

Journal News Sunday

BREAKING NEWS 24/7 AT LOHUD.COM

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Ritz-Carlton,
White Plains,
512 calls



Yonkers Gateway
Motel, Yonkers,
254 calls

Disorderly person: 8 calls



Royal Regency,
Yonkers,
121 calls

Larcenies: 13 calls



Westchester Marriott,
Greenburgh,
104 calls



La Quinta Inn &
Suites, Elmsford,
91 calls

Noise: 9 calls



Tuckahoe Motor Inn,
Yonkers
Disputes: 17 calls



Days Inn, Nanuet
Drugs: 4 calls



The Esplanade,
White Plains
Prostitution: 4 calls

Records show 2,012 police or emergency calls in 2011 at region's 66 properties

By Ernie Garcia
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Like many local families after Superstorm Sandy, Susan B. Henner of Edgemont, her husband and two sons sought emergency shelter at the Westchester Marriott, whose lobby was filled with utility workers at all hours.

"Half of them weren't even staying there, and no one was asking or checking them," Henner said.

Despite Henner's concerns about non-guests in the lobby, the Westchester Marriott and most other local lodgings are safe considering the volume of people who pass through the region's hotels, motels and inns. The Journal News counted 2,012 police visits and 911 calls for 66 Lower Hudson Valley properties in 2011, a period when there were 1.6 million hotel room night stays in Westchester, according to the county's tourism office. Putnam and Rockland did not have hotel taxes in 2011, so their number of hotel room night stays can't be counted.

Dan Conte, chairman of the Westchester Hotel Association and general manager of the 444-room Westchester Marriott in Greenburgh, said in the four years he's led the hotel group, 911 calls haven't been an issue, though he added that safety matters to all hotel managers.

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HOTEL 911 CALLS

The five hotels listed above, led by the Ritz-Carlton, recorded the most calls and police visits in 2011 for the Lower Hudson Valley, according to police 911 logs obtained by The Journal News.

The red boxes, above and left, show the hotels that compiled the most calls and visits for a particular category of incident.

ON THE WEB

View 911 call logs from 2011 for 66 hotels, motels and inns in Putnam, Rockland and Westchester counties at www.lohud.com

HOTEL: Police use some lodgings for stings, traffic stops

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"Now, more than ever, it's a big deal," Conte said, explaining that hotels do not have a common approach to crime or theft. "At the Marriott, we have 24-hour security seven days a week."

Local hotels strive for comfortable, safe and quiet environments, so if guests violate certain rules, managers will crack down.

"When there are too many occupants in the room partying and it gets too loud and out of control, that's when we call the police," said Vick Vangala, operations supervisor at the Fairfield Inn in Spring Valley.

A review of 911 calls for 2011 showed that Fairfield Inn's 104-room complex at 100 Spring Valley Market Place had one of the lowest call rates for a large hotel in the Lower Hudson Valley, with a total of 16 police responses last year for reports of medical emergencies, disorderly patrons and a motor vehicle accident.

Other local hotels weren't so sedate.

The Royal Regency in Yonkers had Westchester's most calls for thefts; Days Inn in Nanuet and Raintree Motel in Congers tied for the most calls for disputes in Rockland County; and Budget Motor Inn in Mahopac had the most calls in Putnam County, mostly for traffic stops and auto accidents.

The 911 call logs don't document crimes. They are simply a report by the public or hotel staffers.

If no one calls 911, a crime might not get recorded at the time it is committed. Call logs for Days Inn in Nanuet do not include an April 13, 2011, stabbing of a 21-year-old Bronx man for which Nanuet resident Ciera Norfleet faces assault and weapon charges Monday in Clarkstown Town Court.

While staying at Westchester Marriott, Henner said, she called security when a loud argument erupted in a room next to hers, though the dispute ended by the time security responded. Westchester Marriott had seven disputes called into 911 in 2011.

After leaving Westchester Marriott, Henner spent a week at Hampton Inn in Yonkers.

"I felt good and safe there," Henner said of her second stop. "The good thing is that everyone has to walk past the front desk. At the Marriott there were lots of entrances and there were lots of people in the hotel not staying there."

Elliot Moritz, 72, of Chestnut Ridge turned to

the Hilton Pearl River after Superstorm Sandy, but he didn't spend any nights there. Instead, he and his wife went to the hotel and spent four hours on three nights hanging out in the lobby and lounge to enjoy the warm fireplace and televisions.

"Nobody stopped me, nobody asked me anything. I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing," said Moritz, a travel agent whose clients generally ask about hotel security only in foreign locations.

Though actual crimes in local hotels are rare for the volume of guests, there have been high-profile cases in recent years.

NFL Hall of Fame inductee Lawrence Taylor pleaded guilty to misdemeanor counts of patronizing a prostitute at a former Holiday Inn in Rockland in 2010. Ben Novack Jr., whose father founded the famed Fontainebleau hotel in Miami Beach, was beaten to death in his Hilton Westchester suite in 2009 during an Amway Global convention at the Rye Brook hotel organized by his company.

His wife, Nancy Novack, and her brother, Cristobal Veliz, face life in prison at their Dec. 17 sentencing in the murder conspiracy.

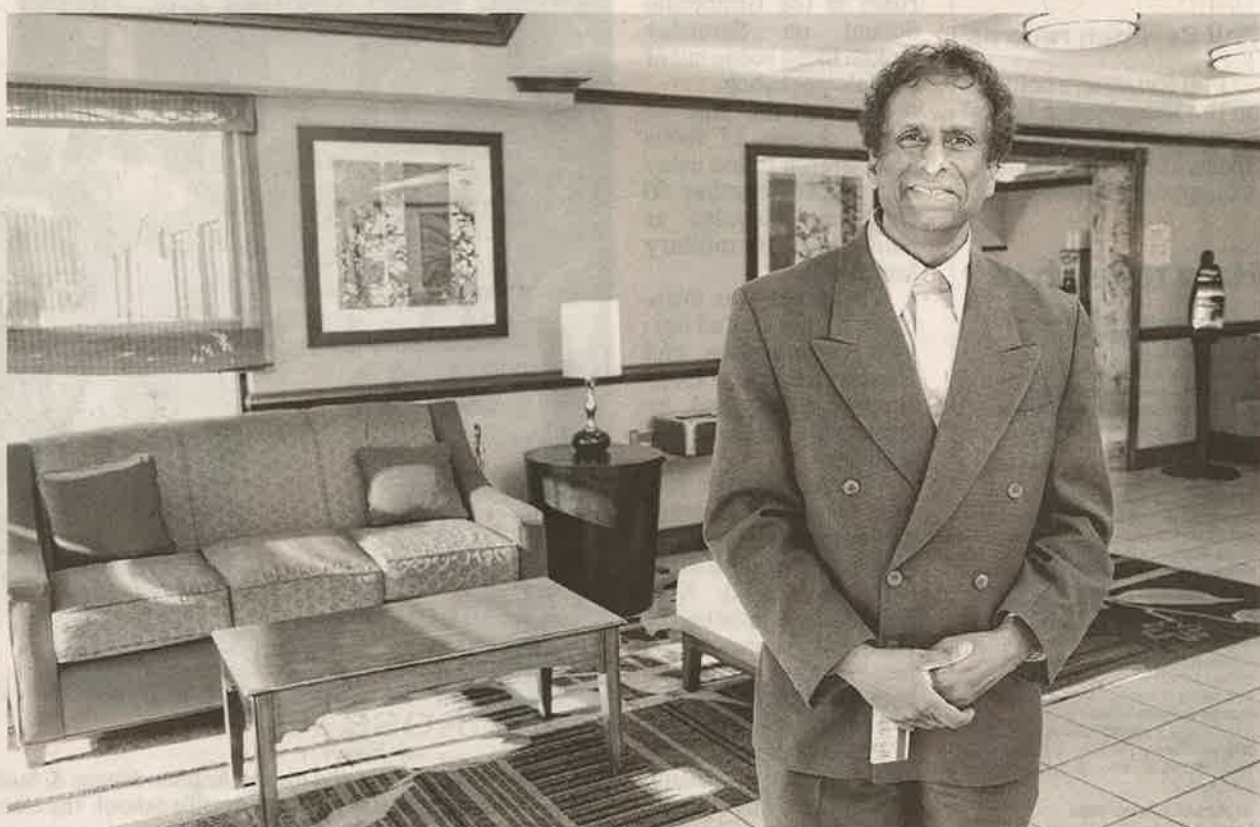
No reliable national or state figures exist on crime in lodgings, according to Tamika Figs, a research manager at the American Hotel & Lodging Association Information Center in Houston.

"AH&LA does not track crime statistics in hotels. We are unaware of any databases that track this type of information," Figs wrote in an email, suggesting that local police departments are the only source of such information.

The Journal News identified 71 lodgings in the Lower Hudson Valley, and the newspaper obtained 911 call records from about two dozen police agencies using the state's Freedom of Information Law. Besides calls alleging crimes or disruptive behavior at 66 hotels, motels and inns in Putnam, Rockland and Westchester counties, the 2,012 calls also include runs for sick people and fire alarms, among other emergencies.

Police said three hotels had no calls in 2011. Call data from Town Lyne Motel in Cortlandt and Watergate Motor Inn in Croton-on-Hudson are missing from The Journal News' count because state police said they could not respond to an information request before Dec. 19.

Last year on April 28 the Watergate Motor Inn was the scene of a seven-



Govind Thota, general manager of Fairfield Inn by Marriott, is seen Nov. 29 in Spring Valley. TANIA SAVAYAN/THE JOURNAL NEWS

hour standoff that ended with Nathaniel Hester, 31, being charged with first-degree criminal contempt, third-degree robbery and fourth-degree grand larceny, felonies. Hester's next court appearance for those and other charges is Jan. 10 at New Castle Town Court.

The Ritz-Carlton racked up 512 calls to 911 in 2011, the most for any Lower Hudson Valley hotel and more than one-quarter of all the police visits and 911 calls for hotels in the region. In contrast, the White Plains hotel with the second-highest number of visits and calls was the Crowne Plaza with 70.

The vast majority of the Ritz-Carlton's calls were for "domestic preparedness" — a visit initiated by police. Initially White Plains police said that it lavished so much attention on the city landmark not because of crime — the Ritz-Carlton had just one call for an alleged larceny and one for a disorderly person in 2011 — but because the building was a potential terrorist target.

When asked why the hotel merited the designation and extra security, Assistant Chief Anne Fitz-Simmons declined to elaborate.

"We don't tell people why we do these things," she said. "We're in a position of public safety, and it's not always wise to explain."

One night in a standard room at the Ritz-Carlton in December runs from \$219 to \$409, according to the hotel's website.

Police regularly initiated many patrols at Yonkers Gateway Motel at 300 Yonkers Ave., besides responding to calls from that location for robber-

ies, sex offenses and disputes. General manager Ravi Gheewala said many of the 254 incidents, including 13 arrests, occurred during police traffic stops on the street in front of his property.

Gheewala said police cruisers like to wait for traffic violators by his property because there is a traffic signal at his motel's entrance. In the almost 10 years his family has owned the motel, Gheewala said, they have excluded undesirable guests by simply not accepting their business.

"When we took it over the police gave us all kinds of guidelines," said Gheewala, whose hotel has 69 rooms. "We've tried to weed out most, if not all, of the trouble."

Conditions at 300 Yonkers Ave. got so bad that Yonkers police shut it down in 2001 until it reopened under different management. Police used a public nuisance law to close the property because of drugs and prostitution, the first time the city took such action under its law.

Yonkers Police Commissioner Charles Gardner said his department deploys increased police presence at certain locations in the city — including Yonkers Gateway Motel — based on intelligence, crime trends and complaints from the community.

"We have made numerous arrests at this location, and some investigations as a result of these arrests are active," Gardner said in an email.

Police monitoring of some motels and sex offenders who live in them led Putnam County to enact a law July 6, 2010, limiting to 5 percent the number of rooms that a lodg-

ing can rent to sex offenders. The move came after officials in that county discovered that four sex offenders were living at the Henry Van Motel on Sodom Road in Southeast at the same time. Last year Henry Van Motel had four calls for minor issues including a dispute and an illness.

Some local managers did not want to discuss conditions at their properties. La Quinta Inn & Suites in Elmsford had the most calls about noise in 2011 but staff there did not comment.

The Rev. Rocco Dapice of the People's Church has held Sunday worship services at the La Quinta's ballroom since Easter. Dapice called the hotel "wonderful."

"I've had friends and relatives stay there as guests, and I have never heard anything negative about it," Dapice said.

A few hotels serve as overflow dormitories for local colleges, yet what might be thought of as the partying crowd didn't result in high call volumes. AVE White Plains at 25 Martine Ave. hosts about 70 students from Purchase College, SUNY, and the complex had 22 calls for all of 2011.

The Esplanade hotel at 4 Lyon Place in White Plains had Berkeley College students in 44 of its 88 rooms in 2011, and police records show it had 32 police incidents last year.

College students no longer live in the hotel, and four of The Esplanade's incidents were for a prostitution sting in July 2011 that the management allowed White Plains police to conduct, netting four arrests.

"We don't have any of that going on now. I've made a lot of changes,"

said Esplanade general manager Arlinda DaSilva, whose hotel is undergoing a \$4 million renovation.

Hotel security is typically a concern to travelers when they are staying overseas, said Doris Star of Briarcliff Travel in Briarcliff Manor.

"I have people who request high floors, and they won't sleep on ground floors," Star said of her customers' safety concerns. "No one seems to be worried about this area."

Royal Regency in Yonkers had two deaths last year. Frank Perri, 47, of Ardsley was found dead in unsuspecting circumstances July 12, and Sean Collins, 33, of the Bronx was found accidentally drowned in a bathtub Feb. 24.

Three unusual incidents last year occurred the weeks of Passover and Rosh Hashanah at Hilton Westchester, where someone put anti-Semitic notes under or on guest-room doors April 23, Sept. 28 and Sept. 29.

The April note had a swastika on a piece of Hilton stationery slipped under the door of Room 440.

The September notes were 4-by-4-inch stickers on the door of Room 252 with a swastika with the words "No Jews Allowed" above the symbol and "In this room" below.

Rye Brook police said they made no arrests. Rabbi Moshe Fuchs reported the April incident to police, but when contacted about it he couldn't remember many details.

Leisure Time Tours books annual Passover resort vacations at the Hilton with Fuchs as the host. Fuchs said he has hosted Passover events at the hotel for years without problems.