

# BarterNews

The Official Journal of the Reciprocal Trade Industry

*Our purpose at BarterNews is  
to provide our readers with a storehouse  
of information, ideas & contacts.*

## **ITM Hospitality Fund Creator Using Barter To Help Those In Need**

Years ago I met Jody Merl at an IRTA convention. She was a panelist on hotel trading, and her knowledge on the subject was most enlightening. Ms. Merl has impressively taken another step in helping others through an effort that aids the less fortunate, and I'd like to share her story with you. It shows another side of barter that many people don't realize exists.

As president of Innovative Travel Marketing (ITM), the nation's leading hotel barter company, Jody Merl knows the formula for barter is a simple one: the exchange of unsold rooms for media placements and other services, expanding advertising budgets and getting maximum value for inventory that would otherwise go unused.

The idea that spurred Merl to co-found the ITM Hospitality Fund in February 2002, however, was even simpler to her—using barter to help the less fortunate. With that goal in mind, Merl considered her hotel rooms and how they could best serve those in need.

Realizing that thousands of critically ill people travel to New York City each year for urgent medical treatment, Merl recognized that ITM's excess inventory of hotel rooms could greatly benefit "healthcare travelers" who are unable to afford accommodations for themselves or their loved ones.

"New York City is a medical capital, home to many of the world's leading specialists and facilities," says Merl. "For thousands of individuals, this city offers specialized care that is literally life saving."

Working in partnership with more than a dozen hospitals, medical centers and medical societies, the ITM Hospitality Fund is the only citywide program of its kind in the U.S. It has so far provided more than 300 patients and their loved ones with a haven in New York City during a stressful and difficult time in their lives.

Led by Merl, and supported by advisory boards of eminent physicians and healthcare and business leaders, the Fund is a noteworthy example of a community's high-achievers working together to achieve a common humanitarian goal.

By making first-class hotel rooms available to those who could otherwise not afford them (Fund beneficiaries only pay room taxes), the ITM Hospitality Fund reduces expenses and encourages the presence of a patient's family at a time when they are needed most.

"We pamper families who are in a very fragile state with the convenience and comfort of hotel rooms in their time of need," says Merl. "It is an enormous help to minimize their emotional toll and expenses of travel."

Patients are referred to the ITM Hospitality Fund through participating medical facilities. Once a referral is made, Merl scopes and coordinates accommodations at ITM client hotels, with regard to the most convenient location for the patient and/or family.

Beneficiaries are chosen based primarily on financial need, with geographical distance from New York also a consideration.

Describing her founding of the Fund as one of her proudest accomplishments, Merl says, "The ITM Hospitality Fund captures the true philanthropic spirit of New York City. We feel blessed to be able to make a difference in the lives of these patients and their loved ones."

The ITM Hospitality Fund was recognized with a HSMAI Golden Bell Award for Community Service in 2004, and as founder, Merl was named "New Yorker of the Week" by leading cable-news affiliate New York 1 News.

For more information on the ITM Hospitality Fund visit [www.itmhospitalityfund.com](http://www.itmhospitalityfund.com), or call (973) 331-8171.