

Adventure Should Be Ocean House Recruiter's Middle Name

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By NANCY BURNS-FUSARO / Sun Staff Writer



Christine Corrigan / SunPhotos Alice Brennan, the director of employee relations and recruiting at Watch Hill's iconic Ocean House.

If she had a middle name it most certainly would be "adventure."

How could it not when she was named for the main character in Lewis Carroll's perennially popular tale, "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland."

But Alice Brennan has no middle name.

"My mother ran out of them by the time I came along," laughs Brennan, the director of employee relations and recruiting at Watch Hill's iconic Ocean House.

The seventh of nine children, and the youngest daughter in the large Irish family, Alice got her name from her big sister, Ginny.

It's a spectacular Sunday on Bluff Avenue and Brennan, a pleasant, direct and dynamic woman, jumps up from the piles of applications spread out on the large wooden table before her and heads into her office in the back of the bright yellow trailer. She has interviewed hundreds of prospective employees and will meet hundreds more before the grand hotel is fully staffed and ready to open its doors later

this spring. No stranger to mass recruitment, she once interviewed 200 people in Brazil all by herself.

"I'm an extrovert," announces the New Jersey native. Growing up in such a large family, she had no choice, she says.

"It's probably why I've done so well in human resources," she adds. "I'm certainly not shy."

Brennan, who will oversee Ocean House Job Fair number two at the Westerly Armory all day Tuesday, says she learned the ropes the hard way.

"I went to the school of hard knocks," says Brennan, who moved to Westerly from Florida last December. "I jumped in right after high school."

More importantly, she says, she had a powerful role model in her father, Robert Joseph Brennan, who worked as an accountant for Western Electric for his entire career.

"He is the man I most admire in the whole world," she says. "He was home for dinner every night at 5:30, he never once called in sick, and once during a snow storm, he walked for miles through the snow to get to work."

"He is an amazing man," Brennan says. "That's where I learned my work ethic."

Her parents, she adds, a broad smile spreading across her face, have been married for 61 years.

Brennan too began as an accountant. She was working in New Jersey when she spotted an advertisement for a position as an employee benefits person with Cunard Lines, the luxury cruise ship line known for sophisticated ocean travel and such romantic vessels as the Queen Elizabeth 2 and the Queen Mary. She applied and was hired.

"That's how I entered the world of luxury hotels and traveling," she explains. Soon after she began working for Cunard, the line was bought by Carnival. Only 40 staffers were kept on.

The young Alice Brennan found herself immersed in the business of creating severance packages and helping people with relocation issues. Then she herself relocated to Miami where she spent 10 years before accepting a job with "The World," the world's first luxury resort community at sea.

Andrew Wharton of Miami, who hired Brennan at "The World," likens his former colleague to a ray of sunshine.

"She is fearless, focused and professional," Wharton says. "With an outstanding, positive attitude."

"She can deal with everyone from the senior executive to the guy washing dishes," he says, "and create a bond."

"I'd hire her back in a minute," adds Wharton.

Landing her new job in Watch Hill has somewhat of a karmic twist says Brennan, who read about the job opening online. The first time she ever stepped foot in Rhode Island, she says, was when she came to Watch Hill for a friend's wedding 13 years ago. When she arrived for her Ocean House interview last fall, she called her friend and said, "Guess where I am?"

"And guess what day this is?" her friend responded. "We were married thirteen years ago today."

"Isn't that amazing?" Brennan asks, her Irish eyes sparking. "It's kind of karma."

Brennan says she is enjoying everything about her new home and her new job.

"I do not have one complaint," she says, adding that she is working with an exceptional team, each of whom possesses "an incredible sense of humor."

"So no matter how hard things get," she says, "we always have lots of laughs."

Plus, she says, living near water is a must.

"I have to be near the ocean," says Brennan, who has lived in the Florida Keys in addition to living on the ocean.

It appears to be an ideal chemistry.

"We love her to death," says Daniel Hostettler, the executive vice president and managing director of Ocean House. "She has a wealth of experience in opening luxury hotels and we are all very happy."