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Cruise Line Timeshare Firm Plans 500 Hires **From *The Business Journal of Phoenix***

Phoenix, AZ. (September 3, 2004) - A Phoenix company that brought cruise lines into the timeshare arena has plans for expansion, and the company's chief executive says they'll be hanging out the help-wanted sign on the corporate gangplank with more than 500 new hires planned for next year.

Of the new jobs, 300 positions will be for operations in Phoenix.

International Cruises & Excursions, or ICE, founded by Marcia Rowley in 1997, currently occupies a four-story building near Interstate 17 and Peoria Avenue, across from the Rose Mofford Sports Complex. ICE has taken over the first floor of an adjacent building and holds an option for the top three floors.

The company currently employs about 650 in the Phoenix area, including both inbound and outbound call center operations. ICE has subsidiary call center operations in Mexico City, South Africa and Australia, and a business-development office in the United Kingdom.

"ICE continues to experience unprecedented growth in terms of both our client base and internal manpower," said John Rowley, the company's president and CEO. "The rapid pace of ICE's expansion is the result of a growing demand for our unique vacation products and our very talented and dedicated staff. To support our growth, we will hire 500-plus employees in 2005."

Despite Phoenix's lack of seaport facilities, "we are one of the top five cruise providers in the world," Rowley said.

The privately owned company began with the focus of allowing resort timeshare owners to trade in their condo time for cruise time. It since has expanded that business model to

provide cruise booking services under a number of branded partnerships with such entities as Sabre and AAA.

"We supply the cruise booking platform," said Rowley, who added that the company books in excess of \$116 million in cruises annually.

Corporate revenue has risen from \$41.4 million in 2001 to \$137.2 million in 2003.

Rowley said of the 500-plus new hires planned for next year, at least 300 will be Valley-based, largely with the call center operations.

The company also started a new service with Carnival Cruise Lines, the largest company in the cruise industry, called the Carnival Vacation Club. That operation actually is conducted shipboard, with 12 employees per ship. ICE plans to expand it from the current three ships to Carnival's 22-ship fleet by the end of next year.

ICE has its own membership group, which accounts for about 10 percent of revenue, Rowley said. In order to join the group, members must have a timeshare ownership to trade with. The membership fee is \$99 per year, although that fee is reduced under multiple-year memberships.

In addition, the membership fee is available wholesale, so other timeshare providers, such as ILX Resorts and the Shell Vacation Club, provide memberships as a bonus to purchasers, although the typical member will have to pay the annual fee once the purchased time has elapsed.

ICE is developing an outbound call center in 50,000 square feet of leased space in the Metro North business park near I-17 and Thunderbird Road. There, employees call people who have been on one cruise and try to sell them another, guaranteeing them a rate for a seven-day cruise for two and then giving them up to 18 months to decide the time and destination for the cruise.

"Outbound requires a very talented group," said Rowley. "We're talking to people who we know want to cruise -- 93 percent of people who take a cruise want to take another -- they just don't know where and when."

In addition to the cruise line relationships, ICE also maintains a full slate of land resort partners, giving timeshare owners additional avenues to trade time. ICE is affiliated in 650 resorts around the world, including several in the Valley.

"We're partnering with ICE to increase our resort awareness throughout the world by increasing our exposure," said Karen Murray Boston, director of public relations and communications for the Scottsdale Plaza Resort. "People who decide they don't want to cruise but would rather have a Scottsdale vacation can come to the Scottsdale Plaza.

"This relationship is just starting, and we look to a lot of guests coming our way in 2005," added Boston.

The Rowleys, who also run a software business called Mini-Soft Inc., which provides third-party application software for the legal industry, were confident in their business model when they began ICE seven years ago. But the journey has taken them further than they perhaps expected.

"As a little entrepreneur, we didn't have any idea that we could have such an impact. We didn't have any idea of the expansion of the cruise line industry, which has doubled since we started," said Rowley, who maintains his optimism in the face of rising fuel prices, pointing out that most cruise lines have long-term agreements with their fuel suppliers.

"It's the most desirable vacation."

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