

today's hotelier

March 2020 | todayshotelier.com

The Official Publication of 

Competition and good policy

How independent hoteliers can thrive in a market of well-known brands

BIJAL PATEL
CHLA Chairman

Being your own PR team

3 strategies for independent hoteliers looking to gain media coverage

SUCCESS IS A TEAM EFFORT

Bijal Patel discusses the past, present, and future of his appointment to chairman of CHLA



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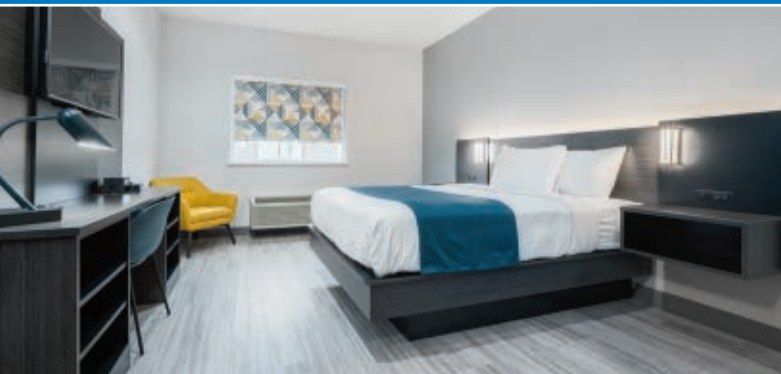
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ABOUT AAHOA THIS MONTH

1.

The new Certificate in Hotel Ownership™ (CHO) is now available. AAHOA's highly sought after CHO is back, and it's better than ever. The new CHO has been recreated with all-new modules, industry-leading content, and a customizable all-digital platform. Learn more and get the promo discount code at aahoa.com/CHO.

2.

AAHOACON20 is around the corner! We're about one month away from the biggest event of the year for hotel owners. From networking and learning to inspirational keynotes and exclusive deals on the trade show floor, you don't want to miss it. Register at aahoa.com/convention, and make plans to be in Orlando April 13-16.

3.

Find a Regional Conference & Trade Show in your area. AAHOA has announced its 2020 Regional Conference & Trade Show schedule. With at least one event in every AAHOA Region in 2020, you'll be sure to find one near you. Our regional events provide one of the easiest ways to network, learn, and make deals close to home. Visit aahoa.com/eventscalendar to learn more.

4.

We're headed to Hunter! The Hunter Hotel Investment Conference, March 18-20, focuses on trends and emerging opportunities to help hospitality investors grow their business. With a first-ever AAHOA-hosted Young Professionals Networking Reception, and AAHOA Chairwoman Jagruti Panwala and President & CEO Cecil P. Staton lending their insights to the conversation, it's an event you don't want to miss. Learn more at hunterconference.com.

5.

AAHOACON certification programs offer hoteliers next-level learning opportunities. In addition to a vast array of educational sessions, AAHOACON will also host many opportunities for professional development, including a Certification in Hotel Industry Analytics (CHIA) Program, Human Trafficking Awareness Training, Anti-Harassment and Implicit Bias Training, and Generation Z Training. Learn more and register at aahoa.com/convention.

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JAGRUTI PANWALA

AAHOA CHAIRWOMAN (2019-2020)

“

I worked hard to make these properties profitable and deliver a guest experience that keeps people coming back. My family members in the industry provided me with an invaluable understanding of how the industry works, as well as the fundamentals of owning and operating a hotel. This was a great foundation for starting my business, but I knew there was so much more to learn.”

Great risk, greater reward

INDEPENDENCE IS AT THE HEART of the entrepreneurial spirit. While taking a risk to chart your own course in business can be a daunting yet exhilarating venture, the rewards are considerable. In the hospitality industry, hoteliers have options when building their business. Many choose to develop and/or operate a property by partnering with a brand, while others forego developing a relationship with a franchisor and pursue a course as an independent hotelier.

Franchise ownership has many benefits and is seen as one of the easiest on-ramps to small business ownership. In fact, more than 80 percent of AAHOA members own franchised properties. The support network and engagement that comes with signing a franchise agreement is significant, although issues such as amenity creep and ever-fluctuating brand standards can frustrate owners.

In my first venture into the hospitality industry, I purchased an independent property and, a few years later, a second independent hotel. I worked hard to make these properties profitable and deliver a guest experience that keeps people coming back. My family members in the industry provided me with an invaluable understanding of how the industry works, as well as the fundamentals of owning and operating a hotel. This was a great foundation for starting my business, but I knew there was so much more to learn.

It was around the time I bought my second property that someone suggested I check out AAHOA because it was a great resource for independent hoteliers. It so happened that the 2001 AAHOA Convention & Trade Show was in Atlantic City, NJ, a short drive from my home. It was at that convention that I discovered just how much AAHOA could help provide me with many of the resources that I would otherwise get from a brand if I were running a franchised property. It helped me realize I was not alone.

As my career as a hotelier advanced, so too did the challenges I faced. AAHOA's education session in multi-property management helped me understand how I could run my two hotels most efficiently. The special partnerships AAHOA maintains with vendors not only gave me access to exclusive deals, they also broadened the number of vendors to which I had access and helped me lower costs by finding the best value. The networking opportunities at AAHOA events allowed me to connect with other hoteliers, discuss issues and obstacles, and learn more about how to make my business succeed. AAHOA's events specifically for women hoteliers and independent hoteliers also helped me develop a close-knit network of hoteliers just like me where we could forge friendships, collaborate, and discuss strategies to make the most out of our hotels.

Independent hoteliers can also get the most out of their AAHOA membership by using MyAAHOA.com, the online portal for AAHOA members to access our industry-leading professional development tools, register for events, and share property information confidentially. This is perhaps the most important thing independent hoteliers can do, for the more specific AAHOA can be in talking about our members, especially ones with independent properties, the stronger our position will be when negotiating deals with OTAs and our vendor partners. Your information is confidential, and we will never share it without your permission.

AAHOA continues to build out its offerings for independent hoteliers. Whether it's political advocacy on behalf of our industry, our vast archive of world-class education and professional development tools, discounted credit card transaction rates, free admission to more than 200 events across the country every year, exclusive deals and vendor partnerships, or other products and services such as the AAHOA PMS, there is something for every hotelier. AAHOA provides a level of support that makes it easier for independent hoteliers to make money, save money, and protect their investment. ■

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CECIL P. STATON
AAHOA PRESIDENT & CEO

Independent hoteliers bring the entrepreneurial spirit to AAHOA



No hotelier should have to go it alone, and with AAHOA's incredible member resources, no hotelier is ever on their own."

HAVE A DEEP APPRECIATION FOR entrepreneurs – the risk-takers who boldly pursue their passions and bring businesses to life. In fact, the ability to work with more than 19,500 entrepreneurs is one of my favorite parts of my role as president and CEO of AAHOA. Whether you own a franchised property or an independent hotel, there's nothing like the freedom that small business ownership affords you in pursuing your dreams, and AAHOA is here to give you the tools you need to make your business a success.

More than 30 percent of members have independent hotels in their portfolios. Many AAHOA Members got their start in independent properties and developed successful hotels without the assistance of brands. Independent hotels bring an important diversity to a marketplace that is dominated by franchised properties.

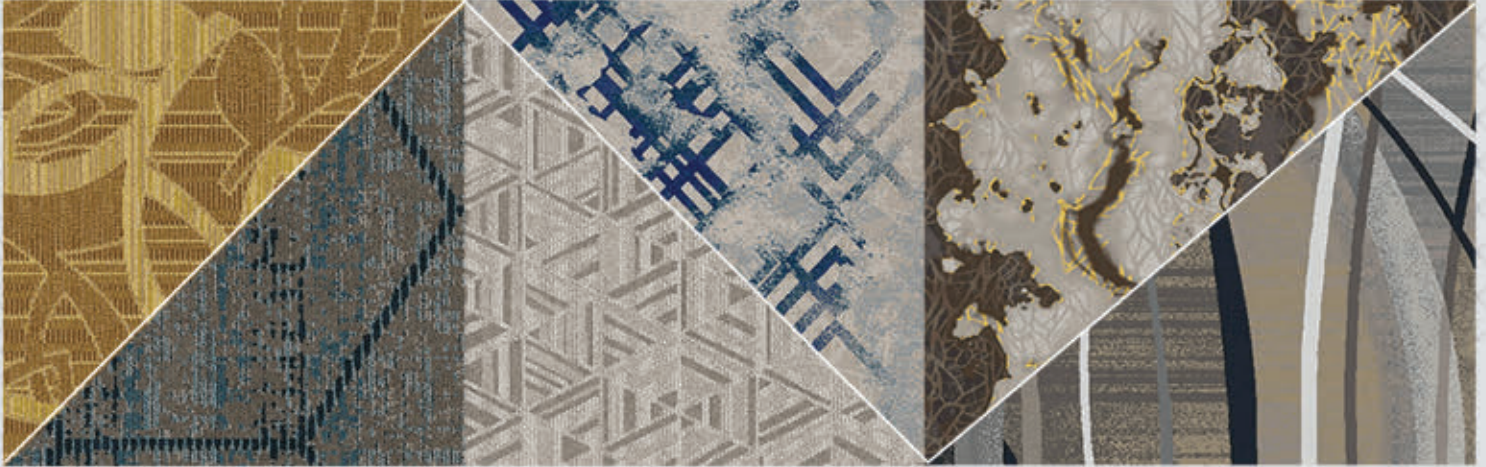
As many members know, one of the benefits of owning a franchised property is the vast resources that can come with a franchise agreement. Independent hoteliers, on the other hand, do not enjoy benefits like national advertising, reservation systems, professional development resources, and a built-in network of similarly situated hoteliers.

That's why AAHOA's member benefits are so important for independent hoteliers. We strive to provide them with many of the resources that would otherwise be provided by a brand. Professional development is one of the key tools with which AAHOA equips its members. Through the AAHOA HOTEL OWNERS ACADEMY™, members can access hundreds of webinars, education sessions, and trainings that cover key areas like revenue management and optimization, financial management, ADA compliance, marketing, human resources, and many more.

AAHOA also provides independent hoteliers with free access to more than 200 events nationwide each year, including the annual convention, 28 regional meetings, and more than 100 town halls. These provide valuable networking opportunities and the chance to meet with vendor partners face to face to determine what deals are best for one's property. AAHOA also offers conferences specifically tailored for women hoteliers, independent hoteliers, and young professionals. AAHOA's partnerships with more than 500 vendors gives members exclusive discounts with vendors such as Chase, HBO, Lowe's, UnitedHealth Group, UPS, and Zonetail. Members also enjoy discounted credit card transaction rates offered by Chase, one of our longtime partners.

When I first joined AAHOA, someone told me, "At AAHOA, we lift each other up." No hotelier should have to go it alone, and with AAHOA's incredible member resources, no hotelier is ever on their own. We will continue working to provide our members with the tools and resources they need to thrive and support the entrepreneurial pursuits that make our industry and our nation great. ■

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Return to rationality: Department of Labor issues final ruling on joint employer status

by SEAN GROSSNICKLE

IN THE OPENING WEEKS OF 2020, the Department of Labor (DOL) issued a revision on its interpretation of joint employer status, altering the regulations dictated by the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) that determine whether an additional entity is considered jointly liable for another business's employees. The updated regulations are projected to clarify the situations in which two or more businesses could be considered joint employers.

Up until 2015, the Joint Employer Rule under the FLSA had remained largely unchanged for 60 years. During the Obama Administration, revisions to the interpretation of joint employer status expanded its determining factors. This led the DOL and National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to impose liability on businesses that had indirect or potential oversight over another business's employees. Many businesses were roped into lawsuits and grievances filed against their business partners. This expanded interpretation had unintended consequences, particularly for franchise business models under which many hoteliers operate.

Going into effect on March 16, 2020, this final ruling introduces a four-factor balancing test that clarifies the obligations of the franchisor-franchisee relationship while providing franchise owners with increased certainty about the ownership and control of their businesses. Previous rulings on joint employer status harbored precarious situations where the franchisor may have assumed liability for the franchisee's workforce, causing uncertainty that stunted new business developments and workforce expansions. The final ruling aims to provide clarity for



“America’s hoteliers applaud the DOL’s ruling, for it provides franchise owners with a clear and straightforward joint employer standard. More than 80 percent of AAHOA members own franchised properties. The franchise business model continues to serve as an on-ramp to economic empowerment for America’s entrepreneurs. Returning to the traditional joint employer standard gives owners the peace of mind that they will remain in control of their businesses.”

– AAHOA PRESIDENT & CEO CECIL P. STATON

business owners who are gauging their exposure to liability in potential joint employer partnerships.

“America’s hoteliers applaud the DOL’s ruling, for it provides franchise owners with a clear and straightforward joint employer standard. More than 80 percent of AAHOA members own franchised properties. The franchise business model continues to serve as an on-ramp to economic empowerment for America’s entrepreneurs. Returning to the traditional joint employer standard gives owners the peace of mind that they will remain in control of their businesses,” AAHOA President & CEO Cecil P. Staton said.

The DOL stated that its updates to joint employer status under the FLSA will take effect this month, but AAHOA anticipates legal challenges to the DOL’s change in regulation, which may delay the ruling. The DOL’s final ruling, while a step in the right direction, does not represent a stable, long-lasting change in the joint employer status under the FLSA. Any sitting administration could revise or reverse the regulation. To ensure systematic change to the joint employer status, AAHOA and other proponents of this final ruling will continue to urge Congress to pass sound, rational, and transparent legislation to determine joint employer status. ■

Don't bury your head in the sand

by MARILOU HALVORSEN

B **ING A GOOD LEADER IS** more than balancing a difficult budget or engaging an audience with a captivating speech. Although those experiences are wonderful when they happen, the truth is the most effective leaders I've known are people who stay in front of the sensitive topics most of us would rather avoid. Simply put, they don't bury their heads in the sand and hope a problem will go away, or better yet, foolishly convince themselves it will never really escalate. Instead, strong leaders heavily weigh each situation, get in front of the topic, and take action to gain some control.

EMPOWER YOUR PEOPLE

Many evolving problems can occur more often than not because we're an industry comprised of people, and people can be unpredictable.

However, if trained properly, our workforce can also evolve into a strong army that helps protect and thwart future problems as harrowing as human trafficking and sexual harassment.

PLAY OFFENSE, NOT DEFENSE

We're living in an era where society believes social responsibility is more important than profits. I believe it's our duty as communities, businesses, and association leaders to be willing partners in educating our staff on important and sensitive topics. Quite frankly, as business leaders, we tend to spend more time playing defense than offense. We're busy fighting the numerous issues that affect our bottom line every day, such as minimum wage increases, paid sick leave, Airbnb growth, predictive scheduling, and dozens of other legislative bills shifting around in our state capitols. I'm not suggesting we ignore these battles. Quite the contrary, it's our job to speak out and advocate on behalf of our industry. But when there's an opportunity for us to show the compassionate side of ourselves, we need to make

sure we take advantage and get ahead of the topic.

GUILTY BY ASSOCIATION

It's important to understand the hospitality industry has been painted with the human trafficking brush. Airlines and many hotels have started comprehensive employee training to spot the signs. What's also important to note is hotels are legally required to provide education to help stop this. However, the problem is mounting. This has led to one of the New Jersey Restaurant & Hospitality Association's 2020 association goals: To help craft a piece of legislation that would regulate the transient marketplace. In addition, we're implementing a program to educate restaurant owners so they may educate their staff to see the signs of human trafficking. If we don't face the fact it could happen anywhere, we'll lose the opportunity to stop it somewhere.

One of my largest supporters, AAHOA has been in front of this topic for quite some time. The fact they took an early lead on this sensitive issue will no doubt position them ahead of others. Their bold action inspired me to add this topic to our Labor Summit this spring where I'll address restaurant owners who may not have considered implementing such a program. If we raise our heads high and speak out about what we are doing to help, we become less ignorant and more caring.

PUSHING THE PANIC BUTTON

Last year's #MeToo movement jolted our nation to the prevalence of sexual harassment surrounding us. Women and men came out in droves confessing to an array of harassment experiences in their lives and careers. A prime example of this was when, sadly, dozens of female gymnasts spoke out about inappropriate touching by their team's physician. This discovery eventually led to an avalanche of sexual harassment claims against the USA Gymnastics Organization, ending with the discovery

of two decades of abuse and 368 women's lives changed forever. Wikipedia refers to this moment as "undetected by a lax system of oversight." I call it bad leadership. Period. USGO leaders failed these women, many of them minors, as well as the organization. Teaching to recognize these problems helps curve the situation and gives victims the courage to come forward.

It's not surprising to overhear our industry described as a hotbed for sexual harassment. In fact, at the height of the #MeToo movement, a salacious feature article appeared in my state titled "Sex, harassment and abuse: An Inside look at the dark side of N.J. restaurants." We need to change this, or better yet, end it completely. It starts at the top, with us. We need to push employee education about what constitutes harassment and ensure those who could be vulnerable are safe. I recently worked with my state's legislature to pass a bill that would require all New Jersey hotel rooms to install panic buttons. This will not only benefit hotel staff, especially housekeepers, who, sadly, receive the brunt of sexual harassment, but also guests. We need the public to know that we will always choose safety over the bottom line.

BE FIRST AND BE LOUD

It's exciting for all of us to know that we have the chance to tell great stories about the people we employ and the opportunities we provide. Part of what makes a good leader is advocating for those in need while staying alert to all activities going on in our businesses so we can stand up and protect our employees. By having knowledge of all parts of the hospitality industry, good and bad, we can establish the change we want to see. ■



Marilou Halvorsen is the president and CEO of the New Jersey Restaurant & Hospitality Association (NJRHA).

Legislators on the Hill gear up for REAL ID deadline

by SEAN GROSSNICKLE



COMMON GROUND PROFILES MEMBERS OF opposing parties who are working together to advance issues important to hoteliers.

THE ISSUE

On Oct. 1, 2020, the Transportation Security Agency will enforce the final phase of the 2005 REAL ID Act, requiring U.S. citizens of age 18 or older to present REAL ID-compliant identification when flying domestically. The security standards set by the REAL ID Act trace back to the recommendations of a bipartisan 9/11 Commission, which proposed the policy to improve homeland security, combat fake identifications, and reduce cases of fraud. However, this means any traveler without a REAL ID-compliant driver's license or other sanctioned identification will be barred from entering security checkpoints at airports across the country. According to the U.S. Travel Association, 57 percent of Americans are unaware that REAL ID requirements begin on October 1, and 72 percent of Americans do not have or are unsure if their license is REAL ID-compliant.

AUTHORS OF THE LETTER

Sen. Roger Wicker (R-MS)

Chairman of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-WA)

Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI)

Chairman of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee

Sen. Gary Peters (D-MI)

Ranking Member of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

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Chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security

Rep. Mike Rogers (R-AL)

Ranking Member of the House Committee on Homeland Security

Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-OR)

Chairman of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Rep. Sam Graves (R-MO)

Ranking Member of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

COMMON GROUND

In the House and Senate, legislators on both sides of the aisle share immense concern for travelers given just how many Americans seem uninformed on the upcoming REAL ID deadline. On January 24, Sen. Roger Wicker (R-MS) and a group of Democratic and Republican lawmakers co-authored a letter to the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) highlighting issues with low public awareness and the potential for crippling disruptions to domestic air travel. The DHS has reaffirmed that it will not extend the deadline despite these concerns. This bipartisan, bicameral group of legislators intends to raise public awareness of the REAL ID deadline and solidify contingency plans to mitigate obstructions for unsuspecting travelers.

“DHS’s efforts will play a crucial role in ensuring that the public is aware of the deadline and takes the necessary steps to acquire compliant identification. Additionally, it is critical that the department do everything possible to ensure that Americans are not needlessly prevented from boarding flights to engage in business and tourism and visit family and friends. DHS should also develop contingency plans to deal with disruption at airports.”

– Excerpt from the letter to the Secretary of DHS, Dated Jan. 24, 2020

ARE YOU #REALIDready?

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security will begin enforcing the REAL ID Act on Oct. 1, 2020. To learn more about the policy and how you can help spread awareness, visit www.ustravel.org/toolkit/real-id-toolkit.



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Q&A with Bijal Patel: Success is a team effort

The future may be blurry, but the youngest to chair CHLA knows we accomplish more when we work together

by ADAM WEBB

BIJAL PATEL IS SOMEWHAT OF A DUAL THREAT. HE'S NOT ONLY THE YOUNGEST chairman of the California Hotel & Lodging Association in history, but he's also the first Indian-American to serve on the board. A third-generation hotelier, it seemed only natural that Patel's career would lead him to this momentous position.

Patel took the time to share with *Today's Hotelier* what this career advancement means to him, how people can get involved in their community's hospitality sector, and what he sees for himself and AAHOA in the future.

How did you get your start in AAHOA? What made you decide to pursue the hospitality industry?

I like to say that when my mother's life as a hotelier ended, my life as a hotelier began.

In case that sounds overly dramatic, let me share the very important truths behind those words.

I am a third-generation hotelier. My grandparents immigrated from Kenya and London to San Francisco in the early 1970s, becoming hotel owners. Then, in the 1980s, my parents emigrated from London to San Francisco, also becoming hotel owners, so I learned the hotel business from an early age with hands-on experience at our family's property.

However, by my early teens, I had no intention of following my mother and father into hospitality. My mother was a pioneer in our industry – the first woman to hold an executive position on the advisory board of the Econo Lodge Franchise Association and going on to serve as president of ELFA 2005-2006, even while she valiantly battled pancreatic cancer.

But then she died at a much-too-young age. I was only 16 when I lost my mother and when I saw my father lose both the love of his life and his partner in business. I immediately wanted to support my dad, emotionally as well as professionally. And I did.

Working together with my father became a powerful bonding experience for the two of us and it became a life-changing lesson for me.

From an early age, my parents taught me the Indian philosophy of “seva” – of giving back. I was reminded that too many people are willing to “take” like they're entitled, while too few people remember to “give” like they're obligated. Perhaps this explains why I've been active for the past five years in the leadership of both CHLA and AAHOA, including as a member of AAHOA's Young Professionals and as an Ambassador for the North Pacific Region.

For me, serving our industry is in my DNA.

“

We have to remember that a number of regulations are now being set at the city and state levels of government. If we want to protect our industry, our focus has to be on working with AAHOA's state partners around the country to fight off bad legislation.”

– BAKULESH (BUGGS) PATEL,
AAHOA PAST CHAIRMAN; OREGON
RESTAURANT & LODGING
ASSOCIATION PAST CHAIRMAN



Vinay Patel, Immediate Past Chair of NCRLA and CEO of SREE Hotels, was instrumental in AAHOA and NCRLA collaborating on goals and initiatives to better the hospitality industry. Vinay's work with AAHOA and NCRLA is another example of what can be achieved when we all work together. Photo courtesy of NCRLA.



Bijal, his mom, and his father built a family business together before his mother's untimely passing.



Bijal giving his speech upon becoming Chairman of CHLA.

“

“Being an active member in my state association has allowed me to not only stay on top of legislative issues that would negatively impact our industry, but it also provided a forum for me to advocate directly with key decision-makers on behalf of my business. In a state like California, this process is of utmost importance and a foundational piece of our political system. As a former chair of the California Hotel & Lodging Association, I gained an appreciation for the different yet similar perspectives that other stakeholders (larger corporations, brands, educators, vendors, management companies) had related to these same issues. Overall, the experience broadened my knowledge of our wonderful industry and helped me protect it from legislation that would impact our future.”

– BIMAL PATEL, CALIFORNIA HOTEL & LODGING ASSOCIATION PAST CHAIRMAN

What does it mean to you to not only be the youngest association chair for an organization like CHLA, but to also be one who's a minority?

Professionally, it's a high responsibility and a rare opportunity. The responsibility is to serve our members in a way that makes CHLA even more valuable for them. We are hoteliers because we are passionate about our industry – we enjoy caring for travelers and we want to do our job even better, for our guests and for ourselves.

The opportunity is to achieve progress on my three focus areas. First, attracting more young people to hospitality as a career; second, continuing and enhancing our fight against ADA nuisance lawsuits; and third, expanding workplace safety through voluntary measures rather than mandated regulations.

My plans are ambitious, but they are realistic and achievable. Above all, they will benefit our members financially so they can be more effective in managing their money and assets.

On a personal level, I am very honored, privileged, and humbled to become the youngest chairman ever of CHLA and only the third Asian-American. And I am ready.

What was the most challenging obstacle in your career so far? Was there anything that came easier than you expected?

My most challenging career obstacle was joining my father in business when I was just 16 after the traumatic death of my mother, his wife and business partner.

I was still in high school at the time, but I was suddenly responsible for managing the renovation and brand conversion of our hotel. It was a half-million-dollar project and it showed me how challenging as well as how rewarding hospitality can be.

I signed my first franchise agreement when I was 18. I earned my Certified Hotel Administrator (CHA) designation at age 20, and I began an active partnership with Choice Hotels and Marriott International that continues today.

The U.S. Navy SEALs have a saying that I embrace as a hotelier – “*The only easy day was yesterday.*” For me, it's a reminder that our industry is not for the meek or the weak. It's for people who are patient and persistent. It's for people who are “overcomers,” those who devote themselves to working a little harder and a little smarter every day.



“As a hotelier, it is critically important to become involved in your professional community. Joining your state lodging association gives you critical access to important statewide information and a network of leaders that are influencing our industry. You also have the opportunity to see how external forces impact your business. As chairman of the Texas Hotel and Lodging Association, I saw first hand the importance of advocacy on our industry and on my businesses. Working with President and CEO Scott Joslove, his exceptional team, and our high performing board of directors, we were able to share the amazing story of economic development and job creation with our legislators and ensured they kept us at the top of their minds as they reviewed rules and regulations that impacted Texas hoteliers. I urge all hotel owners to complement their AAHOA membership with membership in their state lodging association and aspire to join the leadership ranks in each one.”

– PRATIK PATEL, TEXAS HOTEL & LODGING ASSOCIATION PAST CHAIRMAN

What would you tell younger people looking to join associations like AAHOA or CHLA? What’s the best way for them to get involved?

The hotel business has become incredibly sophisticated, so CHLA and AAHOA are essential support systems. These groups provide the learning skills and the networking resources that can help every hotel owner operate in a smarter, more effective way by properly using technology, by carefully managing people, and by innovatively funding renovation or construction projects.

Young people can benefit from others who have experienced the same problems or feelings they are experiencing and who have suggestions and solutions to offer. You can benefit from formal professional education courses and workshops, as well as from informal discussion and sharing.

My advice is to attend meetings at the local, state, and national levels. Serve on committees and in leadership positions. Run for office. Get involved. Because the more you put in, the more you will get out.

I’m especially proud that our associations are places of *inclusion*, where women are active as members and as leaders. Some of our brightest and most capable owners are women, and their roles continue to grow.

I sometimes use the term “actionpreneur” to describe members who become engaged in their associations. Alone, none of us can achieve very much. But together, we can go over, under, around, and through the obstacles we face at our properties. Together, we can be a whole lot more successful.

Yes, hoteliers struggle every day with many financial and operational challenges. But hospitality is still one of the best ways to earn a living in America today, thanks in large part to CHLA and AAHOA.

What’s your outlook for yourself over the next few years? Where would you like to see AAHOA and CHLA go?

My crystal ball is a little fuzzy, so I hesitate to make predictions for myself or for our industry. It’s especially dangerous to predict things for a business as challenging, competitive, and ever-changing as ours.

I can say that I don’t want to simply *live* my life, I want to *build* my life. For me, that means doing things in both my personal and professional dealings that make an impact, that make a difference. Not just for myself but to help others launch their own version of the American Dream.

Life is about more than chasing a buck, it’s about chasing hopes and dreams. So, I get great satisfaction when I can help others pursue their goals.

As for the future of CHLA and AAHOA, nobody goes into business to be average. We become hoteliers so we can be extraordinary hoteliers. CHLA and AAHOA are experts at delivering the services that put the “extra” into your career. They help us deal with challenges that range from labor practices to government over-regulation to brand fairness.

The challenge for CHLA and AAHOA is to always stay relevant for members. Their job as associations must be to make our job as owners easier and more successful. ■



If you’re in the hospitality business and own assets and not engaged your state association, you’re really not protecting your business. Legislators need to hear your stories of how hard it is getting to run your business with all the new rules and regulations. If you don’t get involved, then legislators don’t know how these impact your business. Believe it or not, legislators do want to hear from you and hear your stories. Trust me, it makes a difference when they hear from you.... Experience has shown me that when we speak up as a group in DC or in N.J., we are able to stop bad legislation and protect our businesses. Advocating and having your voice heard is very important to your businesses, but other tools are offered by state associations, like education and special vendor programs, will also save you money and bring more tools to you and your employees. Get involved and get your voice heard to protect yourself, your family, and your business.”

– BHAVESH PATEL, AAHOA PAST CHAIRMAN, NEW JERSEY RESTAURANT & HOSPITALITY ASSOCIATION VICE CHAIRMAN



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The independent hoteliers guide to partnering with construction companies

From trends alerts to tax credits, here's how the right partnership with a general contractor can keep profits up and maximize ROI

by ALICIA HOISINGTON

FINDING A QUALITY GENERAL CONTRACTOR FOR your next hotel project might seem like a daunting task amid an environment of skilled labor shortages and new construction seemingly happening on every street corner. But sources say the feat isn't impossible with a little know-how and some dedication.

CAST YOUR NET

It starts with establishing relationships, according to Eric Bullion, vice president of Pepper Construction Group in Chicago, IL. "The best way is to establish a relationship early on in the process. When you are thinking about doing a project, determine what kind of contractor you want to work with, and then pick someone you want to partner with," he said.

For independent owners and operators, Bullion suggests attending local summits or conferences that feature sessions on hospitality or commercial real estate. "That's a great way to connect and understand the market and meet those familiar with the local area," he said, adding that general contractors are attending these events just as frequently as owners in order to make connections and drum up business.

Beyond attending events, Bullion advises it's wise to cast a net out to your own network of fellow owners and architects. "A lot of the connections we make start with, 'I was talking to so-and-so who is going to renovate or build,' and we figure out how to reach out to them," he said. "Owners should put out feelers to their network and connect that way."

Alan Rae, general manager of independent Hotel Clermont in Atlanta, GA, who was involved from the beginning of the property's adaptive-reuse process, says that the relationship with the construction company needs to start before shovels hit dirt. Early partnership can be especially helpful for hoteliers who are seeking tax credits. Hotel Clermont, managed by Charlestowne Hotels, took advantage of a tax credit allowance for historic

structures. Rae says the construction company for the project acted as a partner in the process, joining in on conversations with the historic and preservation societies.

"It was a collaborative effort and the construction company made sure we weren't making promises that we couldn't keep," Rae said. For example, the hotel's building housed a historical staircase that the historic society wanted to preserve. However, the construction company brought valid concerns to the table about violations with local code. "Because that conversation took place at the very beginning of the project, we were able to navigate those challenges from the get-go."

And because the company was local to the area, Rae says the team was aware of all the rules and codes – a benefit to partnering with a local firm. "On other projects, we've worked with bigger companies, but there was a disconnect with what was happening locally," he said.

Additionally, he says any project will face its red tape, and local companies have connections in the area to help cut through it. "They know who to call. The construction company is critical to making sure you get the right permit and speak to the decision-makers so you're not getting lost in an email inbox," Rae said.

PARTNERING ON PROFITS

Working with the right construction partner also can lead to increased return on investment, sources say. Construction companies stay up to date on the latest trends, understand how to work with designers, and hold the expertise and lessons learned from other projects that they can share with clients as a guide to save money.

"Owners and developers are hiring us to spend their money, and we want to spend their money as wisely as possible and how they would spend it," Bullion said. That's why he reiterates being engaged as early as possible is key. "We can understand their design and know how to do something more efficiently."

TAKING THE FIRST STEPS

Knowing where to start can be the hardest step for independent hoteliers who do not have the support of a franchise's opportunities. When looking for construction companies, take the following steps first:

- ➔ **Network:** Look to your own personal network of hoteliers and ask who they might recommend.
- ➔ **Look for cost-effective measures:** You're going to spend money. But look for companies who offer cost-effective solutions for what you may want, such as offering vinyl that looks like wood vs. real wood floors.
- ➔ **Know your tax credits:** States vary in the amount and qualifications in tax credits for businesses and hospitality. Look into tax credits that may be available in your area.



JAT306/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

For example, if the design team wants guestroom floors to have a wood-look to them, he says the construction company can suggest reasonably priced options. Luxury-vinyl tile that mimics wood would be more affordable at \$8 per square foot vs. real hardwood floors at \$28 per square foot, he says. “We understand the trends and where today’s markets are going. It’s things like not putting carpet throughout rooms because that’s not what guests want.”

Bullion adds that hiring a general contractor pre-construction does cost some money – at his firm, about \$100,000 for a feasibility analysis – but it can lead to a clear ROI before costly decisions are made. He cites a recent project where the mechanical engineer designed a \$700,000 system at a 125-key hotel that would typically cost about \$150,000.

“Because we were on board doing pre-construction we advised owners on the specs for what they needed and saved them close to \$600,000,” Bullion said. “It’s our role to advise owners of what certain choices can mean so they can make an educated decision. “Should I spend more money on this feature because it’s going to give back more in revenue when we open? We can help answer that.”

KNOW YOUR TAX CREDITS

Rae says these partnerships and relationships are critical when going after tax credits, too. Hotel Clermont wouldn’t have been opened without the \$5-million credit it received, but that high-value credit wasn’t always known to the team. In 2015, the Georgia General Assembly passed House Bill 308, raising the maximum tax credit allowance for historic structures from \$300,000 annually to \$5 million. That change gave the green light the project needed, and Rae says it wouldn’t have been discovered if that local knowledge from the team were lacking.

“As much as there are national tax credits, this wouldn’t have happened if this local tax credit weren’t researched and

The rooftop bar at Hotel Clermont offers views of Atlanta’s skyline, but is semi-covered for year-round use options.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HOTEL CLERMONT

discovered,” Rae said. “Local relationships between owners and the construction company and all the people on the ground made it possible.”

But once those tax credits are awarded, Rae says the construction company can help navigate the process and find a balance so that all the revenue-generating elements of the hotel that lead to high ROI can fit within the context of the requirements. He points to Hotel Clermont’s rooftop bar.

“There were lots of restrictions of what can be visible on the exterior of the building,” Rae said. “We had to make the decision of whether we installed a rooftop bar that’s covered with rentable space for 12 months of the year, or do we work with the historic society and not build a fully visible rooftop, which means it’s only usable in the summer months. We had to balance tax credit requirements vs. long-term profitability.”

With the construction company’s guidance, the team decided to meet credit conditions with a semi-covered space that wasn’t visible from the street, giving them the ability to open up the space for the entire year in order to drive revenue.

“The construction company helped to figure everything out because none of us had the answers,” Rae said. “It was a collaborative project, and they could draw on their experience from all their different properties throughout country and implement the best practices. The construction company helped come up with creative solutions.” ■

Being your own PR team

3 strategies for independent hoteliers looking to gain media exposure and a competitive edge

by NICK FORTUNA

PATTY BAIRD, WHO OWNS THE CEDAR HOUSE Sport Hotel in Lake Tahoe, CA, with her husband, has grown accustomed to moochers requesting a free meal or a free night in her hotel. But as an independent hotelier competing with well-known brands, she doesn't just dismiss such brazen requests out of hand.

In January, Baird was expecting a visit from several travel bloggers based in San Francisco who routinely leverage their tens of thousands of Instagram followers to fill their bellies. These Instagram influencers have carved out a pretty good gig for themselves. As long as they post a few good pictures of what they are eating, where they are staying, and write up a richly detailed review, they can dine like wealthy tourists and stay in the nicest digs.

Baird agreed to host these travel bloggers only after performing some due diligence online. They had indeed built large followings on Instagram, and their prior posts looked inviting and professionally crafted. If one free meal could put her hotel in front of thousands of eyeballs, then by all means, fellas, bon appétit.

"It happens constantly," Baird said of requests from freeloading bloggers. "We're always being hit up by influencers, so you have to make sure it's worth it to give them a free night or two in your hotel to be seen by their followers. It's a little tricky, but some influencers really do have huge followings, especially in the travel sphere. It's a tradeoff. If they're willing to come midweek,

when I have more flexibility, then why not? The meal that I comp them will cost me maybe a hundred bucks."

In the bygone era of thick newspapers and full newsrooms, independent hoteliers and other prominent local businesses had an easier time spreading the word about their events and milestones. But these days, with many newspapers floundering, effective media relations require more hard work and creativity.

Here are some tips for independent hoteliers about building a media contact list and using it to their advantage:

1 FIND OUT WHO MATTERS

Print publications might be few and far between, but there's no shortage of media outlets covering the hospitality and tourism industries. Social media sites like Instagram allow users to tell visually compelling stories through pictures, and some people have turned that into a handsome living.

Take, for example, Kiersten Rich, who quit her job in corporate finance in 2011 to write a blog catering to solo female travelers named "The Blonde Abroad." The blog features travel tips, packing guides, videos, and photos from more than 70 countries and has made Rich one of the world's top 10 travel influencers, according to Forbes. With more than 566,000 followers on Instagram, her audience is larger than most newspapers, so giving her a free stay in exchange for some publicity sounds like a bargain.

By searching Instagram and popular travel blogs, independent hoteliers can determine whether it's worth it to reach out to travel influencers. Hotels also should capitalize on social media when hosting musicians, authors, artists, and other newsmakers for events, said Barbara Malone, who owns the independent Hotel Sorrento in Seattle, WA, with her husband.

"Like everyone else, we're chasing after followers on social media platforms and making sure that we're aligning ourselves with people who can spread the word a little bit farther than us. If we can generate a few hundred more followers as the result of something we do, that's great for us," Malone said. "As an independent hotel, we just have to be tenacious, and through social



The Cedar House Sport Hotel's patio is one of the property's many examples of "Instagrammable" hang out spots.

“

Determine which reporters cover hospitality and travel or write feature stories and which editors are responsible for those sections. Keep their contact information close at hand, reach out when you have something worth sharing, and interact with them on social media.”



PHOTO: DANNY OWENS

media, you really can have access to influential people through direct messaging. If you have something interesting to say and you're a respected property that's known, you generally get a response from people.”

2 DON'T FORGET TRADITIONAL MEDIA

Print media still matters. Most newspapers publish a calendar of local events and attractions and have an email address where local groups and businesses can submit their news. But don't stop there.

Determine which reporters cover hospitality and travel or write feature stories and which editors are responsible for those sections. Keep their contact information close at hand, reach out when you have something worth sharing, and interact with them on social media. With most newsrooms experiencing layoffs in recent years, review these publications regularly and update your list to reflect staffing changes. Journalists often move around to different publications or to different roles in the newsroom.

“Building that list takes a lot of effort because you literally have to go through each publication, and there are a lot of publications,” Malone said. “You just have to really focus on those where you know you're going to reach the most people who could be potential clients for you.”

Local media can be a gateway to huge audiences since interesting local stories routinely get picked up by national media. That's what happened for the Hotel Sorrento and its popular silent reading parties, held on the first Wednesday of each month. Visitors line up out the door to enter the cozy Fireside Room, with its fireplace and homey feel, and then devour books and adult beverages while enjoying the live piano music.

The events were first featured in the local weekly newspaper *The Stranger*, which led to mentions in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Forbes*.

If a rival hotel gets a nice write-up in the press, reach out to the same author and publication. Since freelance writers get paid by the assignment, they are likely to pitch their editor a story about your hotel if they are confident that they will have something good to write about.

3 BE ACTIVE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

If national media are working on stories about places they haven't visited, it's common for reporters to contact the local chamber of commerce, convention, and visitors bureau or destination management organization to get the lay of the land.

When writers ask these resources where they should stay in town, you want your hotel to be top of mind, so get out there and meet these people, and let them know you're media friendly. Most respected media outlets won't accept free rooms or meals for ethical reasons, but they typically will appreciate a discounted media rate, and some are just fine with a freebie.

Baird said independent hoteliers should consider hosting networking events for their chamber of commerce since those events may draw media professionals.

“A lot of towns have contracts with PR firms, so it's a matter of forming those relationships and letting them know what your services are and that you're available,” she said. “Often, the town itself wants media attention, and knowing that, they will contact you to help promote something that may gain media coverage. That comped room is peanuts compared to the possible media attention you'll receive.”

To the extent possible, independent hoteliers should attend community events they know will draw media professionals so they can make those connections and build relationships over time, Malone said. Even better, become a part of community events like charitable fundraisers, which are likely to get local media coverage and could be picked up by larger outlets, Baird said. ■



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Creating pathways for women

She Has a Deal makes way for new pitches that could change the hotel industry

by SUSAN BARRY



TRACY PRIGMORE SPENT 20 YEARS AS A HEALTH care executive. When a financial advisor suggested she read “Rich Dad, Poor Dad,” the message of the book clicked. Tracy decided her financial future could not rest on her health care salary alone, so she embarked on a journey into real estate investing that ultimately led to founding TLTSolutions, a real estate acquisition and development firm that invests in hotels.

THE SOBERING TRUTH

As Prigmore worked to make hotel ownership more attainable for underserved investors, she quickly learned access to information and mentorship was held closely within the male-dominated field. “It was challenging to create the connections and access the networks, which is one of the key barriers preventing women from advancing in the field,” Prigmore said. “Furthermore, as I meet aspiring hotel owners, they express the same eagerness to gain the knowledge and experience needed.”

At first, Prigmore focused on increasing the number of women and black hotel owners through her own company by sharing her knowledge with partner investors. But when she read Fidelity Investments’ 2018 “Women and Investing Study,” she was compelled to do more.

“

My objectives are to expose women to hotel ownership and development early in their careers, educate them on how to analyze and structure a deal, and create a forum for cultivating professional relationships that lead to mentorship and future collaborations.”

– TRACY PRIGMORE, FOUNDER, SHE HAS A DEAL



I want to create new pathways to hotel ownership and development for women, and while this mission is organized around our pitch competition, we are providing educational sessions, exposure to the business, inspirational examples, and a powerful network for our participants,” Prigmore said.



“I knew the number of women real estate investors was low based on my own experience and observation within the industry,” Prigmore said. “In the Fidelity Investments study, I learned that less than a quarter of women are comfortable with their knowledge of investing. If you consider that women typically outlive male partners, this is an alarming statistic. Just as it’s important for us to push for wage parity, it’s equally as important to educate ourselves about investing.”

She Has a Deal was born. Conceived as a hotel investment pitch competition for women in the early stages of their careers, She Has a Deal is so much more.

“I want to create new pathways to hotel ownership and development for women, and while this mission is organized around our pitch competition, we are providing educational sessions, exposure to the business, inspirational examples, and a powerful network for our participants,” Prigmore said. “They are meeting the mentors and collaborators that will support their efforts long after the competition is over.”

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Early careerists – defined as students or recent graduates – applied to participate in the pitch competition in fall of 2019. A total of 17 teams were accepted, made up of between one and three participants each, and there are a total of 35 women from 12 schools. From December through February, the participants attended a series of Master Classes that walk them through the process of sourcing, evaluating, financing, and pitching a hotel investment deal.

She Has a Deal provides a financial model to assist the competitors in their search for the best hotel deal. And it’s not just a deal on paper: The pitch teams are finding, evaluating, and proposing real hotel deals, with the chance to win \$50,000 in deal equity.

This month, pitchers will present their deals via web conference to a panel of industry experts. The judging panel is intended to mirror the variety of potential investors in a hotel deal with fund managers, real estate investors, hotel brands, and individual investors all represented.

After hearing all 17 pitches, the panel of judges will select four finalists to move on to the final, live pitching round. Those

TOP OF THE CLASS

Master Classes are taught by hospitality industry luminaries: experts in the field with real-world experience and advice.

Some of the topics covered in the She Has a Deal Master Classes are:

- How to work with a broker
- How to analyze supply and demand in a market
- How to use industry reports such as STR and Kalibri Labs’ Trendline Report
- How to read a hotel financial statement

four teams will come together next month at Hilton’s Innovation Gallery in McLean, VA, to pitch their deals before a live judging panel and audience. “It’s like ‘Shark Tank,’ without the sharks,” Prigmore said.

INDUSTRY-WIDE EXCITEMENT

The support of the industry has been impressive. Both Marriott International and Hilton Worldwide are founding sponsors, and firms like legal advisors Greenberg Traurig and ZDS Architectural Design also are on board.

Next month, She Has a Deal will host a three-day event (April 23-25) that includes a Hotel Investor Master Class open to men and women, presentations from inspirational women in business, and an awards luncheon at which the winning pitch team will be announced. All of the pitch teams will attend in order to network with industry leaders and each other and to be recognized for their completion of the She Has a Deal program.

“We will inspire and connect women by facilitating education and experiences that will help them achieve their ambitions,” Prigmore said. “My objectives are to expose women to hotel ownership and development early in their careers, educate them on how to analyze and structure a deal, and create a forum for cultivating professional relationships that lead to mentorship and future collaborations.”

If you are interested in attending either the Hotel Investor Master Class or the She Has a Deal awards luncheon, tickets are available at www.shehasadeal.com/tickets.

The underwriting process and how it varies

How to ensure cashflow, expenses, and assets are being evaluated correctly

by RUSHI SHAH

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THERE ARE TWO MAJOR approaches to analyzing a lending transaction that carry contrasting levels of risk. Banks and other recourse lenders evaluate the borrower's global cash flow. They analyze the individual's tax returns and all of his or her income sources. Conversely, alternative and nonconventional lenders who provide nonrecourse financing, focus on the property that is serving as collateral for the loan. These lenders are primarily concerned about the viability of the asset and merely screen the sponsor to ensure there are no bad actors. This is an important distinction because it directly affects the borrower's risk. Because nonrecourse lenders are lending money to a bankruptcy-remote entity, a borrower's other assets are safeguarded in the event that the subject property fails to perform. With a conventional bank loan, a borrower is fully exposed to unlimited credit risk because a conventional/recourse lender can go after all of the sponsor's assets in an event of distress.

UNDERWRITING A NONRECOURSE LOAN

Because nonrecourse lenders are dependent on only the viability of the property,

the underwriting process is extremely thorough. The asset's recurring, repeatable, and reliable cash flows are scrutinized and expenses that are considered nonrecurring, extraordinary, and unrelated to the asset's operation are removed. For a hotel, this may include personal expenses such as insurance for the owner, a vehicle expense, or any one-time cost such as employee training or grand opening expenses that are outside of normal operations. Likewise, capital expenditures for roof and window replacement or new carpet installation can typically be reversed from normal underwritten cash flow.

These adjustments become the bedrock of accurately underwriting a "going concern" hotel property and can cause borrowers to leave money on the table if not executed properly. An experienced intermediary can help by preparing a reconciliation between the property's tax return and an underwriting cash flow model and providing proper justification for each adjustment to convince the lender of the asset's viability. This critical preparation ensures the asset achieves the highest possible valuation from the appraiser and the lender calculates the highest possible available cash flow to service the loan going forward.

ACCURAL VS. CASH FLOW CALCULATIONS

Nonrecourse lenders rely on underwriting models that compare accrual vs. cash-basis accounting for an asset. Hotel owners, however, frequently run cash-basis accounting. While the timing differential between these two accounting strategies can minimize a hotel owner's tax liability, failing to address and adjust for this discrepancy during the loan transaction process can penalize the underwriting of the loan. As one of the larger line items in a hotel operation, payroll is a prime example of where this can occur. Most lenders are concerned about trailing 12 months of cash flow. Most hotel owners have one or two periods of extra payroll in a 12-month period. This is legally allowable by the IRS under accrual accounting adjustment. However, most lenders can give credit for this accrual adjustment entry.

Franchise fees and insurance payments are other example adjustments. A knowledgeable and experienced intermediary can identify these expense adjustments upfront to maximize the cash flow available for underwriting the loan with benefits to the borrower. Maximized cash flow translates into higher asset valuation and higher loan proceeds at the lowest interest rate possible. ■



Rushi Shah is principal and CEO of the commercial mortgage and real estate investment banking firm and AAHOA Club Blue Member Mag Mile Capital. As a leader

in hospitality financing, Shah specializes in structuring and placing high-leverage, non-recourse bridge and permanent debt with cash out for full – and limited-service hotels nationwide. Since joining the firm's predecessor, Aries Capital, in 2015, Shah has structured and closed hundreds of millions in financing for all property types. Shah has held previous positions at Northern Trust and has an MBA from the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business.

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Competition and good policy

The solution for
independent hotel owners

by ALFREDO ORTIZ

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STARTING OR OWNING A BUSINESS in an ultra-competitive market is no small feat. Independent hotel owners understand this firsthand because they must overcome the fierce competition from larger hotel chains and established brands that dominate the industry.

COEXIST

Luckily, in some instances, travelers crave the unique, personalized touch that privately owned boutique hotels provide. Thankfully, our free market provides a space for both household brand names and these small businesses to thrive.

Large brands, like Marriott and IHG, continue to offer independent companies buyout opportunities promising financial windfalls. However, independent hotel owners are aware that they have something those large chains don't: a unique personality that allows them to stand out in a competitive market. Take Hotel Sorrento, for example. This independently owned hotel has been around for more than 110 years and continues to create meaningful experiences for visitors while holding true to its historical origin.

To be able to provide these coveted experiences and services, independent hotel owners rely heavily on policies that put their businesses first. The past few years especially have provided a winning drive for small businesses. The current administration has pursued policies that allow independent owners to take charge of their success. Profit margins for these companies are small, especially in comparison to the large name brands. So, effective legislating and less regulatory burdens are the oxygen they need to thrive.

BUSINESS-FIRST MINDSET

One example of such a policy initiative is the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act that provided a victory for business owners everywhere and revived the economy. Just after celebrating the two-year anniversary of the passing of this bill, small enterprises are still basking in the positive results that the policy provided.

By providing small businesses with necessary tax cuts, this bill rewarded innovation, sparked job growth, and enabled wage increases while bringing unemployment in the leisure and hospitality to a record low since the turn of the 21st century.

But, of course, as with any industry, there are challenges.

INCREASING COSTS

Currently, small businesses are facing the consequences of an increasing minimum wage. Many hotels rely on entry-level workers to run the business efficiently and cost effectively. But since the start of 2020, 21 states have already implemented a minimum wage hike. While businesses want to be able to pay workers more – and many are already paying over the minimum wage – these added labor costs for entry-level jobs threaten employment opportunities and the financial viability of these small businesses.

These additional labor costs, which are more easily implemented by large chains, are creating an uneven playing field for independent hotel owners. Additionally, with the rise of Airbnb and other short-term rental companies, boutique hotels are forced to compete with a new level of competition – one that also takes a personalized approach to lodging.

STEP UP THE COMPETITION

Although a source of concern, these obstacles are often needed to drive innovation and ensure businesses are striving to accommodate customers with the very best service. As the saying goes, a little competition never hurt anyone.

Independent hotel owners have their work cut out for them in a competitive market. But the support of smart policies that benefit businesses with smaller profit margins allow for them to remain unique and the perfect home away from home for all visitors. ■

Alfredo Ortiz is the president and CEO of the Job Creators Network.

“

The current administration has pursued policies that allow independent owners to take charge of their success. Profit margins for these companies are small – especially in comparison to the large name brands. So, effective legislating and less regulatory burdens are the oxygen they need to thrive.”

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Lease agreements: Ask the right questions

by DARSHAN PATEL

IN 2019, OUR LAW FIRM drafted more lease agreements than in 2017 and 2018 combined. During our year-end close-out meeting, I asked my attorneys what our clients' motivation was in leasing their properties. The overwhelming answer was the owners of the properties (primarily independent hotels) were getting older in age

and were losing their resolve to maintain the operations of the property. My attorneys and I conducted a survey to generate all the possible options for hoteliers in this predicament:

- Transfer the property to their children to manage.
- Hire a manager and supporting staff for their property.

- Hire a management company to maintain the operations.
- Sell the property.
- Lease the property.

When asked why our clients chose to lease rather than another one of the options, they answered with the following:

- For one reason or another, their children were not interested in managing

WRITING THE DRAFT

If leasing seems like the best option, here are some points to consider when drafting your lease agreement:

- 1. What is the term of the lease?** Are there windows to exit the lease? What are the liquidated damages should either the lessor or lessee want to terminate the lease?
- 2. What is the monthly rent?** Are there any increases in the rent? Is the rent tied to economic indicators such as CPI or CPI-U? How often is the rent recalculated?
- 3. Is the lease going to be a triple-net?** In a standard lease, the lessor is responsible for paying the real estate taxes, maintenance, and building insurance. However, in a triple-net lease (NNN), the lessee is responsible for these expenses in addition to the normal operating expenses of the business.
- 4. Are there any specific requirements you have of the lessee that pertain to the property?** I once had a client with a 20-year-old mango tree and we specifically wrote that the lessee had to maintain the mango tree. Every season, the lessor had the right to collect 20 mangos and the rest could be enjoyed by the lessee. No detail is too small when looking at agreement requirements.
- 5. Are there any special authorizations and confirmations that need to be written into the lease?** For example, is the lessee required to get specific approval to change the color of the building's exterior, change the name of the property, or perform any construction?

the property, mainly due to different career choices.

- ➔ The labor shortage makes finding appropriate staff and management near impossible.
- ➔ The independent property is not suited for the management style of management companies, primarily due to increased labor costs and expenses.
- ➔ The tax from the capital gain would significantly wipe out the net worth of the owner and would eliminate the recurring income that the property generated.

This left property owners with only one option that makes financial and logistical sense: leasing their property. Additionally, the property owners stated they wanted to maintain ownership of the property so



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their children would be able to realize that income when the time came.

Whether you plan to lease your property or enter into a lease, there are a multitude of variables that need to be considered. Be sure to reach out to your attorney to fully understand the ramifications of signing a lease agreement. ■



Darshan Patel founded his firm in 2016 in San Diego, CA. His firm specializes in hospitality law by providing full legal services to hoteliers. You can reach him and his attorneys at (619) 940-6623, questions@lawpatel.com, or at www.lawpatel.com.

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Detroit

by ASIF LAKHANI



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ONCE THE AUTOMOBILE MANUFACTURING capital of the world, Detroit has undergone a massive shift in its demographics and identity since its population peaked at 1.8 million in the 1950s. In the six decades since then, the city has dropped to less than 700,000, according to census data.

However, the renaissance of this iconic American city is moving full steam ahead. In 2016, the city hosted 19 million visitors who spent \$6 billion. More than two million of the visitors in 2016 came from international destinations, according to the Detroit Metro Convention and Visitors Bureau; that number was a 111-percent increase from the 2013 total for the same demographic.

HOSPITALITY RENAISSANCE

As of 2019, there were more than 5,000 hotel rooms in downtown Detroit and approximately 42,000 in the metropolitan area, according to a report from Visit Detroit. Millions of dollars have been spent to renovate and build hotels all over town. Recently, a \$30-million renovation to the Detroit Marriott at the Renaissance Center made way for 1,246 guestrooms with 52 suites and 100,000 square feet of event space.

A new 158-room Cambria Hotel, built by Choice Hotels, is expected to open its doors later this year as part of a mixed-use development featuring food and retail tenants. The \$50-million hotel project features meeting spaces, a grand ballroom,

modern fixtures such as Bluetooth mirrors in bathrooms, and spa-like amenities throughout the building. The 100-room Foundation Hotel, built inside the historic Detroit Fire Department headquarters, was included on *TIME* magazine's 100 Greatest Places and was also recognized as one of the best new hotels in the world by *Condé Nast Traveler*. In all, Detroit has a handful of historic hotels to match its equally rich culture and commerce history.

FROM THEN TO NOW

Detroit's history extends beyond being Motor City and the birthplace of Motown. The Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau was the first of its kind in the entire world when it was founded in 1896. The



In the past few years, Detroit has seen massive hospitality development. As of 2019, there were:

- **5,000+ guestrooms** in the downtown area
- Approximately **42,000 guestrooms** in the metropolitan area
- **\$30 million in renovations** toward the Detroit Marriott at Renaissance Center
- A **brand-new 158-room Cambria Hotel**, slated to open later this year



DMCVB is a private organization that runs on a not-for-profit and membership model that includes more than 700 businesses.

Detroit also is home to the 17th-largest convention center in the United States, the TCF Center, which is named after a local financial institution. Situated alongside the Detroit River, the facility features 2.4 million square feet of space and has five exhibit halls, eight banquet rooms, and 80 meeting rooms. The TCF Center serves 1.5 million visitors annually and hosted a record-high 244 events in 2018, which led to a 564 percent increase in revenue since 2009 and underwent a \$279-million renovation from 2011 to 2015, according to the Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority.

If there is one thing to know about Detroit right now, it's that the city is a burgeoning hotbed of engineering, fashion, startup, and cuisine. It is reinventing itself as a cultural phenomenon. Tourism and accommodations are both trending up, and the temperature is rising.

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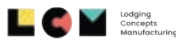
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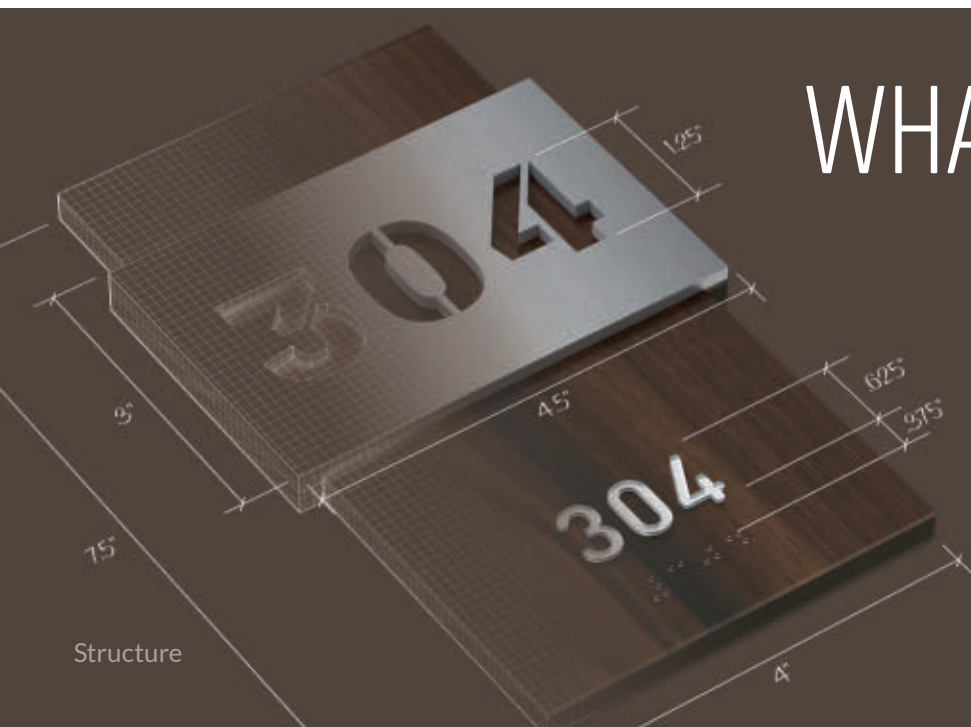
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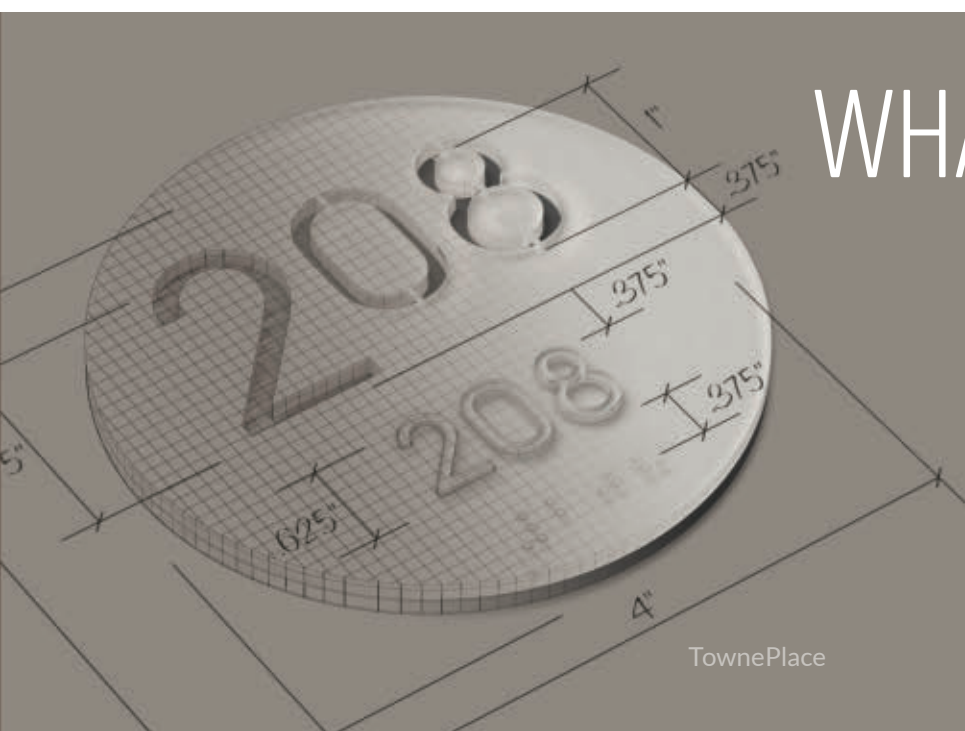
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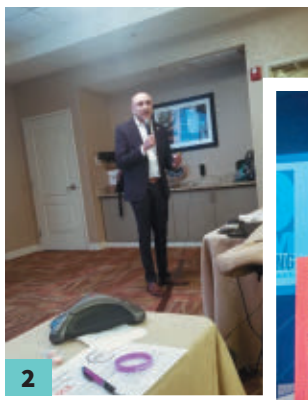
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1. AAHOA proudly attended a summit hosted by President Trump, Vice President Pence, Senior Advisor Ivanka Trump, administration officials, trafficking survivors, advocates, law enforcement officials, and elected leaders to highlight the scourge of human trafficking and identify solutions to the crisis.
2. AAHOA Lifetime Member Mitch Patel, President & CEO of Vision Hospitality Group, teamed with AAHOA to offer free human trafficking awareness training to the general public in Chattanooga, TN.
3. AAHOA President & CEO Cecil P. Staton joined the Illinois Hotel & Lodging Association (IHLA), Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker, Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot, American Hotel & Lodging Association (AHLA) President & CEO Chip Rogers, and countless others in the fight against human trafficking during a No Room for Trafficking regional event.
4. AAHOA President & CEO Cecil P. Staton delivered opening remarks at No Room for Trafficking in Miami, FL.
5. AAHOA President & CEO Cecil P. Staton joined representatives from AHLA, FRLA, and the greater hotel industry to partner with *It's a Penalty* and A21 as part of the No Room for Trafficking campaign.
6. The AAHOA staff joined others around the nation on #WearBlueDay to raise awareness of human trafficking.
7. Binal Patel was the winner of the first sweepstakes for four free hotel nights at the 2020 AAHOA Convention & Trade Show.
8. AAHOA Chairwoman Jagruti Panwala was recently featured on LODGING Magazine Insider, where she shared her thoughts on the state of the U.S. lodging industry and its future, her biggest takeaways from LAS, and what it's like heading the leading association for America's hotel owners.
9. Upper Midwest Regional Director Kalpesh Joshi showed off his blue to raise awareness of human trafficking in January.



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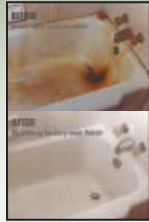
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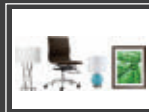
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