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Reading Eagle: Natalie Kolb | DoubleTree by Hilton General Manager Craig E. Poole was surprised by his CEO Light and Warmth Award on Monday.

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DoubleTree's Poole receives Hilton's highest honor

Unaware that he had been nominated, the general manager of the downtown Reading hotel was presented with the CEO Light and Warmth Award on Monday.

WRITTEN BY JEFF MCGAW (/APPS/PBCS.DLL/PERSONALIA?ID=242)

READING, PA —

In a short time since its December 2015 opening, the DoubleTree by Hilton hotel at 701 Penn St. has become the No. 1 DoubleTree from among 500 in the chain.

The award, based on its overall customer service experience - and, according to everyone from line cooks like Isaac McCrimmon to Chris Nassetta, president and CEO of the entire Hilton chain - is no accident.

The hotel's top world ranking among DoubleTrees owed, they say, to the leadership of one man: General Manager Craig E. Poole.

On Monday, Poole, who was unaware that he had been nominated and who had no idea that he was about to be honored, was presented with the CEO Light and Warmth Award, the Hilton hotel chain's highest honor.

The chain has about 4,800 hotels representing 14 different brands. Poole, who was nominated by his hotel staff, was one of 12 people to receive the award this year, and was the only one representing the DoubleTree brand. More than 900 people were nominated for the award worldwide.

To the average person walking down the street, the event may have seemed like a hotel chain just giving an award to itself, but to people like McCrimmon or Dwayne Stubbs, who works in room service, or Aneasa Jordan, the head of human resources, it was a point of pride for all employees.

"It's a big deal to everyone, because everyone who works with Craig knows exactly what he's about," Jordan said. "He's about community. He's about giving people energy, giving people life, giving people opportunities that they wouldn't have got anywhere else. And, he's really making an impact not only on employees here but in the community. So everyone here knows how much Craig loves Reading, and it's a great opportunity to come together for him and celebrate him."

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"It's a great big deal," Stubbs said. The 50-year-old Reading native saw the city in decline, and said he wanted to be part of efforts to revitalize it.

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"I was born and raised here in the Northwest section of Reading, and lived here all of my life," Stubbs said. "I have a home here. I'm invested in this place. When I found out Craig Poole was running it, and Al Boscov was a part of it, I knew I had to be here."

On a trip to San Francisco last year, Stubbs stayed at a Hilton.

"It was this big, beautiful place," he said.

He told the manager that he was from Reading, fully expecting him not to know anything about the city. Instead, Stubbs said, "that guy said: 'Hey, you're the top-run store.'"

The crowd of about 100 people in the conference room was mostly hotel employees, but also included Jim Boscov, nephew of the late retailer Albert R. Boscov and CEO of the department store chain, whose passion for Reading revitalization was well-known and for whom the DoubleTree was the crown jewel of that effort.

Jim Boscov applauded Poole's role in the hotel's success, but added, "you're succeeding in changing a city."

In a videotaped message, Nassetta, Hilton's CEO, said: "You really stood out, your story really stood out. I'm so proud of all that you do. Make no mistake about it, you truly are the heart and soul of Hilton's success, and an inspiration to all of us."

Poole entered the room to raucous applause, and was clearly moved by a video tribute honoring his close relationship with employees and the extensive work he has done in the community.

The award included a check - presented in giant check form - for \$10,000.

One of the people in the audience was 17-year-old Jafet Jaime, a bus boy and artist who recently learned that he was accepted to show his artwork at the New York Art Expo in April. Jaime had raised about \$500 on his own to pay for expenses.

In a gesture that surprised no one, Poole looked at his check, and then picked the young artist out of the crowd:

"Jafet," he said, "you're going to New York."

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