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LONG'S ROAD TO SUCCESS: A jewelry institution breaks free of the mall. 11

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Service with a smile for 40 years and still going strong

BY NAOMI R. KOOKER
 JOURNAL STAFF

Some things in Boston never seem to change.

Swan boats in the spring, baseball in the summer, noisy politicians in the fall.

Edward "Eddie" Cotto standing watch at the Omni Parker House hotel.

Through a massive reconstruction of downtown and a succession of owners at the storied hotel, Cotto has stood his post. First as a doorman, now as a bellman, he has looked on

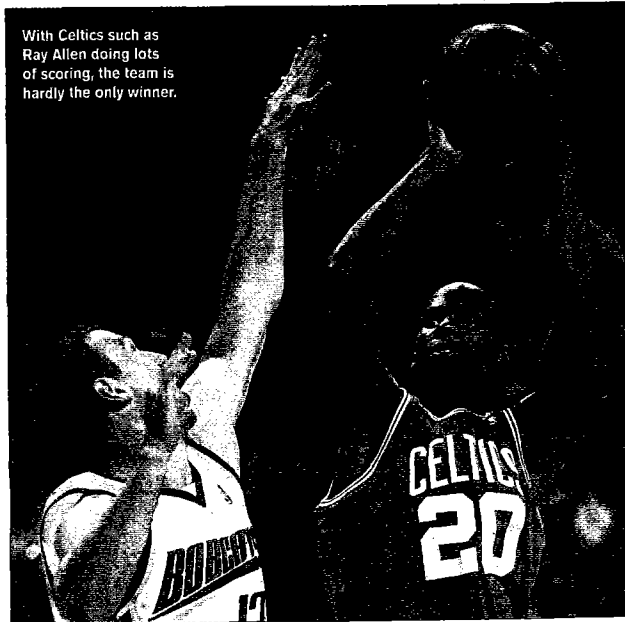
PLEASE SEE PARKER HOUSE, PAGE 26



BY MARC BERNSAU / BUSINESS JOURNAL

Edward "Eddie" Cotto is the longest-standing employee at the Omni Parker House and the epitome of the customer service professional.

Celtics' green



With Celtics such as Ray Allen doing lots of scoring, the team is hardly the only winner.

ZUMA PRESS

Sudden success makes Comcast and other investors look brilliant

BY JESSE NOYES
 JOURNAL STAFF

It was either the luckiest three-point shot of the season or brilliant planning. Regardless, Philadelphia-based Comcast Corp. scored big when it bought out the cable channel FSN New England, along with a 60 percent stake in San Francisco-based FSN Bay Area, for \$570 million last year.

The cable company's big wager is already paying off here in Boston after the Celtics made some blockbuster deals for players Kevin Garnett and Ray Allen this summer, which have pushed the long struggling team to the top of the NBA.

It's just one example of a sudden surge in the Celtics' value.

Comcast's (Nasdaq: CMCSA) play for the channel, which is primarily known for broadcasting Celtics games, is one of the luckiest deals of the year. The channel, re-branded as Comcast SportsNet, has seen ratings during Celtics games

PLEASE SEE CELTICS, PAGE 27

Insurance brokers fear new state agency

BY MARK HOLLMER
 JOURNAL STAFF

Insurance brokers accuse the state's Commonwealth Health Insurance Connector Authority of undercutting competition with plans to start marketing products to businesses with 50 or fewer employees beginning next spring — even if those businesses already offer coverage.

State officials insist they are simply complying with the law, but brokers say the plan goes well beyond the Connector's original mandate to make sure people who have never had insurance before find coverage.

"It's going beyond the whole legislative intent and purpose of why the Connector was established to begin with," argued Dan Foley, a lobbyist with the Massachusetts Association of Insurance Agents. He's pursuing the issue on behalf of the 250 brokers with the Massachusetts Association of Health Underwriters.

Connector spokesman Richard Powers denied the agency is trying to put brokers out of business.

"We will be working with them," he said, "not against them."

Powers pointed out that the Connector will work with brokers to



Moore: Connector working with insurers

PLEASE SEE CONNECTOR PAGE 26

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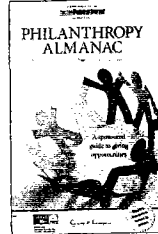
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CONNECTOR: Insurance brokers fear a regulator is becoming a rival

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develop plans to market unsubsidized plans cooperatively with the marketplace to companies with 50 or fewer employees, preparations that have been ongoing since last summer.

Additionally, at least one other health care insider familiar with the marketplace believes the original state law creating the Connector goes beyond just making sure uninsured residents find coverage. But the individual, who would only comment off the record, said the scope of the law does pose risks for the market.

The law that created the Connector also gave it the ability to shape both subsidized and unsubsidized plans now in the marketplace. Connector officials can also establish minimum coverage standards, serve as a contractor for Medicaid coverage and for subsidized Commonwealth Care products.

But the Connector is also a sales portal, through which individuals and business can obtain or buy coverage, and that role does, in fact, legally position the agency to compete with private health plans and the brokers and intermediaries that sell them.

"Whether that is a healthy thing for the market is something I think the legislature does continue to need to look at," the individual said.

Foley and the underwriters pushed for a bill restricting the Connector from marketing insurance plans to companies that already provided coverage. Instead, a compromise plan included in a health care reform "technical corrections bill" established a special legislative commission to monitor the Connector to make sure it doesn't undercut the competition.

"This will be an ongoing committee to make sure the Connector stays on track," said state Rep. **Ron Mariano**,

chairman of the Joint Committee on Financial Services. He pursued the selling restriction and will serve on the new commission.

Insurers are hoping legislators will watch closely. They fear being undercut with the Commonwealth Choice plans that offer cheaper premiums but higher deductibles. But the broker community is also concerned that companies will be misled into giving up plans in favor of lesser products that could actually cost more for people like older workers. Businesses, they said, might drop them in favor of Connector plans that will go well beyond the \$200 to \$300 per month premiums for older workers.

"(Employers) are going to get misled to think the Connector is going to offer them a better price point," said **Jean Russell**, president of the Massachusetts Association of Health Underwriters.

State Sen. **Richard Moore**, who chairs the Joint Committee on Health Care

Financing, also serves on the commission but he said concerns about the Connector undercutting the competition appear to represent a "misunderstanding."

The Connector won't be marketing, he said, unless the companies they market to offer insurance that doesn't meet minimum standards under the new law. Moore also said the Connector is working with brokers and agents to help market the plans "as one of the major ways for outreach."

Even so, Moore said legislators will gladly provide oversight to make sure the "Connector continues to be the Connector and not a state-run insurance company."

But Foley wants the legislators to do more. "It would lead to rate confusion," he said. "This would be a disruption."

MARK HOLLMER can be reached at
mhollmer@bizjournals.com.

PARKER HOUSE: Hotel veteran has seen it all; you'll only see a smile

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

for 40 years as an industry and a city have changed.

The very definition of "service" has evolved during that time. Customer habits have shifted dramatically. Yet Cotto — the Parker House's longest-serving employee — keeps at it.

"You have to love people to do this job," Cotto said. "And have to love hotel work to stay in it as long as I have."

While customer-facing jobs in so many fields have gone to the personality-challenged and the language-challenged, there are few where old-fashioned qualities linger. Bellman at a luxury hotel is one of them.

In 2007, bell persons in the Boston area earned between \$6 to \$10 in an hourly base wage, and between \$12 and \$20 including hourly wage and reported tips — up from 2004 when the hourly base wage was between \$5 and \$8 and hourly wages with reported tips were between \$10 and \$16, according to a **WageWatch Inc.** Hospitality Market Competitive Survey.

Cotto's mix of charm and efficiency was on display one recent morning. He was dressed in his black double-breasted jacket and slacks.

"All right," he says politely into the receiver of a lobby phone. "I'll be up shortly," his Boston accent — which he gets chided for — unmistakable. He sets off for a room on the seventh floor.

"Good morning Mr. Sanders," Cotto greets the man at the door with a bright smile that hardly leaves him. "You're leaving us today?"

There is friendly chit-chat as Cotto lifts the suitcases onto the cart. Does Mr. Sanders, visiting from London with his family, need a taxi? No, but he wants to know the best place to load a rented car. "We'll see you in the lobby,"

Cotto says, cheerfully, pulling the cart out of the room.

In the quiet of the hallway, Cotto says in a low voice: "Now this is a decent size load — six bags. I have a pretty good feeling for him. I think he'll turn out to be a decent person, get a decent tip."

A decent size tip these days would be at least \$1 per bag, if not \$2 to \$3. (Under the new union contract tour bus groups will be charged \$3 per bag come January 2008; now it's \$2.75.)

For years this has been Cotto's routine, taking calls, getting and delivering bags — the comings and goings of guests his bread and butter. As more luxury hotels opened in Boston (The Parker House, **Copley Plaza** and the former Ritz-Carlton once all but owned the Boston luxury market), larger tips were spread around as the rich and famous found other lodgings.

When luggage with wheels rolled into Cotto's life, giving people a greater sense of self-reliance, tips dwindled.

Cotto, 57, has not made his living solely on the goodwill of others. Like many other hotel service workers, the lifelong bachelor has dabbled in other businesses to supplement his income. Regardless, Cotto is a vanishing breed of loyal hotel personnel, content to stay in one position for the duration.

Cotto, with naturally black hair that's slicked back and sideburns, is often smiling, standing straight — "anticipating helping somebody" — facing the hotel's front desk with his hands clasped one over the other in front of him. Sometimes arms at his side. "Everybody has their own style," he says.

"Hard-working, honest," **Paul Sacco** describes Cotto, with whom he worked when Sacco was managing director of the Parker House in the 1990s. "Never got complaints on him."

Sacco lists Cotto among the life-long bell service people who were "characters" and dedicated to their jobs. "First and foremost he wants to take care of the customer — that's his primary concern," added Sacco, CEO and president of the **Massachusetts Lodging Association**.

Nothing really phases Cotto. In his 40 years working at the hotel, he's walked in on dead bodies ("Suicides were big in hotels in those days," he recalls of the 1970s) and awkward moments that first shocked him, but he learned to handle them with grace. He's had married women calling him, trying to finagle information on their husbands who were holding trysts at the hotel. Silence has been his code of respect for all parties.

He carted bags for Hugh Hefner and his entourage of Bunnies. "Nice man," says Cotto of the Playboy Enterprise founder, who tipped \$200. Cotto delivered bags to the room of Cassius Clay (**Muhammad Ali**), who gave \$100 and invited the bellman to have a drink. He's run errands for sick wives; gone out in his own car to guide a lost motorist to the hotel.

When a sheik asked to soak his feet in Boston Harbor waters, believing they had healing powers, Cotto found a bucket in the kitchen, took a cab to the water's edge, and brought back the salt water. The tip was \$250.

Guests such as these are hardly the kinds of folks Cotto grew up with in Mission Hill.

His father was a machinist for the same company for more than 40 years, and worked two jobs to care for seven kids — a work ethic Cotto has adopted. His mom was a homemaker. They were both immigrants from Albania.

It was a neighbor, John Brehm, a senior bell captain at the Parker House,

who suggested the young Cotto pick up a few hours at the hotel. The teen was smitten by the lobby, the oriental carpets. Room amenities at the time included black and white TVs and window-unit air conditioners.

Today, guests check into the hotel dressed casually and they prefer to carry their own suitcases. "It hurts us when they don't require service. We depend on tips," Cotto says.

The coveted service jobs of Cotto's day are now often stepping stones to higher positions.

Even as wages have increased, Cotto says, the competition has cut into the overall income. "The hotels that have gotten built in the last few years — supply and demand, it's not as big as it was."

At 5-feet, 7-inches, Cotto has avoided the typical back and feet ailments of a man his age in a job like his. His investment in \$350 shoes ("something good") through the years has helped carry him the sometimes 16 miles he covers, daily. (He clocked it on a pedometer once.) He's been through about 35 uniform changes.

"I'll probably work until I can't physically do it," Cotto says.

Cotto drags the bellman's cart with the Sanders' bags through the Tremont Street entrance, outside and along School Street, down to where the car is waiting. He helps load the luggage into the back of the SUV.

"We'll see you in April," Sanders coos, shoving dollar bills into Cotto's hand.

"Thank you so much, Mr. Sanders, be well," Cotto says.

In his hand is \$6. Cotto cocks his head to the side, and with raised brows, offers, "So, it was good, right?"

NAAMI R. KOOKER can be reached at
nkooker@bizjournals.com.