

Stars Align For CruiseOne/Cruises Inc.'s New Headquarters

September 16, 2010 – A bevy of top cruise sales executives and even the city mayor turned out for the grand opening of the new CruiseOne/Cruises Inc. world headquarters in Fort Lauderdale last night.

"This industry is about people. Our product is service and knowledge. The investment we made in this facility is an investment we made in our team," Jeff Sherota, svp house brand marketing for World Travel Holdings, told the crowd of well-wishers.

One of North America's largest travel companies and a leading cruise distributor, WTH is the parent of CruiseOne, the home-based franchise travel agent network with more than 600 locations and Cruises Inc., the original cruise travel host agency with more than 500 independent contractors.

Among the many key figures at the headquarters ribbon-cutting were Royal Caribbean's Vicki Freed and Joanne Schimelman, Celebrity Cruises' Jeff Clarke, Norwegian Cruise Line's Camille Olivero and Alex Pinelo, Azamara Club Cruises' Edie Bornstein, Compagnie du Ponant's Terri Haas and Cruise Lines International Association's Bob Sharak.

"This is testament to the strength of Cruise One/Cruises Inc. and certainly a testament to the strength of the cruise-selling agent," Sharak told Seatrade Insider. "We partner with them and are very happy, very proud to see them upgrade their facilities. We hope to continue growing together."

The spacious new West Cypress Creek Road location houses more than 90 people working in areas such as business development, operations, customer service, technology and marketing for CruiseOne/Cruises Inc. as well as WTH house brands.

Training spaces include multiple conference rooms and a Learning Center with 43 computer stations – all equipped with wireless technology, plus two cafes so agents can dine in during training.

"This new facility gives us significant growth potential. It allows our house brands and our home-based team to work side by side, giving us great synergies," said WTH co-chairman and ceo Jeff Tolkin. The 10-year lease shows the company's "commitment to the area, the employees and the industry," he added.

WTH cruise sales are up year over year. "We see continued demand for cruises, which remain an excellent value, and our agents' knowledge, combined with their marketing prowess, has allowed us to continue to sell extremely well notwithstanding the challenges in the economy," Tolkin said.

Alex Pinelo, national director, online and strategic accounts for NCL, called WTH and CruiseOne/Cruises Inc. "a great partner," adding: "We couldn't be happier to be hosting their biggest and best conference on our new ship." The week-long national conference, expected to draw 800-plus attendees, is set for Norwegian Epic's Oct. 16 cruise.

Pinelo, who described the new CruiseOne/Cruises Inc. headquarters in a word – amazing – said: "They outdid themselves with all the facilities and technology." Pointing to the Learning Center, he envisioned how it will be a breeze to "come in with your flash drive and begin training."

For his part, Fort Lauderdale Mayor John "Jack" Seiler expressed delight that the city can retain a company that has "such an impact on the local economy" and supports another economic engine, South Florida's cruise industry. He also expressed pride that Port Everglades is soon to become the world's No. 1 cruise port.

The CruiseOne/Cruises Inc. headquarters "says an awful lot about their commitment to the industry," according to Joanne Schimelman, vp sales and national accounts for Royal Caribbean. "World Travel Holdings is a significant partner. They're one of the best and, together with all their brands, they're a very meaningful part of this business. This shows they're really in this for the long haul."

"Everything we wanted in a building we got here," said Joelle Delva, vp operations for CruiseOne/Cruises Inc, as she led tours of the facility. Before, the companies were spread across three locations.

"Now we're all one happy family. It's terrific to be under one roof."