

# Regenerating Culture In The World Community

By Robert D. Zimmer, President and CEO,  
The Robert D. Zimmer Group,  
Dallas



T

here can be little doubt that this century has been marked by tremendous social, economic and political transformation.

Yet, while technology has produced advanced communication and transportation systems that have helped to unite the world, we have failed to achieve global peace and understanding. While international tourism has become a vital force in our economies and lifestyles, far too many examples exist in all corners of our world of irresponsible development—cultural denigration and exploitation being the norm. While we have seen the world from space—void of borders and segregation—we are plagued by intercultural ineffectiveness and interspecies deprivation.

It seems we hold a vision of a united world, but current paradigms do not allow for its realization.

As an international businessman with some success in the hospitality industry, I believe that each of us holds a key to attaining a sustainable future. We now find ourselves in deep conflict between accepting the new reality and its attendant new responsibilities and retreating to old ways and temporary illusions of rescue. I wonder how we can move toward global peace when in many cases we do not yet fully honor diversity in our individual lives and communities.

But in this time of transformation we have the opportunity to make our new world a place of balance between economics and values, the public and the private, the rational and the intuitive. We now have the chance to build a model that will become the first world civilization. But the journey must start at home—by resurrecting a spirit of community. We can each begin by making contributions that affect islands rather than continents, regions rather than

nations, and individuals rather than populations.

If we focus on readily attainable goals, these small victories might soon herald the emergence of a new, truly global community.

International developers and hoteliers have been blinded in their pursuit of magnificent structures in exotic lands. They have forgotten that the truest mission of tourism is to share with visitors a community and to offer the experience of new ways of life. We establish hotels and resorts in areas of the world that communicate in a special dialogue that we wish to share. We choose locations with resources and attributes that tourists will be drawn to visit.

Yet, the developer all too often invades the existing community and imposes his vision on the land without the participation or cooperation of the residents. In essence, he begins by seeking to establish control of his institution rather than seeking to achieve consensus on a project that will equally enhance the owner, the guest and the community at large.

A community is defined by a scale appropriate to its function and purpose—be it a family, a nation or the global community. Communities are interrelated and interdependent such that the extent to which any part is excluded from the whole describes how far we fall short of achieving the highest capacity of the group.

If we define hospitality establishments as communities within communities, the need for honoring diversity and integrating local heritage becomes readily apparent.

Hospitality establishments must first be designed as organizations that respect and empower the individual. The traditional hierarchical structure that is represented by the pyramid must be transformed into a geometric configuration that does not depend upon uncompromising rigidity for its existence. This new organization structure

must allow for many leaders and honor each contribution as a gift to the whole.

The international developer-hotelier will not abandon his position. He will simply move to the center of the organization and assume the new responsibility of facilitating the process. It will be his role to maintain the vision of the group and gently realign those who stray from the established path.

Because a community can never be built in isolation, we must invite each member to share his vision and identify a common goal toward which we will collectively work. We will then learn the value of mutuality rather than dominance, as our organizations develop the capacity to respond rapidly and effectively to internal and external influences.

It is, fortunately, not too late to reverse the cultural denigration and exploitation that currently exists. But we must begin by accepting accountability for our mistakes. Hoteliers must be willing to relinquish control of their institutions to co-create a mutually rewarding future. Where isolation and fragmentation were the order of the day, a celebration of diversity can be achieved, so we can live in a spirit of reconciliation, despite the complications of a pluralistic world. Economic reforms must also be instituted to ensure that relations between hotelier and community are just. Community regeneration can never be advocated—it can only be inspired by the most insightful and dedicated leaders. ●



Robert D. Zimmer established the Zimmer Group in 1988. The founder of Rosewood Hotels, Inc., he has been its CEO for nine years. He is a graduate of the University of Southern California in art, architectural planning and business.