



**GREEN TURTLE**  
CLUB AND MARINA

September 01, 2006

Bahamas Hotel Association  
P.O.Box N-7799  
Nassau, Bahamas

RE: Nomination of Susan "Debbie" Symonette  
for Employee of the Year

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to serve as my nomination for Susan "Debbie" Symonette as a candidate for the award for Employee of the Year.

I am sure that The Bahamas Hotel Association is now well aware of the talent that we seem to breed here on Green Turtle Cay in the tourism field. The island of Green Turtle Cay, with its population of 400, is the home to Cacique Award winners Brendal Stevens, Floyd Lowe, Vertrum Lowe, Ray Lowe, Alton Lowe, and myself, Lynn Johnson. Last year alone we had four persons in the finals of the Cacique awards- three bringing home the award in their respective categories. After last years Cacique Awards ceremony in Nassau, I happened to be in the elevator with an employee of the Ministry of Tourism's Abaco office, and a resident of Nassau. The Nassau resident asked how it was Abaco bribed the judges, to which the Ministry of Tourism employee responded that it had nothing to do with bribery, but the fact that Abaco has the highest satisfaction rating among visitors and the highest percentage of return guests in the Bahamas.

Even though my nominee is not a life-long resident of Green Turtle Cay, she has called this island home for 24 years (during the span of her career at the Green Turtle Club). The impact that this woman has had on tourism in the Abacos is astounding. She is one of the reasons that Abaco can boast the highest percentage of guests that choose to return after their initial visit. Debbie single handedly brings back many guests every year. The fact that our comment sheets, filled out by guests upon checking out from the resort, consistently list Debbie as one of the highlights of their stay, and a reason they have returned year after year never ceases to amaze me.

I am faced with the task this year of putting the essence of this woman into writing, and articulating exactly what it is she brings to tourism in the Bahamas. How do you simplify into mere words someone as special as Debbie? Let me try:

Green Turtle Cay, Abaco, Bahamas

Phone: 242.365.4271 • Fax: 242.365.4272 • Toll Free Fax/Voice Message: 1.800.254.2617

Email: [info@greenturtleclub.com](mailto:info@greenturtleclub.com) • Web: [www.greenturtleclub.com](http://www.greenturtleclub.com)

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Long before the cacique awards and the internet came into existence, there were letters coming into the Green Turtle Club thanking us for a wonderful stay and thanking us for Debbie. Before there was a platform that recognized outstanding service, Debbie was a candidate for an award rewarding excellent service. Born on Abaco to parents Mr. & Mrs. Symonette of Fox Town, Debbie moved to Nassau at a young age to attend RM Bailey High School, graduating in 1976. In 1978 Debbie furthered her education at the Nassau Academy of Business. She studied secretarial skills, and upon graduation in 1979 gained employment at Gospel Bells Broadcasting. It wasn't until April of 1982, after a brief stint as a cashier at Big Sun Food Store, she found her passion. By chance, Debbie happened to be vacationing on Abaco, visiting family when she heard that the Green Turtle Club was looking for employees. On a whim, she hopped on the ferry, arriving in what she calls a different world. She explains she had never seen anywhere like Green Turtle. She instantly fell in love with its unspoiled beauty, amazed at the extreme contrast to the neighborhoods she was accustomed to in Nassau. She vowed that if she were hired, she would strive to make other visitors appreciate this island as she had when she first arrived. She says, "This is the real Bahamas- I thought, "Wow! This is Paradise"". She was hired, and a partnership was forged that day between Debbie Symonette and the tourism industry of the Bahamas. Every guest that walked through the doors of the Green Turtle Club became her main priority, taking the task of ensuring they had a great experience upon herself. I have watched Debbie evolve from her role as an enthusiastic chambermaid and waitress into a seasoned novice bartender.

Debbie is the ideal person to bartend. She has a superb gift for gauging people's personalities and a knack for knowing how to bring them out of their shells. Some people call it empathy-being able to feel other people's emotions, but in Debbie, this gift is accompanied by a true love of people. The combination of her talents makes her truly amazing behind a bar. She loves people, but more importantly: people love her. Love is the mutual bond that ties her to persons from around the globe, from every walk of life, every tier of the class hierarchy, every income bracket, and every age group. From her countless encounters with celebrities, Government officials, and multi-millionaires Debbie is as much at home with the "rich and famous", as she is with the "broke and nameless". Her smile has the power to break prejudices and reform negative stereotypes that some guests can arrive with.

As a manager, it is important to be aware of your employees' best assets and utilize them to the advantage of the company. From the beginning, Debbie's best attributes were evident: unbreakable optimism, the ability to inspire others to be positive, her understanding of the human spirit, and her genuine caring. As a testament to Debbie's "tourism prowess", she loves the challenge of a difficult guest (that "hard nut" that no one else can seem to crack). I can recall a situation three years ago when our current manager encountered one such guest.

Prior to arriving at the resort, the guest in question lost his luggage, felt he had been taken advantage of by his taxi driver, and had missed lunch. Exasperated, the manager came into the bar and declared the guest could not be calmed. With a chuckle and a twist of her hips, I remember Debbie saying, "Oh let Debs take care of this". Armed with a complimentary "Topsy Turtle"

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cocktail, Debbie saunters out onto the patio. Within minutes the gentleman was laughing and putting his feet up-literally. We don't know what Debbie's secret is, or exactly what she said to that particular guest, but what we do know is that this was a lesson of what Debbie's infectious spirit is capable of. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is quoted as saying "The only force capable of turning an enemy into a friend is love". It may have been Dr. King who is famous for saying these words, but it is our Debbie Symonette who puts them into practice on a day-to-day basis.

Debbie is a caring mother, a devoted daughter, and an all around good person. Dedicated both to the community where she grew up in Nassau, and the community she resides in- Green Turtle Cay, she is an active volunteer at fundraisers and remains active in her church. Her life's goal was fulfilled when she was able to buy her mother Mary (now deceased) a home after being employed at the Green Turtle Club for only a short time.

For someone who means so much, and has given so much to so many, Debbie remains humble and remembers every mentor and every person who has inspired her over the years. When I talked with her about my wanting to put forth this nomination, it proved to be an emotional interview, saying she had her mother to thank for her caring spirit and bravado, her bartending expertise she owed to long-time friend and co-worker Geri, and has her daughter Lashondra Curry to thank for making her the strong woman she is today. She says she owes the realization of her gift for tourism to a guest in the 1980s. The gentleman- the Minister of Tourism at the time, told her she was an asset to not only the club, but also to Bahamian tourism on the whole. She says he inspired her to work to be the ideal representative of friendly Bahamian service. "He helped me realize this is what makes me happy- making other people happy". She says she gets out of bed every day with a fresh outlook on life, and the anticipation of whom she might meet and what their story might be. To a woman who means so many things to so many different types of people Debbie remains humble and thanks them for making it possible to turn something she enjoys so much into her career.

When asked what her life holds, Debbie laments that upon retirement she might go back to school. Her role in tourism is not yet fulfilled. She would like to become an ambassador for Bahamian tourism and help to establish a positive attitude in the youth about what she calls "our bread and butter". She wants every guest to leave with the feeling that we as Bahamians were just as glad to have them here, in the Bahamas, as they were to be here.

It is said that a church would just be a building without its parishioners; I say the Green Turtle Club Bar would just be another building without Debbie. Debbie Symonette deserves this award as an emblem of her extraordinary efforts this year, and as a tribute to her work ethic and a 24-year track record that is impeccable. I think it would be a loss to overlook this dedicated, proud Bahamian woman for this award.

Yours truly,

P. Lynn Johnson  
General Manager