



PETER HALEY/The News Tribune

"You could take this hotel into any city in the world, and it would succeed," says Mark Van Cooney, the Hotel Murano's new general manager.

## The Murano's main man

Following its shakedown cruise after a major remodel and rebranding, the Hotel Murano in downtown Tacoma has hired a new general manager. He likes the job.

BY C.R. ROBERTS  
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After he was hired and before moving to a new home in University Place, Mark Van Cooney – along with his wife, two young children and two cats – lived for a month at the Hotel Murano in downtown Tacoma.

It was a good way, Van Cooney said last week, to come to know the hotel where he would serve as general manager.

Van Cooney has spent his career working at hotels, beginning as a valet parking attendant in 1988 and moving into management with Hyatt and, ultimately, joining the boutique KOR Hotel Group.

He was recruited in 2008 by Provenance Hotels to serve as general manager at the Hotel Murano – which was reborn last year as an art-serious, glass-celebrating destination location.

**You studied computer science in college. Why move to hotels?**

I loved the hotel business.

**Where have you worked?**

In management, at the Hyatt Regency in Hilton Head (S.C.) for five years, the Hyatt Regency Atlanta for two years, the Hyatt West Hollywood for three years. I met my wife in West Hollywood. I moved to the Grand Hyatt in Seattle, then to Indian Wells (Calif.). Then I was with the KOR group.

**I'm guessing the West Hollywood hotel was the most exciting.**

It was definitely the most wild. I should write a book. There was a drug overdose of a famous guitarist. I also gave CPR three times.

There was a band that performed at the House of Blues. They came back during their break. I got a call from the House of Blues asking, "Is the band there?" At the time, they were trying to throw a TV into the street.

Millennium New Year's Eve was three days of craziness.

**Was your career path typical?**

You go to larger properties, up to a major convention hotel. That's the way it is. I was assistant general manager in West Hollywood. That was my first hotel as the No. 2. Seattle had 425 rooms, and Indian Wells was a 500-room resort.

**How did the Murano position come about?**

I got a call from a recruiter. He had my résumé – it may have been from my Hyatt days.

**And you finally decided to come north.**

Southern California – it was not somewhere we wanted to raise our children.

### MARK VAN COONEY

**TITLE:** General manager, Hotel Murano

**EMPLOYEES:** 187

**AGE:** 41

**GREW UP:** Ohio

**FAMILY:** Wife, Gillian; son, Dane, 2½; daughter, Kylie, 8 months

**LIVES:** University Place

**PRIORITIES:** "My wife is my soulmate, my best friend. That's first – my family. Then Ohio State football and ESPN."

**HIS CHOICE TO WIN THE FINAL FOUR:** Pitt

**You'd been in Seattle. Did you have any preconception about Tacoma?**

The Tacoma Dome was what I knew. We would hear about the Tacoma Dome. I didn't have any feelings negative or positive.

I had heard of Provenance, very much into design, the brand.

I flew up, and drove down. I stayed at the hotel. It was my first time in Tacoma. I arrived about 3:30, 4 o'clock. I drove through town, along Ruston Way, to Old Town. I was hooked.

**And the hotel?**

You could take this hotel into any city in the world, and it would succeed.

I'd seen it online, the glass art. It's not just a boutique hotel. With the glass art, it's an experience, a step above.

I was impressed with downtown. It was a mix of Seattle and Portland. I love the water.

When we were living here, at the hotel, my son would wake up in the middle of the night, push a chair up to the window and watch the water and the port. "Boat! Boat!"

That first night, I was impressed with the room.

I called my wife. I said, "It's phenomenal!"

I drove down to Portland and met with the management team.

**How was it living for a month in the hotel you were hired to manage?**

We'd have room service, and my wife was thrilled there was a Trader Joe's.

**Do you plan any changes at the Murano?**

What I'm focusing on is improving the level of customer service. I really want to bring the level of service up to the level of the hotel. We want to make sure the service meets the expectation.

**Any examples?**

We want to go from "Are you checking in?" to "Welcome to the Murano. How may I assist you?"

One guest, a woman, 81, asked our night valet for a bus schedule. He ran down to the bus stop, got the schedule, came back and walked her down there and waited until the bus came.

**Do you have any plans for the former Altezoo (former top-floor restaurant) space?**

We're still in negotiations with the Tacoma Club. Currently, there are no guests and no functions there.

**So now you live in Pierce County. You've been here since last fall. How's that part going, with the family?**

I moved 11 times in my career. My wife and I have lived in seven different places in five years of marriage. When we got here, we really felt like we'd found our home.

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