

DoubleTree by Hilton hotel opens in Reading

Wednesday December 9, 2015 12:01 AM

By [Dan Kelly](#)

READING, PA

Crystal Rocke was giddy.

She was being shown the guest suites and rooms of the new DoubleTree by Hilton hotel in the 700 block of Penn Street across from the Santander Arena.

Her guide was none other than Craig E. Poole, general manager of the newest star in the constellation of downtown development projects.

Poole was supervising the grand opening of the hotel on Tuesday.

There had been talk of having a so-called soft opening, or dry run for staff and systems. But top Hilton executives who were on site Tuesday decided the staff, rooms and facilities were ready and the new space was opened at 5 p.m., said Eric Brown, hotel manager.

Rocke, her husband, Michael Rocke, and Rhonda Hollie, president of the Gerald Albright fan club, have been traveling from their homes in Philadelphia to Reading for 20 of the last 26 years that the Berks Jazz Fest has been in existence.

They escort a group of like-minded jazz fans from Philadelphia to Reading.

"Our contingent gets bigger every year," Crystal Rocke said. "We used to book a floor at the Crowne Plaza and when we heard that Craig had taken over here we called him.

"They're not famous musicians, just big jazz fans. But as they toured the executive suites, king and double queen rooms, Hollie and the Rockes said they got the star treatment.

"I feel like royalty," Crystal Rocke said as she posed for a picture with Poole. "The attention to detail in these rooms is just exquisite.

"One of the first things she checked out was the closet in the master bedroom of one of the suites.

"You know, we ladies need our closet space," she joked.

"They are big," Michael Rocke said. "Maybe there's even room in there for my clothes.

"In the dining room of Cheers American Bistro, the hotel bar and restaurant, chief executive chef Daniel L. Wooten, sous chef Chris Edinger and Juan A. Mojica, a national account specialist for Edward Don & Co., a hotel and restaurant supply company, were going over a checklist of items that still had not arrived.

"Did the luggage carts get here?" Poole asked Mojica.

He looked at his laptop and said the estimated arrival time was Friday.

"We do everything but the food," Mojica said.

Wooten said opportunities to be in charge of a brand new kitchen don't come often and that he considers himself lucky to have the challenge.

"But now, every day is like Christmas," Wooten said. "Every day a new sauce pan or other thing arrives and they're all brand new.

"Poole said 156 people have been hired to staff the hotel.

"Eighty percent of them tell us they can walk to work." he said.

And, everyone was smiling Tuesday. Poole said that was by design. Only cheerful people with an upbeat attitude about Reading needed apply.

"If they didn't smile, they didn't get the job," added Brown, the hotel manager.

At the bar in Cheers were sturdy wooden stools with distressed brown leather cushions. Two carpenters were installing a bar for those with disabilities that was more at table level than the main bar.

Brian Ward of Oley is project manager for Artisan Display of Red Hill, Montgomery County. The custom woodworking company put in a lot of the special features at the bar.

"This job has been great," Ward said. "Everyone has been a pleasure to work for.

"And finally, Ward said, he has a local project he can brag about to his friends and family.

"Oh sure, my kids and my friends will have to see this," Ward said. "This is the first job I've had that's been close to home.

"Carol Carhuayamo of West Reading was the guest services clerk manning the front desk late Tuesday morning. She smiled as she held a telephone handset between her cheek and shoulder, taking a note and ending with a thank you to the caller.

"How can I help you?" she asked with a wide smile.

She said she was a little bit nervous about the big opening day.

"I think I'm a little nervous but more so excited," Carhuayamo said. "All eyes are on us."

Isaac McCrimmon, a line cook in Wooten's shiny new kitchen, said he wasn't nervous about preparing and serving meals to the hotel's first customers, many of whom are Hilton and other dignitaries.

"I'm excited to see the benefits the hotel brings to the city," McCrimmon said as he sliced a mango for one of the hotel's Chop-Chop Salads.

"There's been a lot of work put into this place," McCrimmon said. "A lot of work and a lot of faith."

Contact Dan Kelly: 610-371-5040 or dkelly@readingeagle.com.