

## Kevin Sheehan Norwegian Cruise Line

Norwegian Cruise Line recently announced it would raise its fares by up to 10%. It also is trying to establish a firmer footing with agents, who some NCL officials believe have lost sight of what the line provides to guests. Cruise editor Donna Tunney sat down with Kevin Sheehan, the line's CEO, during *Seatrade Cruise Shipping Miami*.

**Q: Some agents predicted that if other cruise lines didn't follow your lead and raise fares, you might back down. Will you?**

A: No, we won't. Our pricing wasn't in line with our competitors, and if our pricing is below the other players, we're doing a disservice to agents. We know that agents favor us raising our prices.

**Q: NCL raised fares about a year ago, too, correct?**

A: We did, by between 5% and 7%.

**Q: Did that move have any negative effect on bookings?**

A: Not at all.

**Q: Is it likely you will add a fuel surcharge on top of the fare hike?**

A: By raising fares, we think we can cover fuel. It's the agents we're looking out for, because they don't earn commission on a fuel surcharge.

**Q: Why do you feel you need to shore up your relationship with travel retailers?**

A: There were issues with agents before I got here three years ago. When a product doesn't deliver, they remember that.

Back then, our salespeople each had a load of accounts. They weren't able to be in touch with agents the way they should have been, but we're in the process of fixing that.

**Q: How are you reaching out to agents now?**

A: I basically read the riot act to sales and marketing. We're visiting agents, we're getting them onto our ships and we increased our inside sales staff by 45%.

**Q: What are the major changes you made at the line since you joined NCL three years ago?**

A: There were no pricing tools in place when I got here, so I implemented policies, and now we are the most disciplined cruise line in that area. I also hired department heads who were not previously working in the cruise industry.

**Q: When you look outside the cruise industry for department heads, what's the most important skill set that job candidates should have?**

A: We are looking for smart people who are experts in their particular discipline — food and beverage, marketing, etc. — who can bring a fresh perspective to the company.

We don't want to continue doing things one way because that's how it's always been done. We want to innovate, and the only way to do that is to bring in fresh perspectives.

**Q: Is NCL planning any significant itinerary changes for next year?**

A: We will have four ships in Europe next summer, more capacity than we've ever had. We are bringing the Norwegian Jewel to Alaska for the first time, joining the Norwegian Pearl for the summer. We'll have the Norwegian Pearl sailing for the first time from New York in

the fall, joining the Norwegian Gem, which is in New York year-round.

**Q: If you had five agents sitting around this**

**table right now, what would you say to them?**

A: I'd start with the basics because I'm not even sure agents know that we are the Freestyle Cruising line.

I'd explain about the freedom and flexibility we offer our passengers. I'd talk about the 20 dining options we offer on Norwegian Epic. And I'd tell them that if they were on an NCL ship six or eight years ago, it's a very different product today.



Kevin Sheehan

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**NORTHSTAR TRAVEL MEDIA LLC**  
100 Lighting Way, Secaucus, N.J. 07094-3681 U.S.A.  
(201) 902-2000. Travel Weekly is published once a week on Mondays by NORTHSTAR Travel Media LLC  
ISSN #0041-2082. Canadian GST #123397457 USPS #637 780. Canadian Post Agreement #41021023. Vol. 70, Number 13, Periodicals postage paid at Secaucus,

contact customer service by mail at Travel Weekly, P.O. Box 3610, Northbrook, IL 60065-3610; by phone at (877) 705-8889; fax (847) 291-4816 or e-mail: tw@omeda.com. For subscriptions, visit <https://northstar.omeda.com/data/tw/welcome>. Annual subscription rates: USA, US\$149; Canada, US\$189; elsewhere US\$229. Rates for single copies and special issues

**T**C is holding its breath for what **Disney Cruise Line** promises will be an "exciting" announcement in early April. An email invitation touted "new ports, new itineraries, new adventures."

It also added that the news for 2012 is "big enough that the only fitting place to announce our plans is the Big Apple!"

New ports, new itineraries, new adventures, New York ... could Disney be holding its event in its newest homeport?

**Eugene Fodor**, who reinvented guidebooks in the 1930s, was exposed as a Central Intelligence Agency spy during testimony from Watergate burglar **E. Howard Hunt** during congressional hearings in 1974. Hunt further revealed that Fodor sent "writers" abroad who were, in fact, CIA agents.

Though at the time Fodor was aghast at the exposure — he feared for his Czech-born wife's relatives behind the Iron Curtain — last week **Random House** celebrated the 75th anniversary of the publication of his first guidebook, "On the Continent," with a party celebrating "The Spy Who Loved Travel."

Among the items on display were documents **Random House** obtained through the Freedom of Information Act, including a 1946 letter stamped

"SECRET" from eventual CIA Director **Richard Helms**, then an Office of Strategic Services station chief, all but calling Fodor a slacker.

"If Fodor is not pulling his weight," Helms wrote, "ship him home."

**A U.N.-organized tsunami drill** was held last week in the Caribbean, and TC hears the exercise turned up a few glitches in the system. (At least nine tsunamis have hit the Caribbean since the mid-1800s, killing more than 3,500.)

Officials in the Dominican Republic, for example, discovered a lack of evacuation plans.

In the U.S. Virgin Islands, alerts and warnings were broadcast on radio stations in Spanish but not in English, and the overall emergency broadcast signal was weak. In Puerto Rico,

many residents never even heard the sirens meant to alert them to an oncoming tsunami.

There were successes, however.

Bahamian emergency workers were able to issue an alert through text messages sent to 300 officials across the island chain.

Jamaica's previous training sessions with staffers to improve disaster preparedness skills indicated high scores in that area.



## Friends & Colleagues

**James Zitani** has been named vice president of sales for the Central Holidays Travel Group, effective immediately.

Zitani has spent more than 30 years in the tourism industry, more than 25 of those with the Central Holidays Travel Group, where he has spent time in the reservations, operations, groups, ski and sales departments.

**Marc Cavaliere** has been named senior vice president of global sales development at South African Airways. Cavaliere had served as executive vice president for North America for the airline.

Cavaliere joined South African Airways as head of the North American market in 2006. Prior to that, he served as vice president of sales and marketing distri-



business development for groups and special interest travel.

Dimopoulos has more than 25 years of experience in the travel industry. She previously worked with Celtic Tours as vice president of sales and marketing and has served on the board of the Italian Travel Promotion Council and the international committee of the Student Youth Travel Association.

Carlson named **James Baldassari** its vice president of development for its full-service hotels in the Northeast and Midwest. Baldassari was

SUBMIT YOUR STORIES AND PHOTOS: Gerry Bourbeau, Travel Weekly deputy managing editor, at [gbourbeau@travelweekly.com](mailto:gbourbeau@travelweekly.com).