if they fail to renew by the end of the 12-month period their names are removed from the SCA "active" roster, and they will no longer receive SCA communications.

Each year there are several members who, for one reason or another, fail to renew their SCA membership. Often it is just a matter of the task slipping through the cracks. There are currently 55 members with a 2021 expiration date and another 102 members with an expiration date in 2022. These are the members we are eager to reach out to now and encourage them to renew their membership. If you are one of these and wish to renew your SCA membership you can do so now, and you will not lose any membership time. You can use the below link to complete an online renewal application and pay using your credit card. Or you can simply mail a check made out to SCA to SCA, Inc, P.O. Box 18218, San Antonio, TX 78218. Membership is \$15 per year, \$50 for five years or \$350 for a lifetime membership.

<https://www.silvercaduceusassociation.org/members/renew-membership>

SCA REUNION

We have set a date for our 2023 Reunion in San Antonio (Oct 26 -29, 2023). It will be held at the Marriott Airport Hotel that just completed a \$36 million renovation and we were able to negotiate a special rate of \$139 per night. That rate will also be available to those who want to spend additional days at hotel before or after. There is also free parking and hotel shuttle to airport, etc. No need to do anything now other than marking your calendars as we will be providing you additional information on the procedure to make your reservation to obtain this special SCA rate at a later date. Albeit 15+ months away we wanted to make sure you could make your future plans accordingly.

Marriott San Antonio Airport hotel taps into community, service

By Richard Webner *CONTRIBUTOR*, San Antonio Express News



Kin Man Hui/Staff photographer

Mark Vilagi, general manager of Marriott San Antonio Airport, says the lobby of the recently renovated hotel “rivals any of the hotels in the downtown market that I can remember.”

The Bricon Group, a Chicago area-based hotel development and management company, embarked on its first project in Texas in 2019 when it bought a nearly 30-year-old Holiday Inn near the airport and closed it with plans to transform it into a new hotel.

In April, the 11-story building reopened as the Marriott San Antonio Airport — after the company spent \$25 million on renovations and after the COVID-19 pandemic put construction on pause for 10 months.

It now features a spacious lobby with swanky furniture and generous amounts of sunlight and colorful artwork, as well as a cocktail bar with a wall of windows that can be retracted at the touch of a button to let in the breeze from an outdoor swimming pool.

The hotel also boasts a new fitness center and coffee shop, refurbished guest rooms and a VIP lounge reserved for frequent guests of Marriott hotels. The guest rooms on the building’s second floor were

replaced with meeting space. The hotel now offers 15,000 square feet of meeting space, including two ballrooms.

“This was all gutted, completely gutted, down to studs. Walls were taken out. The ceiling was taken out,” said Mark Vilagi, the hotel’s general manager. “To me, this lobby experience rivals any of the hotels in the downtown market that I can remember.”

Vilagi got his start in the hospitality industry as a 20-year-old parking cars at a River Walk hotel. After working his way up through management positions at various local hotels, he joined Bricton in January 2020 to lead the Marriott San Antonio Airport. He is chair-elect of the San Antonio Hotel and Lodging Association, a local group that advocates for the industry.

The hotel recently launched a collaboration with SAY Sí, a local arts nonprofit focused on children and young teens, in which it will display high school students’ artwork, including a mural in its outdoor terrace.

Vilagi recently sat to discuss the hotel’s history, the industry’s ongoing staffing problems, and the hotel’s performance since it reopened. The following has been edited for brevity and clarity.

Q: Did you set out to have a career in the hospitality industry?

A: No. I got the first job. I ended up having a passion to serve, and went on from there. At the Hotel and Lodging Association, we really are trying to help bring that educational aspect to the schools that have hospitality programs — to understand that you don’t actually have to have a degree to get in this business to be successful. You just have to want to be able to do what you gotta do to be successful. It is a sacrifice. It’s long hours. It’s hard work. But for some of us, it’s been very rewarding.

(The association) has what’s called “adopt a school.” Now that we’re open, ... my next target is to find a school to adopt, and then find those graduating seniors that want to consider a job in the hospitality field.

Q: What pitch would you make to students?

A: Every day is an exciting day. Every day it’s something different. You name it, I’ve seen it, whether it be good or bad, right? But at the end of the day, it’s always been fun for me. I’ve been able to grow a career and work through all different aspects of a hotel. I don’t think people really realize that, especially in a full-service (hotel), you’ve got all these different departments you work in. You have a front office, you have accounting. You have housekeeping. You have culinary. You have an event team. You have a banquet team. You have an engineering team. All these teams together make the hotel work.

Q: How old is this hotel?

A: The hotel was built in ’81. In ’84, they added on what was called the North Tower. It was basically 90 rooms they added on. That put them over 400 rooms, and 400 rooms in this market is kind of a tough amount of rooms to have, because you need a lot of demand.

Q: Was that part of the reason Bricton replaced the second-floor guest rooms with meeting space?

A: Yeah, I think so. I mean, being a hotelier and being from San Antonio, you don't have a huge number of hotel rooms in this market. It gets hard to fill up that many rooms consistently. It's great to have it when that peak time hits, but you want to consistently fill up that hotel, maximize your revenue.

Q: Did you bring in your staff members from other hotels, or are they new to the industry?



Artistic lighting illuminates the dining area of the recently renovated Marriott San Antonio Airport.

A: My executive committee all had hotel experience. We together have over 450 years of hotel experience, which is great. To me, that was key, because from my experience, new hotels typically have a lot of turnover, especially in the first six months. I wanted to try to reduce that as much as possible and create better retention. By hiring leaders that have strong experience in the market, I feel they also have strong experience with their associates and can create a better work environment, better retention.

Q: Is it still hard to find staff?

A: I think it's very tough for all of us. I think it's gotten better in a sense that post-COVID, right up the chute, they were still getting benefits from the government, so nobody wanted to work. Once that went away, slowly but surely, it's been coming back. And that's been great. I say we've been fortunate. I have almost 100 employees. Originally, if I was a full hotel, I'd have maybe 120. So that 100 right now is great. Now, it's a matter of just keep training them, keep retaining them and keep our guests happy.

Q: What do you do to attract employees?



Photos by Kin Man Hui/Staff photographer

The Bricton Group spent \$25 million to renovate a nearly 30-year-old Holiday Inn near the airport and reopened it as the Marriott San Antonio Airport.

A: We've used all avenues. We can post jobs on [Marriott.com](https://www.marriott.com), and that'll translate to Indeed. There's Craigslist, there's flyer program, whatever we can do to get out there and get visible — word of mouth, chamber meetings, association meetings. You know, we're all vying for the same thing. How many hotels do you have just on this side (of Loop 410)? You got from Pear Tree to Drury to Drury Plaza, Holiday Inn Express. The list just keeps on going. On the other side, you have another six hotels. So we're all trying to do the same thing. Then it becomes more of ensuring that your pay is competitive for the market. And what kind of benefits do you offer as a company? Do you have any sign-up bonuses, referral bonuses, things like that.

Q: How do you feel about the state of the hospitality industry?

A: From a labor standard, it's been tough, but I think it's getting better out there. It's great for the associates because you see an increase in wages throughout everything, not just hospitality. From a travel aspect, I'm just excited because in San Antonio, and Texas, you wouldn't think we're going through COVID at times. People were still traveling, still getting out. Compared with other states and other markets, we're doing really well. Our hotel's just opened up, so we're starting to see our occupancies grow with word of mouth. So we're excited. We know we're going to have some strong results here.

Q: You're happy with the demand so far?

A: I think everybody wants a little bit more, but I will say that on Memorial Day weekend, we hit about 85 percent occupancy, which is great. So we know it's there. We know it's coming.

Q: Do you know what portion of your guests are business travelers versus tourists?

A: We are mainly a business traveling hotel during the week. We kind of have two stages. The Monday-through-Thursday is more of the business traveler stage, and then Friday and Saturday comes the family-leisure travel stage, checking out on Sunday. Now, do you get some leisures during the week? Of course you do. Do you get some business on the weekends? Sure you do. But predominantly, during the week, it is our business traveler, which is great to see that piece coming back — especially the corporate aspect, because in the hospitality field, the one area that has been the hardest to come back has been your corporate field because they've learned to work from home. They've learned how to use Zoom. They've learned to use (information technology) versus travel.

Q: What about hotels in the airport region versus in other regions, such as downtown? How do their performances compare?

A: I don't have the detailed metrics on that. Downtown will always fare a little bit better because it's downtown. But what we saw post-COVID was, until the group dynamics started coming back, they only fared better in the weekends and they were dying during the week to get business in. Whereas with us, we were kind of faring better throughout, because people can stay here and not pay the \$50 a night for parking. And the accessibility you have from this location to downtown, to La Cantera, to the Rim, to (Six Flags) Fiesta Texas, it's a pretty easy location. And to think you can get back and within five minutes, you're back at the airport.

Q: Tell me about your partnership with Say Sí.

A: In the hotel business, community outreach is important. We always want to help the community. In different hotels I've had, we've done it different ways. Marriott is a big supporter of the Children's Miracle Network.

For us, we wanted to go to another level, and Say Sí was something we thought was really cool because it can help promote the artwork of the children. We have some areas that we're gonna designate where we're going to put their artwork up in the building.

Q: Why is community outreach important for a hotel?

A: You know, we're not just here to serve guests; we want to be able to be a staple for our community and let them know that we care. We're going to create the jobs. We're going to support community outreach efforts and then take care of our guests who come in. We want to be good ambassadors to everyone. We want them to feel like they're important to us.

If you are not sure of the status of your membership, feel free to contact me at rogerfwill@aol.com and I will be happy to provide you with the information.

MEDICAL SERVICE CORPS BIRTHDAY CELEBRATED IN MILITARY CITY, USA.

The 105TH year of the Medical Services Corps was celebrated by 35 MSC's officers and warrant officers at a delightful Birthday Lunch on Tuesday, June 28, 2022, in San Antonio, Texas. The Chef and staff of "The Towers" served a wonderful four-course lunch, thanks to a generous donation by the Silver Caduceus Association. The meeting was opened by Neil Johnson who gave a short description of the birthing actions of the United States Congress to create the MSC on June 30, 1917. Following the long-ago established ceremony of appointing the youngest MSC present and the oldest MSC present to cut the cake, Colonel Jim Van Straten was the oldest and Peter Platteborze was the youngest. After the culinary geniuses completed their task Colonel Monica Douglas, Chief of Staff, Medical Service Corps Specific Branch Proponent Officer and "Acting" Medical Center of Excellence, presented an excellent presentation of the state of the Medical Service Corps today.



