

15 MINUTES

Morning comes again for area hotel housekeepers

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A few days after Christmas, a tall, green pine still twinkled in the lobby of The Best Western on Colonial Boulevard in Fort Myers. At around 9 a.m., guests milled about the lobby, picking juice, breads and cereals from a complimentary continental breakfast buffet, some finding their way to white plastic tables out beside the pool where they munched croissants in the chilly morning fog shrouding the hotel.

"I'm over here and I can't carry this all," a woman from the Northeast, traversing the lobby with six cups of juice, called to a sleepy-eyed man in a sweatshirt loitering by the Christmas tree.

Elevator doors dinged and opened next to the front desk, where a family of four, children swirling in motion around two adults, stepped as one into the lobby. Behind them came 27-year-old Clesha Roberson with her cart full of cleaning supplies, which she had stocked that morning with various sprays, cleaners, towels, soaps, shampoos, lotions — everything she needs to clean up about 10 rooms.

"108 is a mess," Roberson said. "They leave clothes everywhere, food everywhere. They know we have to clean, so they feel like they don't have to do anything. I'll be glad when they check out."

Roberson and her friend Betty Powell, 55, were among the hotel's housekeeping staff there that morning.

"Sometimes it's hard and sometimes it's easy," Powell said of housekeeping.



FLORIDA WEEKLY PHOTO BY EVAN WILLIAMS

Clesha Roberson and Betty Powell at the Best Western on Colonial in Fort Myers.

"Some of 'em are deliberately dirty and some of 'em are very, very neat."

And the neat ones are often the best tipppers too, they agreed. A good tip is maybe five dollars or more, Powell said, also noting that Northerners, or "snowbirds," are generally excellent tipppers.

"Two dollars is even good," Roberson added.

Powell said the best day for tipping she's had was when the Boston Red Sox were in town and she collected \$73 in one day. Roberson, who had collected \$30 just the day before, said that had been one of her best. They also said that rap groups

often come through on or around July 4, and tip well, and so did Hulk Hogan.

Today was a slow day, they said, and to make things easier, most of the guests were "stay-overs," Roberson said, not "check-outs." There's less to clean and stock in a room where someone is staying over.

After cleaning up messy room 108, Roberson moved on to room 106 and began stuffing the pillows in fresh cases, freshening bathrooms then making a bed while avoiding a suitcase, deodorant stick and sock which lay on top — all things she's not allowed to touch. Roberson cleaned

quietly and efficiently, the only sounds being distant chatter and the squeak of a towel cleaning a window. The job is peaceful, which is one of the things she likes about it, not like her weekend job at Southwest Florida Addiction Services on McGregor Boulevard.

"There's nothing peaceful about that," she said. "I see people in a lot of different situations. Some are there to change, but some are just wasting time."

Her weekend job pays better, but she's been at Best Western longer, and so she makes that a priority. A single mother, Roberson said she'll be going to a doctor's appointment after work today, then home to her daughter, who turned 8 on Dec. 15. They live near downtown Fort Myers.

"Miss Clesha is one of our best, most dependable workers," Powell said, coming down the hall with an armful of fresh towels. Powell will be driving home to Lehigh Acres after work, where she lives with her three high-school aged children. She's also mother to a 36-year-old son who lives in Fort Myers.

"I enjoy housekeeping," she said. "If I didn't I wouldn't be here."

Powell used to work as a nurse, and may go back to that job when her daughter is ready for college because the pay is better. Both women were born and raised in Fort Myers.

"It has grown," Powell said. "And it's getting bigger and bigger."

Roberson and Powell continued on down the hallway, which was filled with the chemical cleaner smell of bubblegum wafting out of the rooms. ■

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