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For more information, contact:

Derek Levandowski, (919) 844-0098 or [DerekL@ncrla.biz](mailto:DerekL@ncrla.biz)

**Lodging Operator of the Year Named**

***Michael J. Martino, General Manager of the Sheraton Imperial Hotel and Convention Center wins this year's coveted award***

**(Raleigh – For Immediate Release)** The North Carolina Restaurant and Lodging Association (NCRLA), the trade association representing the state's \$17.5 billion restaurant and lodging industries, awarded it prestigious Lodging Operator of the Year award to Michael J. Martino, General Manager of the Sheraton Imperial Hotel and Convention Center. Martino will receive his award at the first annual Taste of North Carolina, which will be held on February 8, 2010 at the Washington Duke Inn & Golf Club of Durham, NC from 6-9pm.

The Lodging Operator of the Year award honors the men and women who manage North Carolina's 1,600 lodging properties. This winner demonstrates operational excellence along with significant contributions to the industry, and the community in which they work. The awards committee, made up of members of the NCRLA Board of Directors, noted Martino's extraordinary commitment and vision.

Martino recognized the looming economic collapse in the fall of 2008 and took steps to conserve capital and reduce costs, while maintaining open communication with his employees about what management was doing to weather the storm. Martino was able to successfully avert the economic crisis while continuing many of the charitable commitments that the Sheraton Imperial has been known for. In 2009 the Sheraton Imperial sponsored the United Way Annual Fund-raising Breakfast Kick-off. Martino also continued his 10 year involvement with the annual Triangle Heart Walk, donating time, manpower and resources.

"Michael Martino represents the kind of dedication, service and ethics that are necessary to be a success in the hospitality industry," said NCRLA President and CEO Paul M. Stone, "He is very deserving of this award and we are happy to see his excellence recognized."

Tickets to the Taste of North Carolina can be purchased online at [NCRLA.biz](http://NCRLA.biz). Tickets are \$79 a piece for the event, which will be celebrating the best food, beer, wine and hospitality service in North Carolina. For more information on the event, the awards, or how to become a sponsor, contact Rebecca Crews at 1-800-582-8750.

**About NCRLA:** NCRLA, the North Carolina Restaurant and Lodging Association is the leading advocate and resource for the state's \$17.5 billion hospitality industry. Combined, restaurants and hotels are one of North Carolina's largest employers providing jobs to more than 10 percent of the state's workforce. To learn more, visit <http://www.ncrla.biz>.

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