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Virginia Restaurant Lodging & Travel Association Expands Team With Pair of New Hires

Jai Girard and Kayla Cleveland join the VRLTA staff as Director of Education & Workforce and Chapter & Events Manager, respectively.

Richmond, Va. – The Virginia Restaurant Lodging & Travel Association (VRLTA) announced a pair of new hires today, with Jai Girard joining the organization as its new Director of Education & Workforce, and Kayla Cleveland signing on as the new Chapter & Events Manager.

“We’re thrilled to welcome Jai and Kayla to the VRLTA family,” says Eric Terry, VRLTA President. “They both bring impressive backgrounds and dynamic skillsets to their respective positions, and I look forward to seeing what our association will accomplish with the talented team we now have in place.”

Girard brings a unique combination of hospitality and education experience to her new role with VRLTA. She has taught at the university level in both Texas and Virginia, has extensive research experience, and has 13 years of management experience from multiple hospitality ventures.

Her most recent positions include Visiting Lecturer at James Madison University and consultant for hospitality businesses in Texas. During her time at JMU, she served as the Faculty Advisor for Club Manager’s Association of America and as an Entrepreneurship Faculty Fellow for the Gilliam Center for Entrepreneurship. Girard graduated from Texas A&M University with her bachelor’s, master’s, and soon her PhD in Recreation, Park, and Tourism Sciences.

“Despite my love for teaching, I really missed working in the hospitality industry,” says Girard. “I am beyond excited to join the dynamic team at VRLTA working on some of the things I love the most: education, industry advancement, and nonprofit work. Virginia is a special place to me, and I look forward to helping create growth opportunities for our members.”

Cleveland also brings over a decade of experience working in the hospitality industry to VRLTA. With a background in event execution, member services, training, and management, her skillset has already made an immediate impact on the association.

Prior to accepting her new position, Cleveland was a Team Lead for Drive Shack Inc.’s Goochland location. During her time at the company, she was selected as a Travel Trainer to assist in the opening of The Puttery in Texas, the flagship store for Drive Shack’s new concept. She also has experience working with Havana ‘59, the Country Club of Virginia, and graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2013 with a Bachelor’s degree in Business Management and Administration.

“I am incredibly excited to join the team at VRLTA and help our association continue to make a difference in the

ever-growing hospitality and tourism industries,” says Cleveland. “Growing up in Virginia, I know how special this state is and how diverse our offering is in terms of our restaurants, hotels, and attractions! I look forward to working closely with our chapters and members around the state, and providing the networking and support that our members deserve.”

VRLTA’s focus remains advocating for hospitality and tourism, connecting with and supporting members, and offering education and networking opportunities for the industry.

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The Virginia Restaurant Lodging and Travel Association is the unified voice of the restaurant, lodging, travel and hospitality suppliers associations. VRLTA creates value for members by promoting the legislative interests of the industry, networking, educational opportunities, and protecting free enterprise. For more information, visit www.vrlta.org or call 800-552-2225.