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top: Once all the lights and decorations are in place, The Peabody Memphis lobby virtually shouts, "Merry Christmas!" **above, left:** Holliday Flowers co-owner Judy Holliday Long adds ornaments to the hotel's 30-foot tree. **above, right:** Judy's son Reed Long checks a wire connection.

Holidays at The Peabody

A family-owned Memphis florist company decks this famous hotel's halls.

A giant array of seasonal flowers tops the gurgling water of the lobby fountain, visually soothing the transition from bed to bustling day.

The floral arrangement, provided by local Holliday Flowers, "is done at 2 or 3 in the morning after

everybody's gone to bed," explains Doug Browne, general manager of The Peabody Memphis. "The idea is that the guests never see us putting on our makeup, so to speak." On this day however, the flowery fountain—and everything else—will take second billing as points of visual interest.

That's because in a few short hours, a massive 30-foot, two-story, fully decorated Christmas tree will spring up in the lobby, where only a curiously blank spot now exists.



above: "I relocated from Corinth, Mississippi, to work with the Longs," says Allison Young. left: Kyle Allin gets all wrapped up in his work as he and Sue Scarbrough decorate one of the 12 trees in The Peabody.

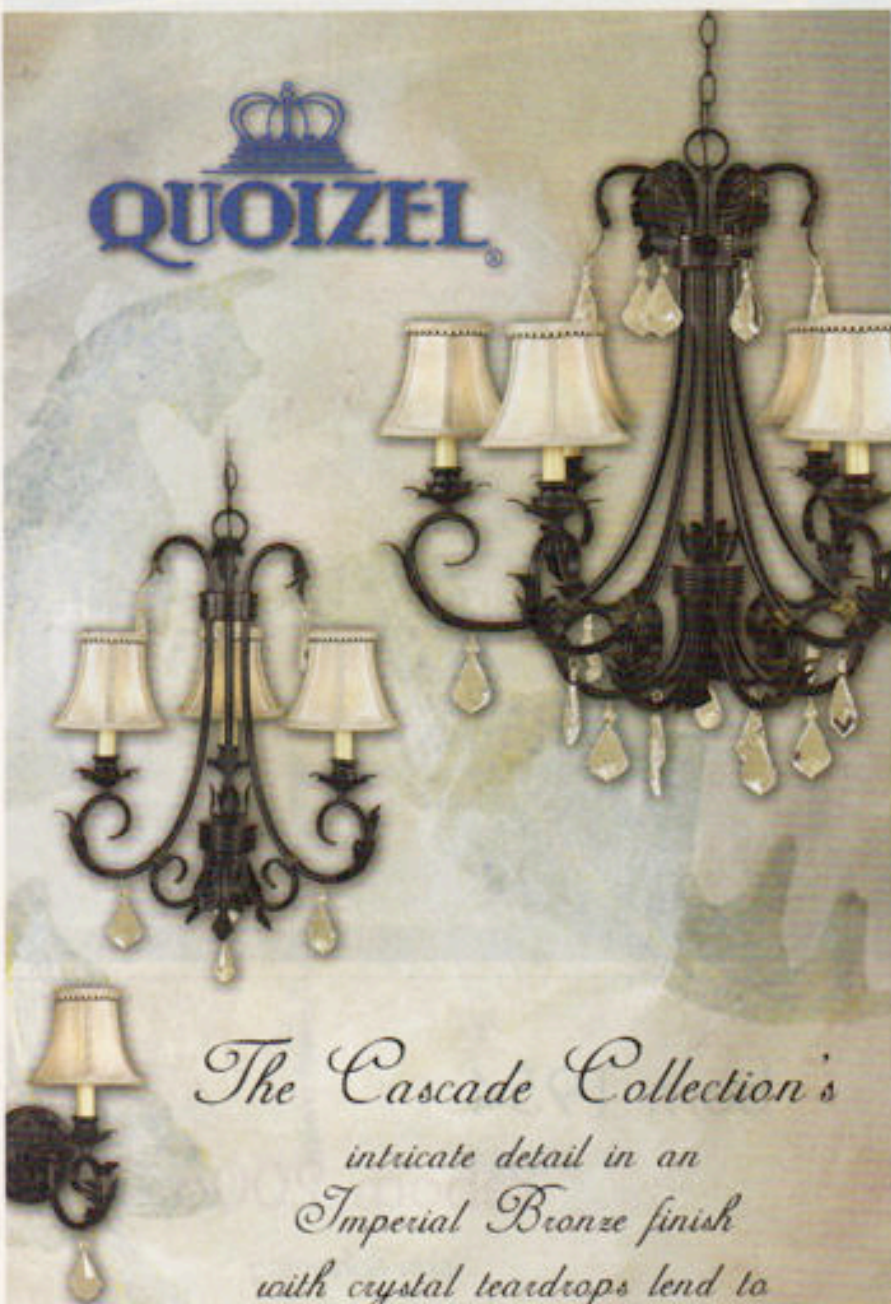
Once a year, the behind-the-scenes Holliday employees step out into a very visible Peabody spotlight.

Rise and Shine, O Christmas Tree

About 7 a.m. the Holliday staff arrives. Carrying in box after box, the owners of the florist, Judy and Mark Long, hustle into the hotel, along with a handful of longtime workers, who bring their spouses and children to watch as the artificial tree takes shape. (Fire codes prevent using a live tree.) Resembling a lively extended family, the group chats and cracks jokes as they nudge aside furniture, dig through boxes, and fluff tree limbs. A motorized lift rolls up to erect the center pole for the soon-to-be-towering tree.

"The tree is built from the top down," explains Mark. "We light it and decorate it in about six hours." When the tree topper is ready for placement, 6'4" Mark jumps on the lift with the

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8-foot-tall segment. After the lift rises to its uppermost point, he climbs to the rail to gain more height and then leans into his task. The crowd below gasps as both man and tree sway a few seconds before the topper slides into place.

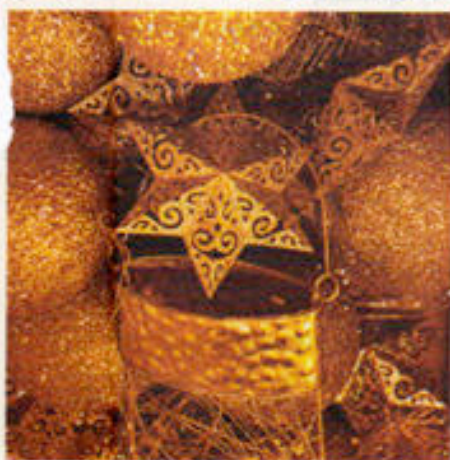
Deferring decor questions to his wife, Mark says, "I deal with the structural, not the pretty stuff." Judy obliges as she continues to wrap lights on branches with practiced hands. "We do traditional colors: reds, greens, and golds," she says. Clear-bulb strands add sparkle to each limb prior to the branch's attachment to the tree. The huge bottom limbs each require an entire strand of the lights.

Ornaments, many 10 to 12 inches in diameter, are firmly secured. At The Peabody, "it's not cutesy things," Judy says about the chosen decor. Instead, the florist envisions elegance. Despite emphasis on the hotel's duck motif, not a single duck-shaped ornament emerges from the 30 or so boxes littering the floor. "To me, that would be overdone," she says.

In recent years, the company began decorating the hotel's exterior. Doug, who joined The Peabody in 2003, requested it. "We want to make sure visitors see the building smiling during the holidays," he explains. "Even from the street, they'll know we're not the Scrooge of Christmas."

No Time for Time Off

Judy, a Memphis native, began the business almost 30 years ago, one year before she met Mark, who was reared



jaunty "King Cotton March" by John Philip Sousa. Finally the decorated tree stands in all its glory. "The Peabody is the grand hotel of the South, and this is a very Memphis, very Southern tradition," Judy says. "We're here to enhance it and bring Christmas to the hotel.

We really think it's an honor to be doing this." *NANCY DORMAN-HICKSON*

For information on Holliday Flowers, call 1-800-346-5490, or visit www.hollidayflowers.com. For information on The Peabody Memphis, visit www.peabodymemphis.com.

By the Numbers

To bring a festive air to The Peabody Memphis, Holliday Flowers places the following seasonal decorations throughout the hotel.

- 12 trees
- 15 (15-foot-long) lighted garlands
- 55 wreaths and swags
- 75,000 lights

in East Tennessee near Kingsport. Their sons, both students at the University of Memphis, grew up in the floral industry. "I took Brent to work when he was 10 days old," Judy says of her oldest son, now 21. "I got to stay home with Reed for two weeks."

Reed, now 20, says, "We slept in cardboard rose boxes when we were little." Mark took the boys with him when he delivered Sunday brunch floral arrangements. Both Brent and Reed fondly recall Peabody chefs sneaking them milk and cookies on their early-morning visits to the venerable hotel. "My sons truly feel like it's home," their mother says.

Today, the Long boys entertain onlookers with an act much more exciting than milk and cookies. They razzle-dazzle, using their freehand rock-climbing talent to fearlessly perch on The Peabody's mezzanine rail and lean way out as they stuff branches into place. Instead of cringing, their mom soon takes over the precarious spots to add ornaments.

When the ducks make their 11 a.m. appearance, the crew steps into high gear, keeping time with the

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