



In its second season, the reality series “Hotel Impossible” is produced by Atlas Media Corps for the cable network the Travel Channel. New episodes air Monday nights starting at 8 p.m. mountain time. The Grand Lake Western Riviera episode is slated to air in March on the Travel Channel, according to a Travel Channel spokesperson. Those in the Grand Lake area during taping are politely asked to respect the production process.

Reality check, Grand Lake motel owners to be on Travel Channel reality show

JANUARY, 30 2013

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GRAND LAKE, CO COLORADO

Imagine being told in front of a national audience there's a better way to do your job.

That's exactly what's going to be taking place in Grand Lake this week as a TV crew of renovation and hotel-management experts descends upon the town to pay a visit to the Western Riviera lakeside motel.

There, the self-assured hard-hitting host Anthony Melchiorri of the Travel-Channel show “Hotel Impossible” plans to meet motel owners Mike and Jackie Tompkins and their staff.

From there, it's a safe bet Melchiorri will size up the motel's lobby, inspect a room to reveal any cleaning misses, and judge the overall guest experience at the Tompkins' 16-room lodge.

It's likely he'll pull the Tompkins aside to deliver them a wake-up call, then sic a designer and a team of construction workers on the premises to make improvements.

In a word, the Tompkins are “nervous,” they said on Monday, just two days before taping.

They found out on Jan. 2 their property was selected to be featured on the show, which takes hotels not living up to their potential and attempts to turn them around. A designer visited the Western Riviera property to assess it, and a producer of the show has since visited to get a feel for the town of Grand Lake, according to the Tompkins, who still do not know how producers learned of their property in the first place.

They'd never seen the show until after they got word their motel was being considered, they said.

"We watched a few episodes to see what it's all about," Jackie said. In one show, "Anthony, the host, made the entire staff cry. It made me want to run the other way."

Melchiorri has a reputation of being blunt with hotel owners and managers.

In this Monday's episodes, the star of the show told the manager of the Periwinkle Inn in New Jersey, "I'm changing your name to Miss Excuse." The manager nearly walked off the show from feeling offended by the host's comment.

In the following show, Melchiorri helped to work through a sticky family-business dynamic while managing to get the entire Daytona Beach hotel repainted as well as the pool area made over.

He seeks the design expertise of the show's regulars Blanche Garcia, Casey Noble and Alison Victoria to help transform spaces, and the show is enlisting the local firm TDS Construction of Winter Park to work on the project.

Searching for that magic profit

The Tompkins have been operating their Grand Lake lodging business for longer than a decade, most-recently adding an events center to the mix of properties they own in the small mountain town. Besides the motel, they also rent out lakeside and courtside cabins on a nightly basis.

"We've been doing this 13 years and have yet to make a profit," Mike said candidly on Monday. "I'm embarrassed to say that."

"They're all older buildings, so just maintaining them is very costly," Jackie said.

Since they don't have the money to do everything they'd like to their properties, they often need to pick and choose, she said.

Online feedback about their motel often states the place is "clean," but also "dated," Mike said.

The motel is located on prime real estate, overlooking Colorado's largest natural lake. But where summers are hopping, winters and shoulder seasons are not. "In July we make in one day what we make the entire month of April," Mike said.

Yet they pride themselves for not having been closed a single day in all the years they've owned the Western Riviera. The more businesses that are open in town, the better for the greater business community, Mike said.

A taste of reality

Before buying the Western Riviera, the only motel-service experience the Tompkins had was having stayed in hotels or motels, so the learning curve was sharp and fast.

Jackie had help with cleaning rooms, but during the first two years she also handled reservations and did the laundry.

"It was hard," she said, "But it was really important for me to learn every aspect of the business." She

soon discovered ways to improve operations; for example, the old way of penciling reservations on a calendar gave way to computers. A new cancellation policy was implemented.

Now the show will bring its own discerning set of eyes to the business.

“I really believe after watching all the episodes we’ve watched, there’s a lot of stuff we’re going to learn, even though I’m scared to death,” Jackie said. “I really think it’s going to give our guests a better experience, give our employees a more enjoyable place to work, and it will be good (exposure) for the entire town.”

“I learned in business, it’s wise to surround yourself with people who are smarter than you are,” Mike said. “And these people are definitely smarter when it comes to hotel management.”

But if all else fails: “I’m gong to get really mad at them, yell at them and kick them off the property,” Mike said with a wink. “I’ve watched reality TV. I know that’s what they want.”

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