

today's hotelier

The Official Publication of AAHOA

AAHOA
CON
22
ISSUE

THE GREAT LABOR BATTLE

Winning the war on talent



Unshakeable success in an unsteady economy

2021-2022 AAHOA OFFICERS

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT

Miraj S. Patel
MBA, CHO, CHIA

Vinay Patel

Nishant (Neal) Patel
CHO

Bharat Patel
CHO, CHIA

STRENGTH *in numbers*

Your AAHOA Officers on unity and the key challenges hoteliers face today

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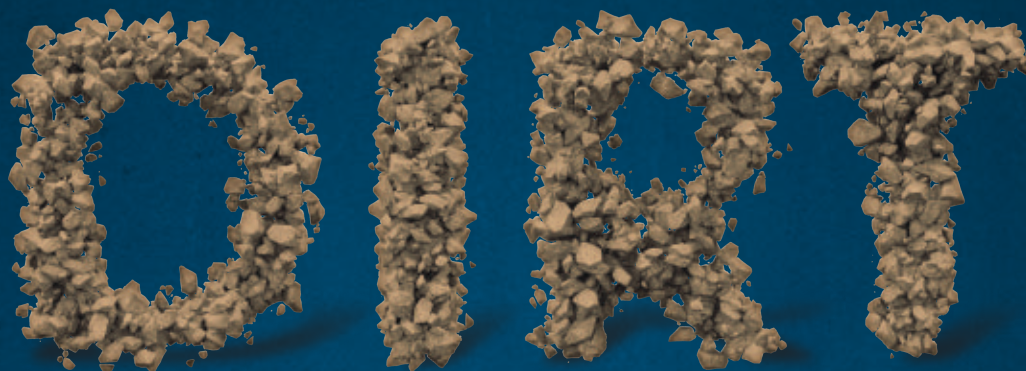
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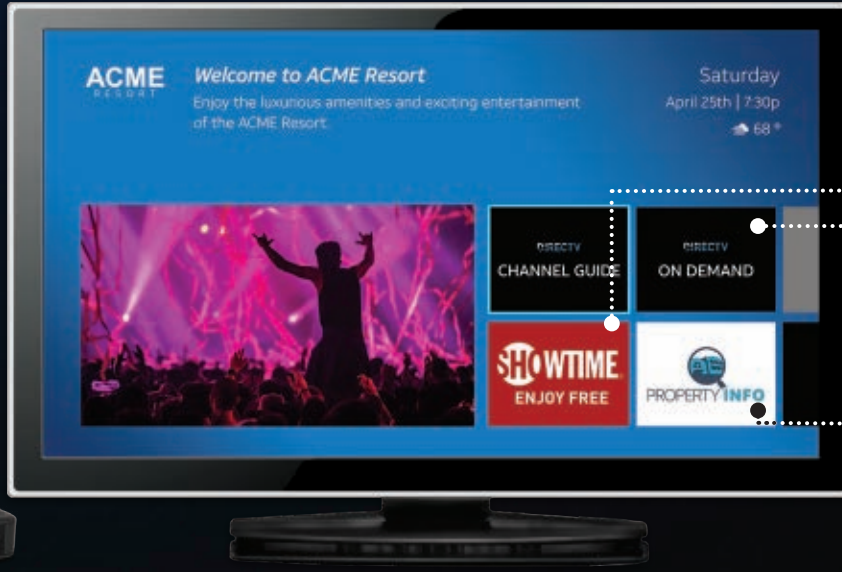
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5 Things To Know About AAHOA This Month

AAHOACON22 WILL USHER IN A NEW ERA.

This month, the 2022 AAHOA Convention & Trade Show will bring together the industry for education, networking, and dealmaking. However, it also is the time during which members will elect the 2022-2023 Board of Directors and Vice Chairman Nishant (Neal) Patel will become AAHOA Chairman of the Board. The AAHOA elections are always electric and momentous, filled with excitement and, sometimes, big surprises. You'll want to be in Baltimore when they happen to personally welcome and congratulate our new leaders. [AAHOA.com/Elections](https://www.aahoa.com/Elections)



REGIONAL SEASON KICKS OFF NEXT MONTH.

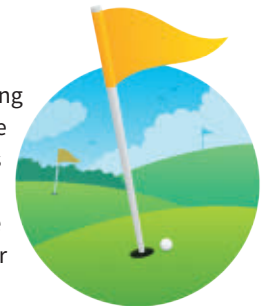


AAHOA launches its 2022 Regional Conference & Trade Show schedule in May. Our regionals give attendees access to top vendors, incredible networking opportunities, and region-

specific industry updates you can't get anywhere else. These events are open to all hotel owners, even if you're not already an AAHOA Member, and you can attend as many as you like. [AAHOA.com/Calendar](https://www.aahoa.com/Calendar)

AAHOA CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENTS TEE OFF IN MAY.

AAHOA's 2022 charity golf tournament schedule tees off next month, beginning with the North Central Region Charity Golf Tournament on May 25. We invite players and sponsors to join us as we come together to support local charities and ongoing COVID-19 relief efforts. It also will be a great opportunity to network in person while enjoying a beautiful day of competitive golf at some of the country's top golf courses. Check the link below and sign up for the event near you! [AAHOA.com/Golf](https://www.aahoa.com/Golf)



SERVE ON AN AAHOA COMMITTEE.

The active participation of our talented, dynamic membership is vital to AAHOA's success. If you want to make a difference for AAHOA Members and the hospitality community at large, we encourage you to apply to serve on an AAHOA committee. Applications are due by April 15. [AAHOA.com/Committees](https://www.aahoa.com/Committees)



AAHOA UPDATES ITS 12 POINTS OF FRANCHISING.

In 1998, AAHOA identified certain best practices for the hospitality franchise system. AAHOA called those best practices the 12 Points of Fair Franchising ("12 Points"). AAHOA has continuously updated the Points to reflect business changes and the long-term, mutually beneficial relationship between industry franchisors and franchisees. The revised 12 Points continues this mission as an educational primer for AAHOA Members, future hospitality franchisees, and hospitality franchisors to discuss and use to continue designing, developing, and implementing best-in-class, mutually beneficial franchise systems. [AAHOA.com/12Points](https://www.aahoa.com/12Points)



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VINAY PATEL
AAHOA CHAIR (2021-2022)

“

It may be difficult to see it now, but things could always be worse. Instead of focusing on the negatives or the slow path to recovery, I challenge you to look for your small ‘wins’ each day.”

There is light ahead

AAHOACON22 IS HERE – OUR SECOND IN-PERSON CONVENTION, THIRD OVERALL – since the pandemic began.

As we enter our third year of this pandemic, it seems like a new variant comes into play just as we think we’re over the hump of the final obstacle. I’ve spent the past few months speaking with members, Industry Partners, and industry leaders about how they stay positive despite the circumstances.

2021 brought about supply chain disruptions and a labor shortage, and some members dealt with Mother Nature and powerful natural disasters, including fires, tornados, and hurricanes, on top of their already difficult situations.

While it can be tough to see the light at the end of the tunnel as the pandemic continues to drag on, it makes us all that much more appreciative of the small wins. We’re seeing more people step up to the plate, take on more responsibility, or simply fill in the gaps.

For example, a Florida-based AAHOA Lifetime Member recently drove hours to pitch in to help with housekeeping duties at an understaffed location, balancing the duties of President & CEO with housekeeping. Other AAHOA Members raised money for families who lost nearly everything they’ve spent their lives building due to disastrous tornados.

It may be difficult to see it now, but things could always be worse. Instead of focusing on the negatives or the slow path to recovery, I challenge you to look for your small “wins” each day.

Whether it’s going out of your way to help a customer or colleague or reaching out to someone you haven’t spoken to in a while to simply check in...it’s the little things these days that go a long way.

We can find problems everywhere we look, but it’s the people looking for solutions who will come out on top. I hope AAHOACON22 gives you the opportunity to network, connect, learn, and find those “wins” you are looking for.

This will be my final message as I wrap up my time as your AAHOA Chair. This year has been full of ups and down and I am so thankful for all the members working together with me as I led AAHOA into another successful year.

We released the Oxford Study data, held a successful in-person convention – the first time since 2019, hosted 92 in-person events, helped establish the American Hospitality Alliance (AHA)...among many other things.

AAHOA Government Affairs worked fiercely to advocate for COVID-19 relief, PPP and EIDL enhancements, preservation of IRC Section 1031 like-kind exchanges, and state ARP funding for grants.

I want to congratulate Neal for taking over as chairman this month. His dedication and support as Vice Chairman was instrumental to AAHOA’s successes, and I know that he will continue to lead the way. ■

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Getting involved with the AAHOA Political Action Committee

by SEAN GROSSNICKLE

OVER THE YEARS, AAHOA has aggressively cultivated relationships with elected officials in Washington, D.C., and in your state capital. In doing so, we have helped expand their knowledge about the importance of hotels to their communities and the economy at large. Thanks to you and your fellow AAHOA Members, AAHOA is now the foremost resource and advocate for America's hotel owners. Engaging directly with your elected officials is one of the best ways to promote laws and policies that benefit our employees, our businesses, and our communities. As the industry continues down the road to recovery, the PAC helps AAHOA Members stay active and engaged in the political process.

The AAHOA PAC gives AAHOA the opportunity to advocate on behalf of its members on Capitol Hill and in state capitals across the country. AAHOA PAC would cease to exist without continual contributions and support from our members. All AAHOA Members are encouraged to become members of AAHOA PAC and attend AAHOA PAC events in their regions, as well as in Washington, D.C.



HOW MEMBERS CAN GET INVOLVED AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE

▶ AAHOA Lifetime Members

AAHOA Lifetime Members can contribute any reimbursement they may receive from the 2022 AAHOA Convention & Trade Show registration fee to AAHOA's political activities. Visit the AAHOA Booth at this year's AAHOACON22 in Baltimore or email pac@aahoa.com to learn more.

▶ AAHOA Members

Every AAHOA Member is eligible to make a contribution to the AAHOA PAC.* Log in to MyAAHOA.com to get started.

365 FOR \$365

AAHOA Members represent the strongest and most reputable voices of the hotel industry. One dollar a day from one hotelier can make all the difference! AAHOA's 365 for \$365 campaign calls upon AAHOA Members to pledge \$1 a day for one year to advance the AAHOA PAC.

PAC funds give AAHOA a seat at the decision-making table. The successes in Washington, D.C. are only possible because AAHOA and our members have strong relationships with public officials who understand and appreciate the importance of our industry to the American economy. PAC funding allows AAHOA to strengthen its existing political relationships and forge new partnerships with the political power brokers of the future. ■

Interested in
joining?

Visit the PAC landing page at AAHOA.com/PAC to access the FAQ and more, or join today through MyAAHOA.com.

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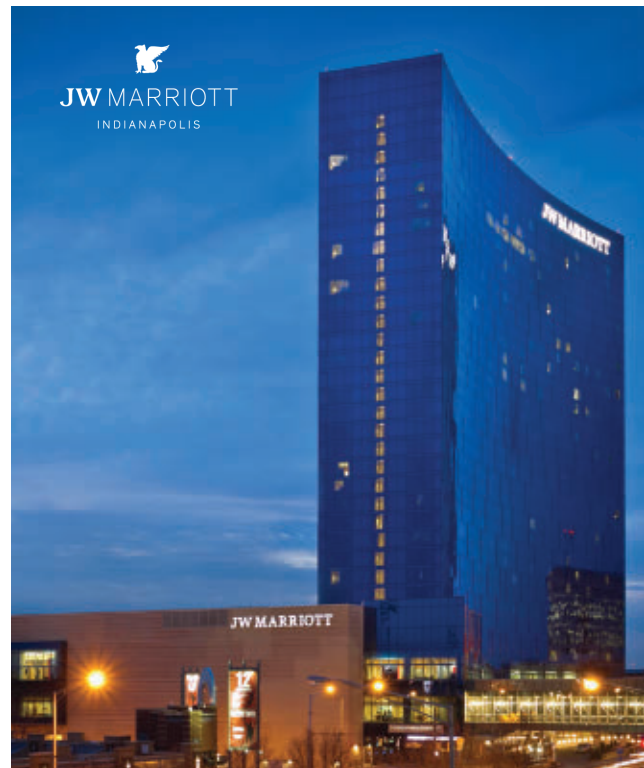
Jorge G., Director of IT
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Invaluable experience

by JYOTI SAROLIA

THE MOST SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEURS I HAVE EVER KNOWN BECAME that way by investing in themselves and their futures. With that goal in mind, after attending my first AAHOACON more than a decade ago, I knew one of the smartest investments I could make was to become an AAHOA Lifetime Member. My first AAHOACON convention was overwhelming, but it opened a new world of vendor options, networking, and educational opportunities. Two days were not enough! Snaking through exhibitor aisles and seeing each supplier and their show specials became a bargain-hunting extravaganza. And what girl doesn't enjoy shopping, especially if it's for hotels she owns?

Brand-sponsored social events were, and still are, invaluable opportunities to meet industry leaders and learn more about how their brand visions align with my own portfolio growth goals. Hospitality is an industry forged through the strength of relationships. As hoteliers, we know this to be true with our guests. And I have come to learn firsthand that brand development leaders who are involved with AAHOA are just as interested in customers like me who rely upon relationships to guide future partnership, development, and asset-acquisition decisions.

LEARN FROM THE BEST

There is no substitute for learning from people who've already traveled paths you wish to pursue. AAHOA is the most powerful networking conduit in the lodging industry, and I can't even count the ways I have benefitted from advice generously shared by my growing network of peers and mentors.

You can't put a price on the value of having access to the kind of professional expertise that comes from getting involved with

AAHOA, whether by simply coming to the industry's largest gathering of hotel owners or through AAHOA's incredible Town Halls. By investing in your relationship with AAHOA, you will find vast opportunities to network, share challenges, find solutions, and build a lifetime network of friends and industry colleagues.

In addition, AAHOA has an amazing lineup of educational opportunities. I have taken advantage of so many professional and personal learning resources. AAHOA offers a treasure trove of content just through its webcasts alone! My two all-time favorite workshops, "How to Develop a Hotel" and "How to Start Your Own Management Company," became catalysts in building the confidence I needed to launch my own company in 2018.

If you own a hotel, you already know this. There are decisions in our business lives only owners can make. What this supposed "new normal" will eventually look like is still unknown, but this only further underscores the value of AAHOA's educational offerings

“

AAHOA is the most powerful networking conduit in the lodging industry, and I can't even count the ways I have benefitted from advice generously shared by my growing network of peers and mentors.”

and the importance of being a lifelong learner.

OPEN DOORS

I'm grateful for all AAHOA does to protect our shared interests as small business owners through its tireless and never-ending work on the legislative front. AAHOA's political leadership has helped open doors at the local, state, and federal levels, enabling me to build positive relationships with elected officials, advocate for our industry, and help protect the interests of all hotel owners within my community and state.

With AAHOA's help, I'm more able to reach government decision-makers by telling the story of a small business owner. And my story is one of a woman with big dreams who believes in the power of a proud industry. I share my belief of our industry's ability and history of making the world a better place for our guests, our associates, and our communities.

This marks my eighth year serving as a South Pacific Region Ambassador and my third year being a Premier Ambassador. I have participated in various AAHOA committees, including Franchise and Industry Relations and Strategic Planning. And AAHOA recognized me with its prestigious Outstanding Woman Hotelier of the Year Award. In addition, I was the first woman elected to chair the Choice Hotels Owners Council.

Throughout my journey, the insights and support I've gained from AAHOA have helped me become the hotelier I am today and the person I aspire to be tomorrow. ■



Flying high

TAKE PHOTO/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

The sky is the limit when AAHOA Members band together to support one another

by IAIN SHAW

THE MOMENT A HOTELIER JOINS AAHOA, they gain access to a community of hospitality professionals whose experiences, interests, and concerns often overlap significantly with their own. AAHOA's events, news updates, and educational programming are all invaluable resources for members, and hoteliers would be hard pressed to find a fraction of the services AAHOA provides at anywhere close to the cost of annual membership dues, which are less than the cost of an average one-night hotel stay. But, despite the resources, support, and solutions AAHOA provides, perhaps its greatest selling point is the members themselves, many of whom show up for each other and the industry in ways too numerous to count.

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For starters, the bond between AAHOA Members extends beyond any official association function. “This association initially was created for business purposes, and that’s certainly a major element of its focus, helping members with anything from franchising to advocacy issues,” said Harikrishna (HK) Patel, AAHOA Mid South Regional Director. “But at the same time, we treat each member as family.”

As countless members have learned, the AAHOA family can be a source of day-to-day information, alerts, advice, and support on a range of topics, from recommendations for sourcing equipment to staffing issues. But, when it comes to legislative, regulatory, or legal issues that affect hoteliers, members can lean on each other for solidarity and strength in numbers. The power of an individual voice in the crowd simply doesn’t compare to the influence of thousands of hotel owners pulling in the same direction under the AAHOA umbrella.

“You have an organization that represents nearly 20,000 members nationwide, who own 60% of the hotels in the U.S.,” said Sarah Gulati, Esq., of Gulati Law, P.L., who is also an AAHOA Florida Region Ambassador. With that kind of backing, “you come with much more force when you’re trying to take down a bill or get a bill approved,” she added.

SPEAKING WORDS OF WISDOM

AAHOA’s collective lobbying power has been instrumental in helping hotels across many states resist lawsuits regarding ADA compliance. “We’ve banded together locally to not only educate our local politicians but, more importantly, place restrictions so these lawyers can’t come in and keep filing these lawsuits,” said Imesh Vaidya, AAHOA Southwest Region Ambassador. “In Arizona, we were successful in having a law passed that gave our members 60 days to cure any ADA violation. In New Mexico, we were successful in having the attorney general join numerous lawsuits as a co-defendant and have them dismissed.” The ability to respond collectively has helped AAHOA Members navigate issues ranging from marketing programs to local taxes and crime.

Some members take on added responsibility to help their fellow AAHOA Members. The association provides access points at all tiers of government, via local and regional



The power of an individual voice in the crowd simply doesn’t compare to the influence of thousands of hotel owners pulling in the same direction under the AAHOA umbrella.”

groupings, as well as at the federal level through AAHOA’s office in Washington, D.C. Patel said local and national AAHOA representatives play a critical role in advocating

on behalf of members. “Basically anybody who needs help can reach out,” he said. “Any issues you have, as a Regional Director, I will take it personally and support you.”

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The association's lobbying and government relations functions can be invaluable, but lateral communication between rank-and-file members also is essential to AAHOA's value proposition to its members. Members who stay with AAHOA for a number of years tend to develop interlinked networks, interacting both on official AAHOA channels and informally via other platforms. Vaidya said AAHOA's WhatsApp groups are an outlet for connecting with hoteliers in his region, but he also keeps in touch with an "inner circle" of close contacts in the industry via a group email.

AAHOA counts many non-hoteliers among its membership, including lawyers like Sarah Gulati, herself a product of a family of hoteliers but who practices hospitality law. These professionals offer AAHOA hoteliers expert advice on the hospitality industry from a different perspective. "I've been asked numerous times to provide input on the legal side



of things for the hospitality industry, I've done some speaking events, and I've helped many hoteliers on ADA lawsuits and hospitality transactions," Gulati said.

Gulati also is active on the AAHOA Women's Committee, which gives female hoteliers access to a unique network of peers across the country. AAHOA hosts several events throughout the year specifically focused on women hoteliers, educational events, local Town Halls, and other meetings. Participation has doubled in the time Gulati has been involved, and in recent years, female leaders also have assumed senior roles within AAHOA. "You do see much more involvement from women," Gulati said. "For example, a few names that come to mind are Jagruti Panwala, Lina Patel, Tejal Patel, Nimisha Patel, and Jyoti Sarolia, who have taken leadership roles in the association. There's definitely a shift in involvement from women in the industry."

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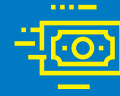
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LET IT BE

In times of extreme duress, AAHOA Members tend to rise to the occasion to support each other. When tornadoes ravaged Kentucky in the waning weeks of 2021, HK Patel witnessed the power of AAHOA Members rallying around not only each other but also their communities. In fact, he played a leading role in coordinating relief efforts with other AAHOA Members in the region.

Patel oversaw a fundraising campaign that collected around \$20,000 to help families and businesses affected by the disaster. “The majority of the people who were affected were not in the hotel industry or any hospitality business,” he said. “They were individuals. Their homes were destroyed. Their small businesses were destroyed.”

Patel and a group of AAHOA representatives got together to distribute thousands of dollars’ worth of essential items – including food, water, and toilet paper – to residents. “All of my Ambassadors were very helpful in taking initiative and helping me go up there with all these materials to hand them out to people who were in need,” he said. “As a Regional Director and a citizen of Kentucky myself, I took it personally to be my duty to help.”

AAHOA also was able to leverage its network to help a hotelier whose hotel and personal belongings were destroyed by a tornado. “We had a great supporter of AAHOA, an insurance adjuster based in New Orleans who helped this hotelier immensely,” Patel explained. This adjuster did everything in his power to help the hotelier close his claim with a record amount that he couldn’t have gotten from the insurance company on his own. This was money he desperately needed to help him recover and rebuild after the extensive damage.”

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, AAHOA Members have relied on each other like never before. Both Patel and Vaidya talked about how AAHOA Members had been able to lean into their networks, built during their time as AAHOA Members, for advice and education on PPP loans, as well as information on how different franchises were responding to the pandemic. In some cases, this helped iron out tensions between hotel owners and franchises.

“COVID has taught us that nothing is permanent, but the need to work together is

something that will never go away,” Patel said. “We will all come up against difficult situations in life, and we need to help one another because there are some obstacles we can’t overcome on our own.”

As Vaidya says, sometimes that simply means AAHOA Members showing up for each other after a particularly tough day or a busy week. “There are times when everyone just has a miserable day and a friend of yours will call you up and say, ‘We just need to go have a beer,’” he said.

Vaidya said there obviously is still room for improvement and advancement, but the industry and individual hoteliers would be worse off if associations like AAHOA were not there to provide a framework for collaboration and cooperation between members.

“We know it’s not perfect,” Vaidya said. “No organization is perfect, and AAHOA still has a long road ahead of it. But the positive change that AAHOA has caused, and we’ve benefited from, in the past 30-plus years are immeasurable.” ■

The graphic features the AAHOA logo at the top left, followed by the year '2022' in large yellow font. Below this is the title 'REGIONAL CONFERENCES & TRADE SHOWS' in white. A dark blue banner with the text 'SAVE THE DATES' in white is positioned above a list of events. The events are arranged in two columns, with dates in yellow and event details in white. A large, semi-transparent '2022' is visible in the background on the right side. At the bottom, the text 'STAY CONNECTED THROUGH AAHOA' is displayed in white. On the left side of the graphic, there are three circular icons representing people connected by lines.

02/15 Central Midwest Regional Tulsa, OK	08/04 South Carolina Regional Columbia, SC
05/10 Greater LA Area Regional Los Angeles, CA	08/09 Northwest Regional Vancouver, WA
05/12 North Pacific Regional San Jose, CA	08/24 North Texas Regional Irving, TX
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06/09 Southwest Regional Salt Lake City, UT	09/13 Mid Atlantic Regional Cherry Hill, NJ
06/21 Alabama Regional Birmingham, AL	09/15 Washington DC Area Regional Arlington, VA
07/11 Mid South Regional Nashville, TN	10/06 South Pacific Regional San Diego, CA
07/13 Northeast Regional Rochester, NY	10/14 North Central Regional Cincinnati, OH
07/26 Arkansas Regional Little Rock, AR	11/04 Gulf Regional New Orleans, LA
07/28 Upper Midwest Regional Minneapolis, MN	11/18 Florida Regional Orlando, FL
08/02 North Carolina Regional Charlotte, NC	11/29 South Central Texas Regional Austin, TX

STAY CONNECTED THROUGH AAHOA

Just keep climbing

AAHOA Members finding unshakeable success in the face of an unsteady economy

by STEPHANIE STEPHENS

THANKS TO WHAT FEELS LIKE A SEEMINGLY unending ocean of uncertainties, due to COVID-19 and a roller-coaster economy, operating a hotel during the past two years hasn't been an occupation for the faint of heart. But across the industry, AAHOA Members have weathered the storms, some quite literally, and supported each other valiantly during one of the most challenging periods in recent American history. Here, we profile three such industry leaders who didn't let circumstances beyond their control mess with their business success.



Building prosperous relationships

“Jay is one of those people who is enthusiastic, and they trust him, so people just share information with him, and he passes it along.”

“THE STRENGTH OF ANY ORGANIZATION is at the local level,” said Jay Trini Patel, AAHOA Member and recent recipient of a Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority 15th Annual Partners in Tourism Award. Proudly, he took home the Local Champion

award that celebrated his tireless energy and devotion to spreading the good word about Charlotte, NC, something he’s joyfully done for 32 years.

According to CRVA, “Local Champions are individuals who live and work in Charlotte or North Carolina and have been instrumental in collaborating with CRVA’s Sales and Services teams to bring meetings and events to the city that generate an economic impact for the area.”

And Patel fits that description to a T, recounting his history as “a passive investor in numerous hotels over the years.” He also owns five UPS stores, including a franchise location in the Charlotte Convention Center.

“During these times, you must be proactive and not just sit and wait,” he said.

Never one to rest on his laurels, Patel helped bring AAHOA’s national convention to The Queen City in 2007 and served as AAHOA North Carolina Regional Director from 2005 to 2008.

CRVA says annual visitor spending is \$7.8 billion, and Patel ponders what else he can do to increase that number along with the satisfaction of those who visit. He continues to champion Charlotte to his contacts within UPS and at other hotel corporations, sharing what’s ideal about his city as a conference destination, and it works.

Originally from Trinidad, he’s always wanted to give back to his home country as he does now for Charlotte. As a fun side business, he’s taken more than 700 people to the Caribbean to see cricket when India plays the West Indies.

Engaging with others “is key in all aspects of life,” he said. “It gives you confidence in anything you do because you have resources.”

“People do business with people they know, like, and trust,” says Mike Butts, CRVA vice president of sales and executive director of Visit Charlotte – CRVA’s sales and marketing division – in a video documenting Patel’s award. “Jay is one of those people who is enthusiastic, and they trust him, so people just share information with him, and he passes it along.”

This Local Champion proves that sharing and caring about his city and his friends inspires him, and everyone around him, to think about more than just themselves.



Jay Trini Patel (center) accepts the CRVA 15th Annual Partners in Tourism Award.



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Weathering storms

WITH 24 YEARS IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY, AAHOA Member Vimal Patel, CEO of QHotels Management in New Orleans, LA, knew that opening new properties could always be rife with challenges. What he didn't expect was contending with a pandemic and hurricane at the same time.

His LinkedIn post of early February 2022 said it all: "Finally, after almost five months and taking the most significant punch from Hurricane Ida, the first hotel out of six is finally open. There are still five hotels closed and in rebuild mode for the next few months."

He said business "in his market was on an upward trend until COVID-19 and resulting liquidity and other financial issues." Patel had to shut down an operating hotel for three months in March 2020. Then another, under construction, closed for 2.5 months. That was enough to cause anyone angst and more, but Hurricane Ida thought she'd wreak some havoc in Louisiana in August and September 2021. As a result, Patel closed six hotels due to "extensive damage."

But, he persevered, and that "first hotel" opened with the help of "additional debt and line of credit," and astute maneuvering, Patel said, noting that he was aided by the input of three other partners and his wife, Mina.

Patel said the other openings are works in progress, but he can see the proverbial light at the end of the repair tunnel. However, every day that passes without business means costs of labor and materials continue to rise, and the lead time for shipments to arrive lags even more.

His enormous to-do list didn't deter him from filing a lawsuit against a major hotel brand, which is an example "of brands

pushing mandatory requirements, such as for approved vendors, unfair marketing programs, and brand mandates that add to the overall cost of operations."

Patel knows he's pushing boundaries. "But," he said, "99% of owners fear if you do speak up, you'll suffer retaliation by those brands."

So, instead of operating from a position of fear, he relies on his "resiliency, fighting spirit, and will to survive and navigate."

"We had to rise above the water," he said. "Problems existed before the hurricane, but the elephant in the room – brand-mandated requirements – only increased during COVID. If I can't stand up and speak up for what's right, what am I teaching my two daughters?"

Patel's advice to any hotel owner is to plan for "what if," including intrusion from Mother Nature.

"After a catastrophe," he offered, "we seem to always play defense and react. Put proactive measures in place before it happens, be sure you have insurance that covers what you need, and understand the exclusions and limits."



Vimal Patel,
CEO, QHotels
Management

“

Be sure you have insurance that covers what you need, and understand the exclusions and limits.”

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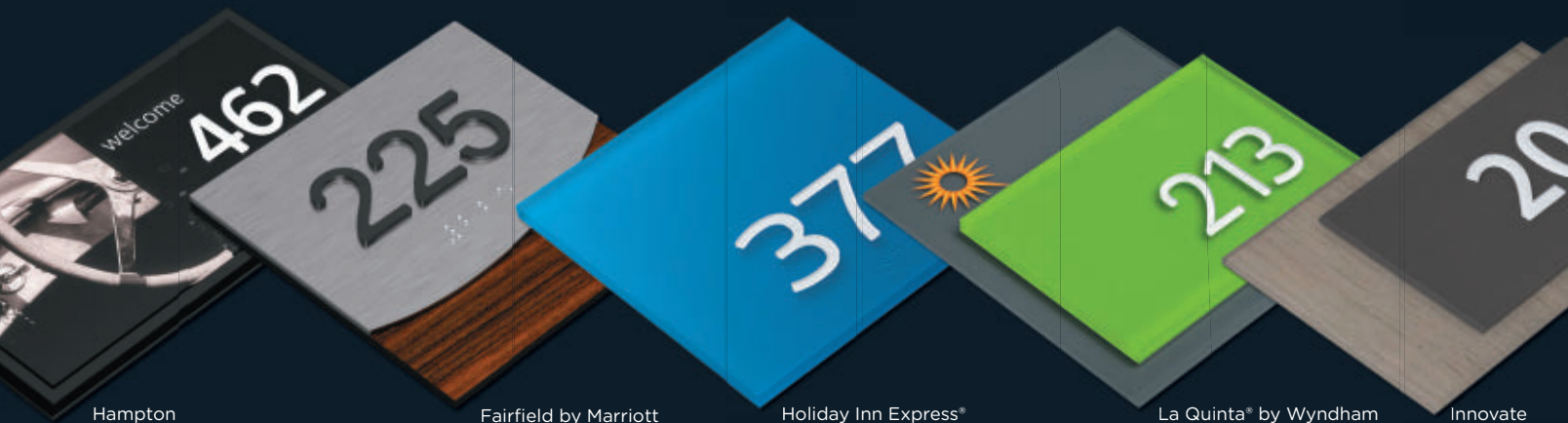
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AAHOA LIFETIME MEMBER

Surpreet Singh wanted to open a restaurant like Amrina for eight years and it finally happened at the end of March in The Woodlands, TX. With creative, eclectic, Indian-inspired cuisine, and illustrative cocktails, Singh said the venture is “definitely risky now, or at any time,” but that he and his family and partners at THIND Management follow the pulse and shift of consumer demand.

Although timing might have seemed wrong for others contemplating new ventures, for Singh, it was perfect. The new luxury boutique restaurant, operating under the banner of THIND Management’s Kahani Social Group, features a variety of lavish and inviting spaces for diners to enjoy “a social experience married to the rest of the experience,” Singh said.

A live DJ adds to the cosmopolitan “nightlife” feel of Amrina, because “people should be able to have a great dinner, and jam to a live deejay and other instrumental music,” he added.

THIND specializes in hotels, and Singh said this family got started in the industry 15 years ago. The company owns properties and performs third-party management, while Kahani Social Group currently targets other boutique ventures.

In 2020, he found the right space for Amrina, found his celebrated chef, and Singh was off and running. During COVID, his company worked hard to keep doors open and to save jobs and paychecks.

“We didn’t let anyone go,” Singh said. “We survived it and it was a great thing.”

The company aims to bring a big-city dining landscape to smaller towns. Additionally, Singh is planning an upscale food truck hall, and he’s set to open more indoor restaurants in the upscale fine dining category. “Each will have its own unique story,” he said.

“The pandemic won’t last forever,” Singh said, relishing strategizing next moves for Amrina’s success with younger brother Preet Paul Singh, “who’s fresh out of college with fresh ideas.”

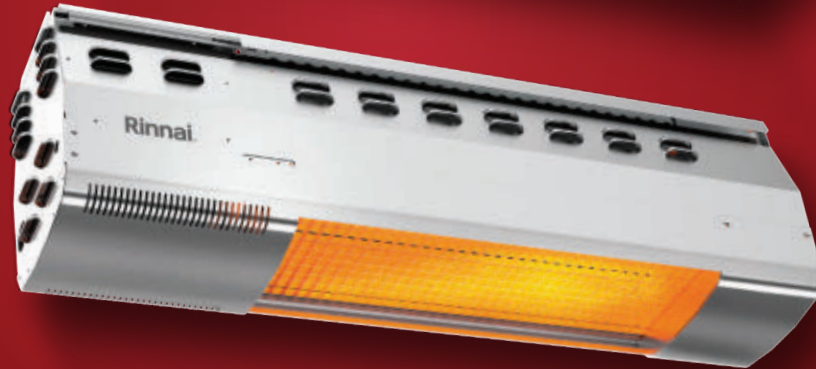
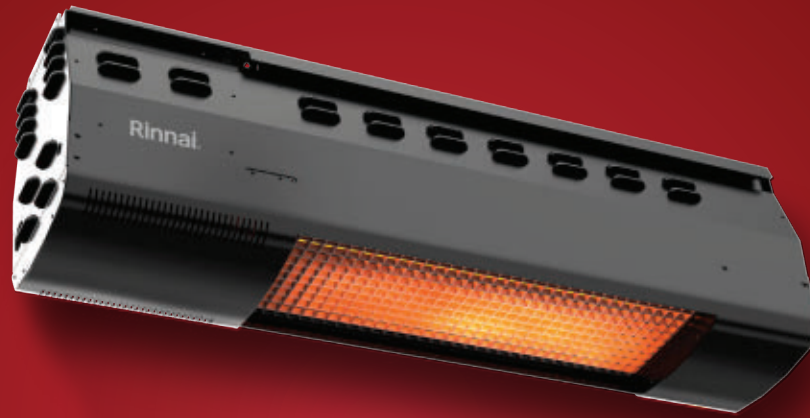
He also said resilience helps ground him and keep him focused on what he’s working toward, eyes on the prize.

“We’ll make whatever sacrifices necessary for our dreams to become a reality.” ■

“Although timing might have seemed wrong for others contemplating new ventures, for Singh, it was perfect.”

Surpreet Singh,
Vice President
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FEATURE

Strength

in numbers



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Perspectives from your AAHOA Officers on the power of unity and the key challenges hoteliers face today

by CARTER DAVIS

MORE THAN TWO YEARS after the start of the pandemic, much is still to be decided. How will the industry solve the labor crisis?

Will business travelers return en masse anytime soon? Is “bleisure” really a thing? Do guests expect COVID-era cleanliness standards to continue once the virus subsides?

Much like the traveling salesman of the early 20th Century, anyone claiming to have all the answers or a miracle cure is selling something. And lying. But, there is value in looking ahead and consulting those with extensive experience when confronting a problem.

With that in mind, what follows are insights from the 2021-2022 AAHOA Officers on the current state of AAHOA and how the association can best serve its members, as well as the actions the industry needs to take, and the role AAHOA will play, in the continued march toward recovery.



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**Vinay
Patel,
Chair**

GIVEN THE TRANSITION AAHOA HAS BEEN THROUGH DURING THE PAST 18 MONTHS, WHAT'S IN STORE FOR AAHOA'S FUTURE AND WHERE IS THE ASSOCIATION HEADED?

Any change is disruptive in the beginning, but the future looks bright for AAHOA. COVID-19 had a big impact on us personally and on our industry as a whole. The transition and organizational changes happening at AAHOA are also a direct result of this, so we must pivot to meet today's needs and make AAHOA better than ever.

HOW ARE AAHOA MEMBERS BETTER OFF THROUGH THEIR MEMBERSHIP?

We are the voice of hotel owners, working with our brand and vendor partners so we can solve complicated issues *together*. Additionally, we educate our members on the latest implications and trends in our industry, and we advocate at every level of government to protect the best interests of our members and entrepreneurs everywhere.

HOW HAVE YOU SEEN ADVOCACY GROUPS LIKE AAHOA CHANGE THE INDUSTRY FOR THE BETTER?

We are the boots on the ground, and we speak up when there are issues that impact us all. United, we are stronger together than we are alone, so having a loud voice that speaks in unison puts our concerns at the forefront to make a difference for everyone.

WHAT INDUSTRY TREND ARE YOU MOST EXCITED TO SEE PLAY OUT IN THE COMING YEARS?

I'm looking forward to watching how technology continues to change and reshape the industry. Capabilities and the pace of



United, we are stronger together than we are alone, so having a loud voice that speaks in unison puts our concerns at the forefront to make a difference for everyone."

change are accelerating, and we have a lot to look forward to in this area.

WHAT COULD THE INDUSTRY BE DOING BETTER TO ADDRESS LABOR SHORTAGES?

I'd like to see us all use technology to improve the experience for our existing team members. Also, we need to find way to motivate and excite new people who are thinking about joining the industry and help our teams look at our industry as a lifelong career path instead of a just a "job." There are so many powerful stories out there to celebrate this, and as an industry, we have to do a better job of telling these stories.

WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU KNEW WHEN YOU FIRST STARTED OUT IN THIS INDUSTRY?

I wish I knew how to better manage people. We are a people-centered business, and we have many different types of personalities in our industry. Managing it all isn't easy, and it took me a while to figure that out.



**Nishant
(Neal) Patel,
CHO, Vice Chairman**

GIVEN THE TRANSITION AAHOA HAS BEEN THROUGH DURING THE PAST 18 MONTHS, WHAT'S IN STORE FOR AAHOA'S FUTURE AND WHERE IS THE ASSOCIATION HEADED?

The past two years have certainly been a time of extreme change and challenge, but I'm proud to say that AAHOA has continued to evolve and remain innovative despite everything. We must find ways to cater to the next generation of hoteliers, giving members what they ask for and need, and continue to be the resource we say we are.

HOW ARE AAHOA MEMBERS BETTER OFF THROUGH THEIR MEMBERSHIP?

During the pandemic, every hotelier had to pivot on what has felt like a daily basis. But AAHOA was on the forefront of advocacy and leadership, ensuring members had the necessary resources during a time of extreme uncertainty.

HOW HAVE YOU SEEN ADVOCACY GROUPS LIKE AAHOA CHANGE THE INDUSTRY FOR THE BETTER?

We are stronger together, and we can make meaningful changes within the industry when we work alongside one another to advance interests that seek to protect our businesses. For example, AAHOA worked with the FTC to bring fairness to our hotels – leveling the playing field for everyone with the goal of helping owners make a higher ROI on their investment.

WHAT INDUSTRY TREND ARE YOU MOST EXCITED TO SEE PLAY OUT IN THE COMING YEARS?

Moving forward, I see two primary concerns. True, the labor shortage is the biggest challenge we're facing, but I'm excited to see how technology can help alleviate some of that pain and make us more efficient and productive. Prior to the pandemic, the industry looked at technology a bit differently and more cautiously, but we were forced to

“

During the pandemic, every hotelier had to pivot on what has felt like a daily basis. But AAHOA was on the forefront of advocacy and leadership, ensuring members had the resources they needed during a time of extreme uncertainty.”

adopt new offerings that we might not have explored in a stronger economy.

WHAT COULD THE INDUSTRY BE DOING BETTER TO ADDRESS LABOR SHORTAGES?

We need to be relying more heavily on technological solutions that will allow us to streamline operations, while also advocating to bring in labor from outside the U.S.

WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU KNEW WHEN YOU FIRST STARTED OUT IN THIS INDUSTRY?

I would have liked to have known the basics of building a team. As part of the younger generation of hoteliers, we thought we knew everything about hotel operations, and we failed multiple times. Being able to build a proper team that we could trust could have prevented a lot of setbacks. It's important to not be the smartest person in a room, and if everyone feels like they're experts, no one really is. Be humble and be open to other ideas. Trust the real experts and don't be above seeking help when you need it.



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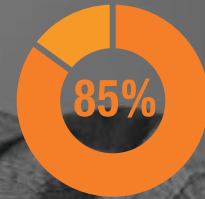
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Bharat Patel,
CHO, CHIA,
Treasurer

“

We only accomplish our goals when ego is put aside and we act in the group’s best interest.”

GIVEN THE TRANSITION AAHOA HAS BEEN THROUGH DURING THE PAST 18 MONTHS, WHAT’S IN STORE FOR AAHOA’S FUTURE AND WHERE IS THE ASSOCIATION HEADED?

Our future’s so bright, I want to wear shades. We have new leadership with plans, processes, and goals designed to help members make money, save money, and protect our investments. This is an opportunity to get back to basics, and that’s what we’re doing. What can we do to help you? What can we do to introduce new ways of thinking in your business? How can we protect your investment?

HOW ARE AAHOA MEMBERS BETTER OFF THROUGH THEIR MEMBERSHIP?

We are stronger when we are united, and if we act with one voice as one group on issues, there’s really nothing we can’t accomplish. We are better together than we are individually, but we only accomplish our goals when ego is put aside and we act in the group’s best interest.

HOW HAVE YOU SEEN ADVOCACY GROUPS LIKE AAHOA CHANGE THE INDUSTRY FOR THE BETTER?

I always ask whether anyone really believes government isn’t going to be in our business tomorrow or putting their hands in our pockets. Advocacy is important because even the most in-touch government representative doesn’t know our businesses like we do. There is no one better

positioned to advocate for hotel owners and tell our stories than hotel owners.

WHAT INDUSTRY TREND ARE YOU MOST EXCITED TO SEE PLAY OUT IN THE COMING YEARS?

Like a lot of people, I’m eager to watch hoteliers make better use of technology and improve the experience from an operations and guest-experience perspective. I’m not against having people at the front desk, for example, but we need to be thinking critically and leveraging technology in the smartest ways possible.

WHAT COULD THE INDUSTRY BE DOING BETTER TO ADDRESS LABOR SHORTAGES?

Aside from exploring technology-based solutions, we have to re-evaluate immigration rules. You can have temporary workers. Scholarship opportunities. Students who are making decisions about their career path should know that the hospitality industry provides so much opportunity for career development, advancement, and satisfaction.

WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU KNEW WHEN YOU FIRST STARTED OUT IN THIS INDUSTRY?

I wish I had known more about the financial difficulties hoteliers face. During my career, I’ve experienced the challenges of 9/11, the Great Recession, the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, and the pandemic. But being able to face obstacles with fellow hoteliers and belonging to a group like AAHOA makes overcoming those challenges truly rewarding.



Miraj Patel,
MBA, CHO,
CHIA, Secretary



With the data from the Oxford Economics Study, we have more leverage than ever at every level – federal, state, and local.”

GIVEN THE TRANSITION AAHOA HAS BEEN THROUGH DURING THE PAST 18 MONTHS, WHAT'S IN STORE FOR AAHOA'S FUTURE AND WHERE IS THE ASSOCIATION HEADED?

We've been through leadership changes and the pandemic simultaneously, but we have continued to work through it together. As for what's on the horizon, we are continuing to explore solutions for resetting how we do business, including addressing hidden fees, brand mandates, NOI, and much more. Everything is on the table, and we want to see the legacy of hotel ownership continue for future generations.

HOW ARE AAHOA MEMBERS BETTER OFF THROUGH THEIR MEMBERSHIP?

AAHOA is the definition of the American Dream. We truly have a platform of unity, but you have to be engaged to help solve problems and make a difference. As a member, you get so much more, including greater access to vendor partners, networking opportunities with your peers, and political advocacy. Honestly, I don't see any other association that's as valuable as AAHOA.

HOW HAVE YOU SEEN ADVOCACY GROUPS LIKE AAHOA CHANGE THE INDUSTRY FOR THE BETTER?

AAHOA has been an advocacy powerhouse, but I want to ensure we're the most powerful advocacy group there is, achieving real and lasting results. On the federal side, we were able to help push through PPP and EIDL, working hand in hand to make sure members knew how to take advantage of resources. But we need to be as strong on the state and local sides, even if that means modifying how we do things. With the data from

the Oxford Economics Study, we have more leverage than ever at every level – federal, state, and local.

WHAT INDUSTRY TREND ARE YOU MOST EXCITED TO SEE PLAY OUT IN THE COMING YEARS?

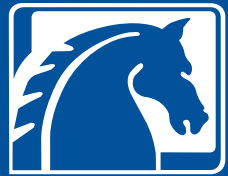
I think we're seeing a trend of simplifying operations and offerings. Rather than continuing to offer services guests might not really want, we can work more closely with the brands on determining which services do and don't make sense from a cost-benefit perspective. Overall, though, it seems like brands are understanding the importance of simplification.

WHAT COULD THE INDUSTRY BE DOING BETTER TO ADDRESS LABOR SHORTAGES?

Certainly, we are all being forced to be more creative, and we need to urge legislators to create policies that support and create hotel jobs. Many hoteliers have been struggling with this issue since before the pandemic began, and we need to urge legislators to craft job-creation policies. Yes, working with the government can be challenging, but it's necessary.

WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU KNEW WHEN YOU FIRST STARTED OUT IN THIS INDUSTRY?

I've learned a lot since just starting in the industry, but I wish I had known what I know now after living and operating a business through the COVID-19 pandemic. The past several years highlighted not only my struggles, but our members as well and we as a team had to learn how to strategize to combat these struggles, such as about being able to evolve quickly to keep up with ever-changing economic factors, and getting back to the basics of the business and being able to execute those basics really well. ■



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Six ways to strengthen
your company's
employee
handbook

by DEEPA N. SUBRAMANIAN

HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN SINCE your business dusted off its employee handbook? As you may know, employment and labor laws are constantly evolving. As a result, you should review your handbook on an annual basis and make sure it provides maximum protection for your business. When it comes to disciplinary actions, terminations, and the like, the handbook is the first place employees will look, so it's important your handbook is up to date and accurate. The handbook should reflect your actual business practices and shouldn't be a stock handbook that you pull off the internet and use without modification. You should consider state, federal, and local laws that apply to your particular business. Take a fresh look at the following six areas when focusing your handbook review.

1

SUPERFLUOUS LANGUAGE

Employers should beware of potential promises made by superfluous language. Unnecessary purpose statements, rigid progressive discipline steps, and unrealistic commitments to provide training or a mutually enjoyable work environment should be avoided.

2

EEO, BULLYING, AND AT-WILL EMPLOYMENT

In addition to equal employment opportunity, harassment, discrimination, and retaliation should be addressed. Many employers imprudently limit their harassment policies to sexual harassment only. However, harassment policies should include prohibitions of harassment based on any protected category. The protected categories should be updated and also include sexual orientation, genetic information, and other state-specific categories.

A clear complaint procedure should be included in the policy that allows for multiple reporting avenues. For example, an employee should be able to go to their supervisor, HR, the owner, or call an anonymous hotline with complaints.

Similarly, employers should consider adding a separate policy to address bullying. Numerous states have passed workplace anti-bullying legislation.

Many employers have learned that including an at-will policy in the handbook (where allowed by law) reinforces the principle that employment may be terminated at any time for any lawful reason. Likewise, at-will policies should clarify that the handbook is not a contract, and employers may revise policies at their own discretion without prior notice.

3

PROGRESSIVE DISCIPLINE

Some employers have a progressive discipline policy that leads from verbal coaching to written warning to suspension to termination. Ensure your progressive disciplinary process is permissive but doesn't bind you to any particular course of action. Your policy should lay out these possibilities, while making it clear management reserves the right to skip any steps of the progressive discipline process and employees remain at-will at all times. As an employer, make sure you treat your employees fairly and as consistently as possible when meting out discipline.



A clear complaint procedure should be included in the policy that allows for multiple reporting avenues. For example, an employee should be able to go to their supervisor, HR, the owner, or call an anonymous hotline with complaints.”

4

TIMEKEEPING AND TECHNOLOGY

Due to unrelenting litigation under the Fair Labor Standards Act, timekeeping and overtime policies should specifically prohibit employees from working off the clock. Employees should be disciplined but still paid if they violate the policy and work off the clock. Especially in the hotel setting, when non-exempt employees may live on site and work at odd hours, they must be told repeatedly that all hours must be reported and tracked, even a 10-minute run to the front desk to check on a work-related issue. Policies should explain it's the employee's responsibility to report pay errors and how to do so.

A related consideration is a policy that addresses employees' use of their own electronic devices – laptops, smartphones, and tablets – for work purposes. Policies should be crafted to address concerns regarding privacy, protection of confidential information, and working off the clock.

5

EMPLOYEE ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Employee acknowledgements evidence that employees have received the handbook and should be obtained each time the handbook is updated. The acknowledgement can be utilized to reiterate the at-will policy (again, where allowed by law) and shift responsibility to the employees to raise any questions or concerns about the handbook or company policy. Also note that violations of any company policy, even one not identified in the handbook, can lead to discipline, up to and including termination.

6

PTO AND SICK TIME

With the COVID pandemic in full swing, reviewing and revising sick leave and PTO policies is crucial. The policy should state when the employer will require medical documentation to support leave, how many absences may lead to termination, how to alert management when an

employee will be late or absent, how PTO is accrued, etc. If an employer offers special COVID-related leave, that can be included in the handbook, as well.

Dedicating the time and resources to reviewing policies on an annual basis is well worth the investment. Handbooks that require a complete overhaul may be best handled by legal counsel so you can ensure you're complying with local, state, and federal laws. ■



Deepa N. Subramanian, Esq., is a shareholder with Ogletree Deakins in the firm's Atlanta office. She represents employers in all aspects of employment law, including employment litigation

and counseling, and she advises and defends clients in federal and state employment-related lawsuits, including actions alleging discrimination, harassment, retaliation, violations of wage and hour law, and breach of contract.



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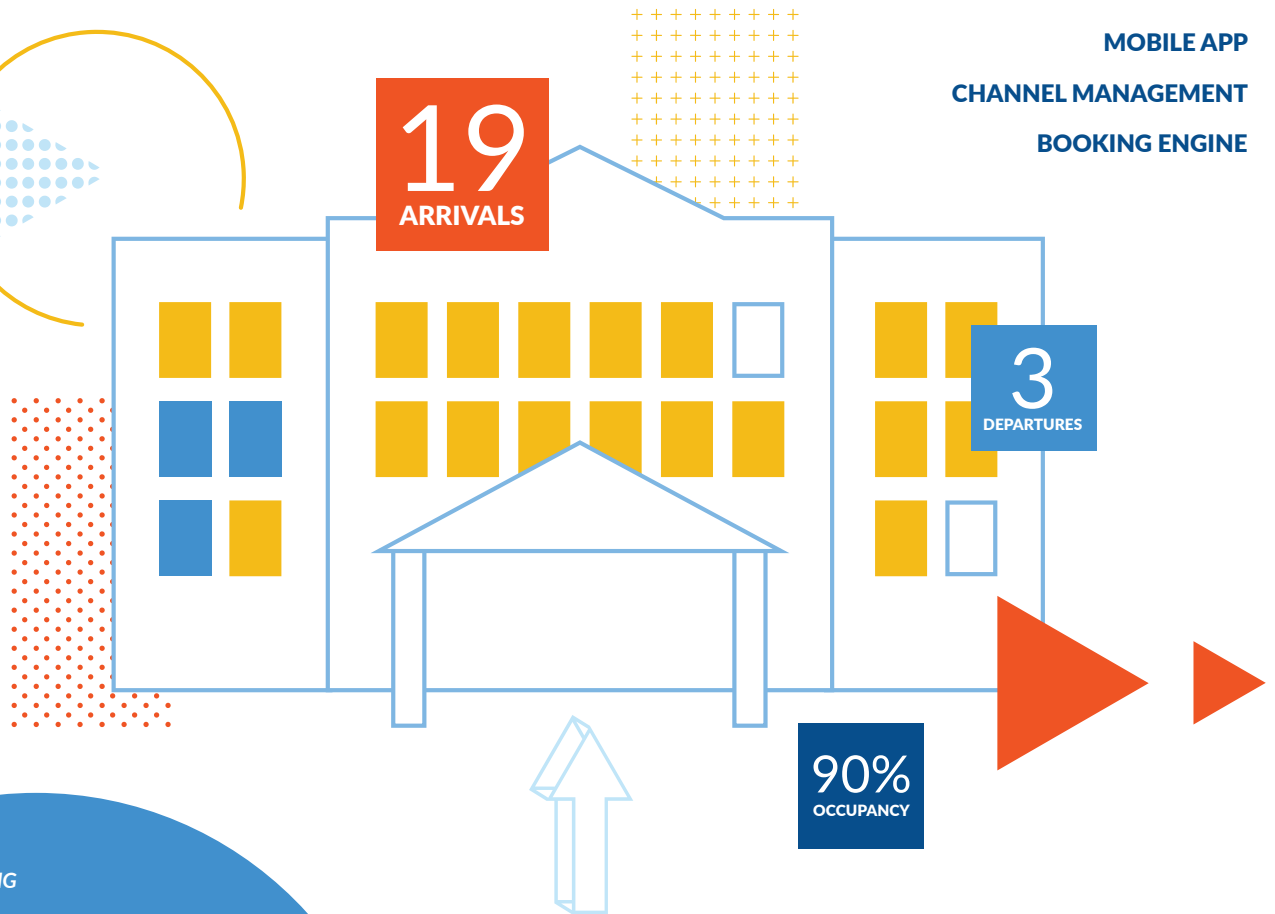
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Questions *answered*

Recoverable depreciation explained

by CHRIS RICH and THOMAS KRAUTNER

F RANCHISEES OFTEN FIND THEMSELVES IN A DIFFICULT situation during a property-insurance claim. To use an old saying, they find themselves between a rock and a hard place after a catastrophe. The “rock” is the hotel brand and its design requirements inside hotels, and the “hard place” being the insurer and what they’re willing to pay for repairs.

Most brands have specific requirements regarding replacement materials. For example, carpet, flooring, furniture, and drapery must stay on brand location to location and from one room to the next. But after a major regional catastrophe or during a supply chain bottleneck, those materials aren’t always available.

It’s particularly frustrating for a hotel franchisee forced to replace, for example, the entire carpet of a whole wing because of damage in *one* room. And it’s the insurance adjuster’s job to make sure the company only pays for damaged property.

Rock, meet hard place.

Still, franchisees should be aware of every possible dollar on the table, so let’s explore the notion of recoverable depreciation and answer three big questions. These funds can make a massive impact on your ability to repair your property, up to brand standards, after a loss.

1

WHAT IS “RECOVERABLE DEPRECIATION?”

Recoverable depreciation is the gap of funds between actual cash value and replacement cost value for both the structure and contents portion of your property-damage claim.

- Actual cash value is the price of an item that has depreciated.
- Replacement cost value is the cost of replacement with a completely new item.
- Recoverable depreciation is the difference.

Recoverable depreciation is paid when the insured spends all the money agreed to, performs all the repairs agreed to, completes the approved repair and replacement, and provides proof of payment. An example of “proof of payment” would be a contract with a contractor and canceled checks with a “release of lien.”



Mitigating costs works well until receipts for labor come up significantly less than the agreed scope of work.”

2

HOW DO YOU DEVELOP A PROPER SCOPE OF LOSS FOR PAYMENT?

Imagine a tremendous thunderstorm outside and an air conditioning unit at your hotel malfunctions due to a lightning strike. As a result, water leaks into your lobby, damaging 300 square feet of carpet, pad, and subfloor. Your walls and furniture are also damaged, and of course, the A/C unit is destroyed.

You suspect more damage in the walls, but you can’t see it without thermal imaging. And when you take photos of the damage to forward to your claims adjuster, you feel the pictures don’t accurately show the damage in full.

The flooring, furniture, and A/C unit are all a few years old, and they’ve depreciated or lost value since initial installation. If your property policy only pays for actual cash value, your insurer will only pay for a piece of carpet that’s a few years old, second-hand furniture, and a thrift-store A/C unit.

A replacement-cost policy will pay to replace your damaged A/C unit, furniture, and flooring with new materials of like, kind, and quality, up to policy limits, of course. You also will have to pay your deductible. That’s an amount you’ll need to put toward repairs before insurance kicks in.

But, once you have an agreed scope of loss and meet your policy conditions,

recoverable depreciation is available to collect provided you meet the qualifications.

Many insurers will pay a claim in two phases. First, they’ll attempt to pay you the actual cash value of depreciated carpet, furniture, and equipment. Then, once you take a few steps to prove to the insurer that you’re replacing the property, you can get a second check for the recoverable depreciation.

3

WHY DON’T MORE HOTELIERS COLLECT THEIR FULL SETTLEMENT?

Most franchisees are self-made businessmen who act as the general contractor, hiring various subcontractors to perform structural repairs. In addition, many will often trade contents with other hotels they own to mitigate costs.

Mitigating costs works well until receipts for labor come up significantly less than the agreed scope of work. Or a decorated scheme changes while the claim is pending. After all, there is only peace of mind in delegating leadership of construction projects or going dollar-for-dollar retail with a franchise vendor after the claim gets settled. ■



Chris Rich is a licensed general & public adjuster with Jansen/Adjusters International, an AAHOA Allied Vendor Member. Chris is an active claims professional member in the Houston community responsible for helping hotel owners obtain full and fair settlements for their insurance claims.



Thomas Krautner is the executive vice president for Jansen/Adjusters International, responsible for representing policyholders’ interests with recoveries up to

\$60 million. For more info, visit jansenai.com.

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by RUSHI SHAH

COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE FINANCE AND CAPITAL markets are parts of a lucrative ecosystem. As a transaction moves forward step by step, each link in the food chain adds value. These producers may include investment sales and leasing brokers, buyers, sellers, borrowers, lenders, equity and mezzanine investors, mortgage bankers and brokers, and more. Ultimately, everyone is working toward the common goal of a successful acquisition or refinance closing.

There is a lot of money to be made along the way, however, there is always the risk of running into profit-chasing posers who can delay and disrupt the path to closing. Fortunately, there are simple

steps borrowers can take to avoid a derailed deal.

ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

While there are many upstanding lenders in the commercial

real estate industry, the lure of healthy profit margins also attracts players who misrepresent their abilities to get you to the closing table. As capital has become more plentiful, the number of players calling themselves “direct” lenders has also grown. In reality, most of these shops don’t have money to lend but are just brokering the deal to someone else. This can be a problem for two main reasons. First, because they aren’t the final lender, they frequently fail to complete the proper level of upfront

due diligence needed to ensure the transaction’s viability. As a result, surprises can crop up further into the process, causing the transaction to go sideways and the borrower to lose precious time and money. Second, these alleged lenders do not have control of the deal. They may try to convince borrowers they’re in charge, but chances are someone else is actually calling the shots. In a commercial real estate transaction, control equals certainty of execution, and certainty of execution ensures closing. The best way for borrowers to avoid being trapped is to ask the right questions upfront. Let’s explore three ways to effectively peel back the onion to determine if a capital source is bona fide or not.

Smoke and mirrors

How to tell whether a lender is real

1

TRUST THE RIGHT RESOURCES

To begin the process, borrowers should engage a professional mortgage banker to guide them. Prudent borrowers choose an expert who has long-standing relationships in the market, a proven track record of closed deals, including recent transactions, and references to vouch for past performance. These qualified intermediaries rely on an established platform and methodical due diligence process to evaluate if a lender should be included in their repertoire.

By enlisting a professional to do the heavy lifting for you, asking the right questions, and heeding red flags, borrowers can ensure certainty of execution and avoid unnecessary headache and heartache. Financing a large transaction is an arduous process. Having an expert by your side whose sole job is to work with real leaders with real balance sheets and real decision-making capabilities and who will ensure you get to closing every time (barring any extraordinary circumstances such as fraud) can prove a key catalyst for success. ■

2

UNDERSTAND WHO IS BEHIND THE CAPITAL

Even if the lender has its own balance sheet, it may not be a direct lender in the truest sense. A qualified mortgage banker knows to probe further to determine if the lender is using a warehouse line of credit to fund deals. This blanket line of credit is provided by a bank or a financial institution to the lender to make loans. Under this model, a lender is often at the mercy of the warehouse lender for transaction approvals. The warehouse lender also may leverage the loan at closing to make more return on its invested capital. Although an acceptable practice, warehouse lending can prolong the closing process for borrowers and increase the loan-approval risk.



Rushi Shah is Principal and CEO of the commercial mortgage and real estate investment banking firm and AAHOA Allied Member Mag Mile Capital. As a leader in

hospitality financing, Shah specializes in structuring and placing high leverage, nonrecourse 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.

3

RECOGNIZE RED FLAGS

If a lender requests a deposit before producing a fully approved term sheet, borrower beware. Asking for an underwriting fee before doing any work on the deal is a practice employed by sham lenders and unqualified mortgage brokers. A bona fide mortgage banker would never request this type of upfront deposit. The industry standard for engaging with a mortgage professional is that they get paid only upon a successful closing. The only time an expense deposit is legitimately required is when an actual, approved, execution-ready term sheet for a particular deal has been issued.

Elevating

the guest experience

Seven trends shaping hotel architecture

by STEPHEN OVERCASH

HOTEL DESIGN HAS changed dramatically in the past 10 years, and it will only continue to radically evolve as Generation Z, also known as Zoomers, seek “experiences” around the world. The “guest experience” is paramount in hotel design and it’s being simplified in current and future hotel designs.

Telling a story is essential in creating a memorable experience, and hoteliers are accomplishing that via subtle touches integrated into a hotel’s exterior and interior architecture. This “story” often pays homage to the local geography, history, or culinary heritage of the hotel’s setting. A unique and interesting story creates lasting memories and promotes the area, encouraging guests to explore the local surroundings, often extending the hotel visit and capturing more of that coveted bleisure traffic. Here are seven trends in hotel architecture that are on the rise.

1

TIE IT TOGETHER

Hotel design trends include the hotel becoming more of a mixed-use destination. In the future, it will be important for hotels to integrate residential, retail, restaurants, office, and entertainment. A rich mix of uses and activities strengthens the story and experience while creating additional revenue for the hotelier. These additional activities can be components of a larger mixed-use development or integrated into the hotel building. Amenities can be shared and enjoyed by all the varied users.

2

BLUR THE LINES

Hotel design melds the indoors and outdoors, creating memorable experiences throughout the day and night. These experiences can include the discovery of hidden courtyards, rooftop terraces, and activated alleys. Operable glass walls allow seamless movement from indoors to outdoors. Future hotels will invite fresh air and nature into the building, with landscaping spread throughout the property. The landscaping will easily be maintained and complemented by an abundance of natural light. All these factors contribute to the WELL building standard of the hotel.

3

REPURPOSE THE POOL

We are also seeing the traditional, utilitarian hotel pool continue to evolve. This space is becoming more experiential and interactive via fountains, water walls, and LED lighting with easy access to restaurants and bars. The pool can easily be converted to nighttime, backlit dance floors. Pool lounge furniture can be built into a shallow pool, and zero-edge pools are becoming more popular on rooftop terraces, fusing the pool with nature on the horizon beyond.

4

COME TOGETHER

Hotel design encourages social interaction. Bars, coffee shops, cozy nooks, and workspaces can be spread throughout the hotel. For example, the bar on an upper-level floor can be the check-in touchpoint for guests, while large, double-sided fireplaces and outdoor fire pits can encourage interaction between guests. Lobbies can be more of a hangout for the younger guests, with interactive gaming opportunities.

5

SIMPLIFY AND STREAMLINE

Public spaces are starting to overlap more, which simplifies guest circulation throughout the property. Hotels often incorporate two or three different hotel brands in one building, which can streamline guest activities and back-of-house operations. And the hotel building can continue to add additional functions and uses, creating destination spaces for guests. This adds to the hotel's appeal for hosting group events, including weddings, conferences, and trade shows.

6

GO BEYOND THE BED

The guestroom design trend of “less is more” can accomplish two goals.

With large windows, hidden air conditioners, and streamlined furniture, the hotel guestroom can offer a memorable experience by following the “less is more” design trend. At the same time, hotels can offer technology-based means to access the room, open doors, program the audio-visual amenities, adjust the blinds, pre-set the air conditioning before arrival, etc. And, no longer the domain of science fiction, robots will be able to assist guests and provide much of the guestroom cleaning.



7

GET MOBILE

It seems like a mobile device is perpetually in the hand of millennials and Gen Z to document their experiences. Hotel architects and interior designers are designing spaces with Instagrammable moments in mind. These hotels are integrating unique features throughout the hotel's interiors and exteriors to allow these experiences to be captured and shared with friends. For example, interactive elevators, green biophilia walls, unique landscape features, murals, water features, funky furniture, and edgy lighting are all popular options. If implemented successfully, hoteliers can enjoy free marketing as these experiences are posted to various social media outlets and circulated around the world. ■



Stephen Overcash is managing principal for ODA Architecture. He can be reached at (704) 905-0423 or sovercash@oda.us.com.

Identify the threat

Not all cyber extortion is ransomware, and the threat isn't just a technical IT matter

by ROBERT ASHINGTON-PICKETT

NOT FOR THE FIRST TIME, I WAS RECENTLY INVOLVED IN A CASE OF THREAT EXTORTION that had mistakenly been initially identified as a case of ransomware. This misunderstanding is common, but it's also worrying because getting this wrong can lead to an incorrect response, which could be costly and damaging.

MAKE THE RIGHT CALL

For the case in question, the CEO of a European company received an email with a ransom demand. The criminal claimed to have accessed the company's network, stolen large amounts of customer data, and threatened to sell it on the dark web unless he was paid a large ransom in Bitcoin. It seems that at this point, the CEO took the fact that the threat had come via email along with the mention of "network," "data," "ransom," and jumped to the conclusion that this was one of those ransomware attacks that he was vaguely aware of.

Accordingly, the CEO called in his head of IT and asked him to deal with the matter. Next, the IT security team confirmed with relief that there was no

ransomware on the network and then advised that the threatening email was typical of the many fake emails sent by bluffers. If it were a case of real ransomware, the threat would appear directly on the company's screens. The conclusion was, therefore, that this was not a genuine threat and could be safely ignored.

Unfortunately, the IT team only got it half right. It was indeed not a ransomware attack. Instead, it was a genuine threat extortion. After ignoring a second email from the extortionist, the company discovered that examples of its customer data were appearing for sale on a criminal marketplace. Apart from anything else, this immediately created data privacy/GDPR challenges. At this point,

the company called in external security advisers who correctly assessed the threat and asked for my advice.

"WHEN" NOT "IF"

Extortions such as this are far more common than it appears and this misperception leads many companies to believe, therefore, that it isn't a risk for which they need to prepare. Threat extortions, along with kidnap for ransom, are one of the oldest forms of criminal activity and are still widely committed today. The curious thing is that it's to the advantage of neither the criminals, the victims, nor law enforcement agencies to make this known. Therefore, we rarely see media reports of these crimes, leading to the assumption that they don't exist. The

problem with this, however, is that in many businesses the correct prevention, preparation, response, and recovery measures aren't considered necessary precautions.

The difference with today's threat extortion is that instead of a threat to, say, poison a company's soft drinks on supermarket shelves, the cyber extortionist threatens to sell customer data and/or intellectual property on the criminal net. Most other aspects of this crime are similar to traditional threat extortion and its resolution requires specialist techniques, tactics, and procedures that aren't part of an overworked IT department's core competencies.

In 2022, personally identifiable information is a major commodity for criminals. The

“

The hotel industry knows well not only that it obtains and stores large amounts of such data as part of its business but also that large numbers of its employees and third-party vendors necessarily have access to this data.”

hotel industry knows well not only that it obtains and stores large amounts of such data as part of its business but also that large numbers of its employees and third-party vendors necessarily have access to this data. For the case in question, we identified that the extortionist was an employee of an outsourced call center and had downloaded the customer data at work onto a USB drive. ■



Robert Ashington-Pickett is managing partner, senior consultant with

NorthPoint International, Ltd., advising NorthPoint clients on cyber-crime management, fraud prevention/investigation, and capacity building.

Giving POWER

WWW

IT HAS BEEN A DIFFICULT COUPLE OF years for any business looking to hire. The COVID-19 pandemic allowed Americans to step back, reassess, and reimagine their careers and work-life balance needs. Many workers have left the workforce altogether due to factors like lack of child care, health concerns, or early retirement.

This has created a supply-and-demand imbalance in the labor market. As of this writing, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics is reporting more than 11.3 million open positions across the country and only two job seekers for every three open jobs. The power has now shifted from the employer to the employee and folks have the freedom to be choosy about which jobs they pursue. And while this crisis has hit all types of organizations, hotels have been struck especially hard.

The success of your hotel depends on your people. After all, it's your people who interact with your guests and make their experience great. So, prioritizing people over function

is critical to win in today's challenging hiring landscape. In other words, you need to find ways to offer more to meet the needs of today's job seekers, otherwise you risk operating short staffed and losing business to competitors. One way for hotels to attract and retain better talent is to show you truly care about COVID-19 safety for your employees.

While cases may be on the decline, we may be living with the virus in some capacity for the remainder of our lifetimes. And it's something hotel managers must continue to address with employees, especially those who work face to face with customers.

So, in addition to vaccine guidelines, hotels that want to compete must implement common-sense COVID-19 policies to ensure employees feel safe coming to work and trust that you prioritize their well-being. Based on experiences gained from working with those in the hospitality space during the past two unpredictable years, here are the five elements crucial to a common-sense COVID-19 policy.

KEY to the people

by ADAM ROBINSON

Five keys for implementing a common-sense COVID-19 policy



FLEXIBILITY

A recent study found that 1 in 4 people who quit their job during the pandemic wanted more flexibility. For businesses like hotels where remote work isn't an option for most positions, flexibility can come in the form of allowing employees to choose their own hours and schedules. For example, can employees leave to pick up their kids or take them to the doctor if they're sick? Just because you may not be able to offer hybrid or remote work doesn't mean flexibility is off the table. If you can offer flexibility that works for your hotel and implement it correctly, you can attract and retain talent.



TESTING

It should be common sense to offer COVID-19 testing for on-site employees. This gives your employees another layer of protection while keeping guests safe. Making testing free and readily available, or even requiring employees to regularly test, can put everyone at ease.



PAID LEAVE

Implementing a COVID-19 leave-of-absence policy that accommodates medical and personal absences shows employees you care about their overall well-being. The pandemic has impacted everyone, and dealing with COVID-19-related issues while working is very difficult, whether or not your employees are actually sick themselves. For example, this would be useful for working parents dealing with school closures related to COVID-19.



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“

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CHARACTER COUNTS

COVID-19 has impacted us all in more ways than one. Even if we haven’t physically fallen ill, our mental health has likely taken a toll. And having to show up every day and endure a bad manager or a toxic culture amplifies those issues. Implement a mandate that demands everyone treat those around them with respect and stick to it. A culture of kindness makes people happy to come to work, even during tough times like the ones we’re facing today. You should only hire folks who demonstrate this value and have little patience for anyone who violates it.



MENTAL HEALTH

As noted above, COVID-19 brought much-needed conversations around mental health to the forefront. In addition to flexibility and PTO designed to help folks who are infected with the virus themselves or need to support infected family members, build in some opportunities for people to step away for their mental health too. Some employers are starting to offer one mental health day each month, no questions asked. It’s a great way to show your employees that you value their well-being beyond just the physical.

As the economic recovery is still unpredictable and we are continuing to see patterns similar to 2021, hotel managers are in a difficult position. The key is to continue to adapt and invest in your talent and tools that will help you build a successful business for the long run. Implementing these five protocols will help your hotel stand out from the rest and set the groundwork to be prepared for any challenges on the horizon. ■



Adam Robinson is the co-founder and CEO of Hireology, driving his mission to help business owners make better hiring decisions using predictive data and innovative technology.



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Exploring the perspective
of the independent hotelier

by RAVI B. PATEL

WELCOME TO A BRAND-new Today's Hotelier column. Thanks for stopping by. In multiple issues each year, we plan to devote this space to exploring issues specific to independent hoteliers but relevant to the industry at large. We will hear from veterans across a wide swath of the industry, all of whom have direct experience in the development and operation of independent properties. Unfortunately, it can be too easy for the industry, and the media, to give more attention to the brands and franchised properties, but there's an enormous chunk of the industry that operates outside the often more-publicized brand-franchisee relationship.

Like many AAHOA Members, I'm a second-generation hotelier. Based in Los Angeles, CA, I've been a South Pacific Region Ambassador for five years and have served on the Independent Hotelier Committee for four years, this being my first year as IHC Chair.

WHO WE ARE

One core trait that's common among many independent hoteliers is the need and ability to pay attention to the basic elements of day-to-day operations. Just like the franchised properties, solving the unique problems

we face takes a great deal of patience and a fundamental understanding of the industry. These two skills, patience and know-how, are vital when dealing with uncertainty in the economy, especially without many of the low-hanging resources afforded by the brands. But, just like franchised properties, independent hotels have also experienced the many ups and downs of this cyclical industry while trying to keep heads in beds, maintain respectable service, and create a sustainable business strategy to get through any downturn largely on our own. And focusing

on the basics is what is helping lead us through the continuing recovery.

All across the nation, it's evident that independent properties have been able to remain in business for decades. For some, operating an independent property is a stepping stone, but for many, it's the backbone of their family business and growth. The practices learned at that first property become a lineage of experience for future generations of independent operators.

WHERE'S THE WHY?

The experience of operating an independent hotel often leads to a very close customer-to-operator relationship, and those strong relationships across the independent hotelier community grew this

industry into what it is today. Whereas competition is an unavoidable – and often welcomed – aspect of our economy, continuing to build this industry takes hoteliers of all stripes coming together to help each other out.

Just like many other industries, there are aspects of knowledge, experience, and patience acquired throughout the process of growing a portfolio that starts at the small-business level. Accordingly, it's crucial to consider the perspective of an independent hotelier because many of the practices implemented by the

most successful brands today were birthed in the independent hotels of yesterday.

Ultimately, the intention with this space is to feature the voices of independent hoteliers across the nation, and showcasing members of the AAHOA Independent Hoteliers Committee is a great way to shed light on what works for us, offer best practices, and generate creative ideas to help everyone in our industry. After all, at the end of the day, regardless of the name on the sign in front of our properties, we're all hoteliers.

As you will see, this committee holds a lot of knowledge and experience, and these contributions will feature independent hoteliers across the nation who understand the deep roots of our industry and its future. And while the topics will be presented from an independent point of view, they will be of interest to everyone in our industry. Time to get to work. ■

Ravi B. Patel is an AAHOA Member and currently serves as chair of the Independent Hoteliers Committee.

“It's crucial to consider the perspective of an independent hotelier because many of the practices implemented by the most successful brands today were birthed in the independent hotels of yesterday.”

Do you have a story idea or topic you'd like to see covered in this new column?

Share your ideas by emailing us at pr@aahoa.com.

Staying afloat

Don't let a lack of connectivity
sink your reputation

by TED HELVEY

“Invisible threads are the strongest ties.”
 – Friedrich Nietzsche

WHILE THIS FAMOUS QUOTE RELATES TO human connectivity, the same paradigm can apply to hospitality, where strong connections between guests, associates, and experiences are created within the four walls of the hotel. There are both tangible and intangible experiences that create strong ties to keep guests coming back.

Let’s look at this more closely. For smaller hotel owners, there are real opportunities to connect with your guests. Some are families, some are workers assigned to remote, long-term job sites, and some are just passing through town. But they all need and expect certain amenities, and by paying attention to important hospitality trends, hoteliers can build loyalty and a good reputation by getting a few things right.

ROBUST WI-FI WILL ALWAYS BE A MUST-HAVE

Efficient check-ins with front-desk computer systems or automated kiosks, streaming video content on the in-room TV, checking email, and having Zoom meetings all rely on reliable and fast Wi-Fi connectivity.

Layering the multiple devices each guest brings into hotels every day, a sub-par internet connection can make or break who comes back. Regardless of their demographics – guests placed for long-term plumbing contracts, families displaced from their homes, or transient travelers who frequent the same route – they all come with the expectation of a solid Wi-Fi experience. At the end of the day, reliable and fast connectivity is essential for any profile of guest.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR NETWORK UPGRADES

If a hotel is looking to upgrade its network to satisfy this essential requirement, where should it start? Choosing Wi-Fi 6 infrastructure will best maximize your investment for the long run, as it will ensure faster speeds, more bandwidth available for more devices, and improved performance. This all leads to better experiences, higher ROI, and fewer hiccups on the network. Plus, most of the devices logging onto the network already support Wi-Fi 6 technology.

But, what does network usage look like? Let’s assume that every guest brings two to three devices into the hotel. At 100 rooms, that’s 200 to 300 devices taking a piece of the network at any given time, which is amplified during peak usage. And just for fun, let’s do this math with the 3.5 million guests who stay at AAHOA Member-owned hotels each night: that’s 10.5 million devices that need access. Additionally, due to guest demand and reduction of staff, the hotel may be required to deploy additional IoT devices



(HVAC monitoring, water temperature monitoring, check-in kiosks, for example) and contactless technologies, which also need the wireless network infrastructure to support them.

Knowing the network has a lot of strain each day, hotels, even on the smaller side, can easily afford to build an enterprise-level infrastructure with a combo of access points, switches, controllers, and bandwidth-management gateways. This combination, which can be purchased and installed with one supplier for ease of setup and management, will ensure great Wi-Fi in every room, strong connectivity for housekeeping, sales and the front desk, and powerful support throughout the property, even for guests working at the breakfast buffet, in the lobby, or outside.

THREE IMPORTANT SCENARIOS

1 Evening internet usage peaks might be one of the most challenging scenarios to overcome. Everyone is trying to connect with work projects, stream video content, and be online for personal usage after a long day. The Wi-Fi will become unusable without the proper network controls in place. This scenario will only continue to increase exponentially with TV casting, gaming, and other high-bandwidth activities brought into the hotel.

2 A guest is using a small boardroom to host a meeting, and everyone around the conference table has to be online. AV teams need also to ensure the video stream and speaker

in the meeting space is online and functional. These events provide great monetary opportunities, especially with offices being downsized and more companies hosting team events in hotels. But having the network controls in place to direct more bandwidth to these priority guests will be essential for a smooth experience.

3 A guest arrives at the hotel with four different devices. How do these guests get authenticated and securely connected without

calling the front desk? Even after their smartwatch, phone, and tablet are connected, when the Wi-Fi on their laptop slows down, they will get frustrated and write a bad review online. You lose their future loyalty, not to mention the others who read that review and choose another place to stay. A reliable Wi-Fi network that can ensure easy and fast

connectivity when it's needed most will make happy, loyal guests.

Ready to make the upgrades but not sure about the capital expenditures? There are providers that offer OPEX models to give your hotel the step up now without the sticker shock. Building a solid foundation of those "invisible threads" to power the connected experiences will make all the difference in guest satisfaction and loyalty. ■



Ted Helvey is chairman and CEO of Nomadix, an AAOA Allied Vendor Member.

A technology innovator with more than three decades of demonstrated expertise and industry experience, Helvey seeks out new ways to help hotels, MDUs/MTUs, and enterprises improve customer satisfaction, maximize operational efficiencies, and increase revenue.



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Call in the cavalry

Consulting a qualified expert may open the financial lifeline your business needs

by MAGGIE CROWLEY



IN MARCH 2020, WITH THE WORLD SHUTTING DOWN, LARK HOTELS CEO PETER TWACHTMAN WAS FORCED TO TEMPORARILY suspend operations for 20 of his hotels in seven states due to COVID-19.

As it did for many other hoteliers who've universally been battling diminishing NOIs, the rising cost of labor, and increased competition from Airbnb and VRBO, the mandated shutdowns felt like a coup de grâce. Twachtman, however, was resilient and motivated to adapt and overcome the challenges the pandemic brought to the industry.

Especially in the earliest days of the pandemic, hoteliers were forced to adjust their operations on what felt like a daily basis, including modifying staff schedules, operating with minimal occupancy levels, and enforcing new sanitization protocols. These, and many other, factors added to the perfect storm of economic hardship that was brought on by COVID-19.

To survive, numerous hospitality employers applied for and received PPP loans. Many also examined the employee retention tax credit, although, with a number of legislative changes since it was introduced, properly applying for the credit proved to be a complicated and scary process for many.

"It seemed complex and overly burdensome, so I shelved it," said Twachtman, of Lark Hotels' decision not to apply for ERTC funds.

In its simplest terms, ERTC is a CARES Act relief measure for businesses, which encourages them to keep employees on their payroll. It's a refundable credit that offsets employment taxes. According to the United States Treasury Department, "the amount of the credit is 50% of the qualifying wages paid up to \$10,000 in total." Simply put, this offering has been one of the most beneficial tax credits available to hotels financially impacted by COVID-19.

THIS, TOO, SHALL PASS

After sorting out the ups and downs of the application process, with help from an outside consultation, Lark Hotels was ultimately approved to receive ERTC funds, giving the company the financial support to prevent further interruptions in business activities and look to the future with confidence.

"When COVID-19 first hit our industry back in late February 2020, we were composed of 26 hotels in seven states, but we are now 42 hotels across 10 states." Twachtman said. "What was, and is still,

surprising to me are all the people and groups I speak with that haven't taken the time to look at the ERTC and see if their business qualifies."

Twachtman's story proves there is light at the end of the tunnel for hotels still struggling to pay their staff, and Lark Hotels, like countless properties, proved once again that hoteliers are resilient and can thrive during troubling times.

Don't leave money on the table, especially if it could mean the difference between staying in business or closing your doors for good. There are numerous resources available to struggling hoteliers, and even if you've looked at them all before, a qualified consultant likely can pinpoint some options you may have overlooked or dismissed before. ■



Maggie Crowley is head of strategic development for Leyton, an AAHOA Club Blue

Industry Partner and an international consulting firm that helps businesses leverage financial incentives to accelerate their growth and achieve long-lasting performance. She can be reached at (617) 712-6759 or mcrowley@leyton.com.



The great labor battle

How benefits improve culture and win the war for talent

by GEOFF ROWSON

T-STUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM, VADIM SADOVSKI/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

AS HOTEL OWNERS AND EMPLOYERS IN the hospitality industry, the “great resignation” is no strange concept. The Jan. 4, 2022, report from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics states that a staggering 4.5 million people have voluntarily left their jobs.

These numbers aren’t exactly encouraging. Especially in the hospitality industry, where we face constant turnover and a draining fight to attract and retain the right employees. The hospitality sector was no stranger to high turnover pre-COVID-19. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the hotel and motel industry faces an employee turnover rate of 73.8%.

With a turnover rate that high, it becomes challenging to maintain day-to-day operations, let alone client satisfaction. Your hands are full, your profitability is decreasing, and you can’t wait on a solution that solves your retention and recruitment problems, but – good news alert – you don’t necessarily have to.

DO WORK

A strong, mutually beneficial company culture for hoteliers is everything, but strong internal cultures aren’t formed overnight. There is no magical plan that

comes together with the snap of your fingers. Simply put, there are no shortcuts to a great culture.

While there are no easy ways around the problem, there are core elements of your hotel’s culture over which you have complete control, and that substantially impact your current and potential staff. The best way to build a trusting relationship with your employees is by first taking care of them. This begins and ends with a benefits package that actually works for them.

In a recent episode of the CHRO Champions podcast, retired chief human resources officer and industry expert Jeff Shuman shared critical pieces of insight into how strengthening a company’s culture from within results in valued employees and improves recruiting and retention rates. Shuman describes culture as the DNA of organizations. It’s not a mission statement nor is it a well-designed poster hanging on your office walls. Company culture isn’t enough. It has to be the right culture.

Shuman states, “[It] is so critically important that the culture is right for that particular business entity. It’s right for the time, it’s right for the customer base and the audience you are trying to serve.”

Company culture relies heavily on the beliefs, behaviors, and values of the hotel. These things start from within, at the employee level. Does your staff

believe you have their best interests in mind? Do your employees have established trust with your leadership? Are your employees valued? All of these relational elements interact with each other to create an unwavering culture that attracts top talent to your hotel.

Meanwhile, poor company culture results in high turnover rates and lower success rates with recruitment. These are the two things leadership teams in

the hotel sector are working relentlessly to avoid.

GET SMART

Recruiting and retention difficulties have forced us to ask ourselves why employees are leaving and what it will take to make them stay. Employees know their worth, and they can identify when employers don't take the time or make the *continued on page 77*

One often-overlooked solution

Putting healthcare first in your fight for recruitment and retention can yield tangible benefits. Here are just three reasons why.

1

Employee benefits have become critical elements to the recruitment and retention conversation. People want to be provided with high-quality healthcare that won't empty their pockets. By offering the best benefits packages possible, you're making the statement that your employees' well-being matters to you.

2

Your healthcare spend correlates to how much time and effort you put into it. Rather than keeping the mindset of "healthcare insurance costs always increase year over year," take a step back and review your business trends. Is your selected benefits package serving your employees well? Or is it just checking off a box? Put thought into the benefits you're offering your employees and make sure you pick the right ones for them and effectively communicate how they can best utilize their benefits.

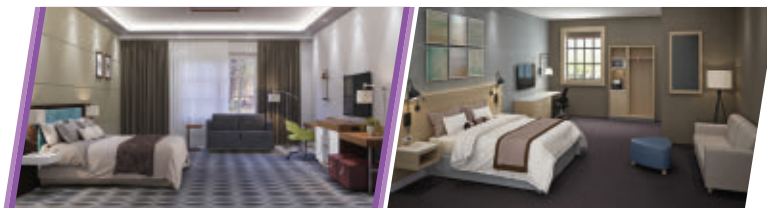
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When you've effectively implemented benefits packages tailored to your employees, your HR team has a nugget of gold with which to lead on the hunt for talent. Top-notch benefits are sought after by those in search of a new career. And, if quality healthcare isn't a priority for you, working for your hotel will not be a priority for them.

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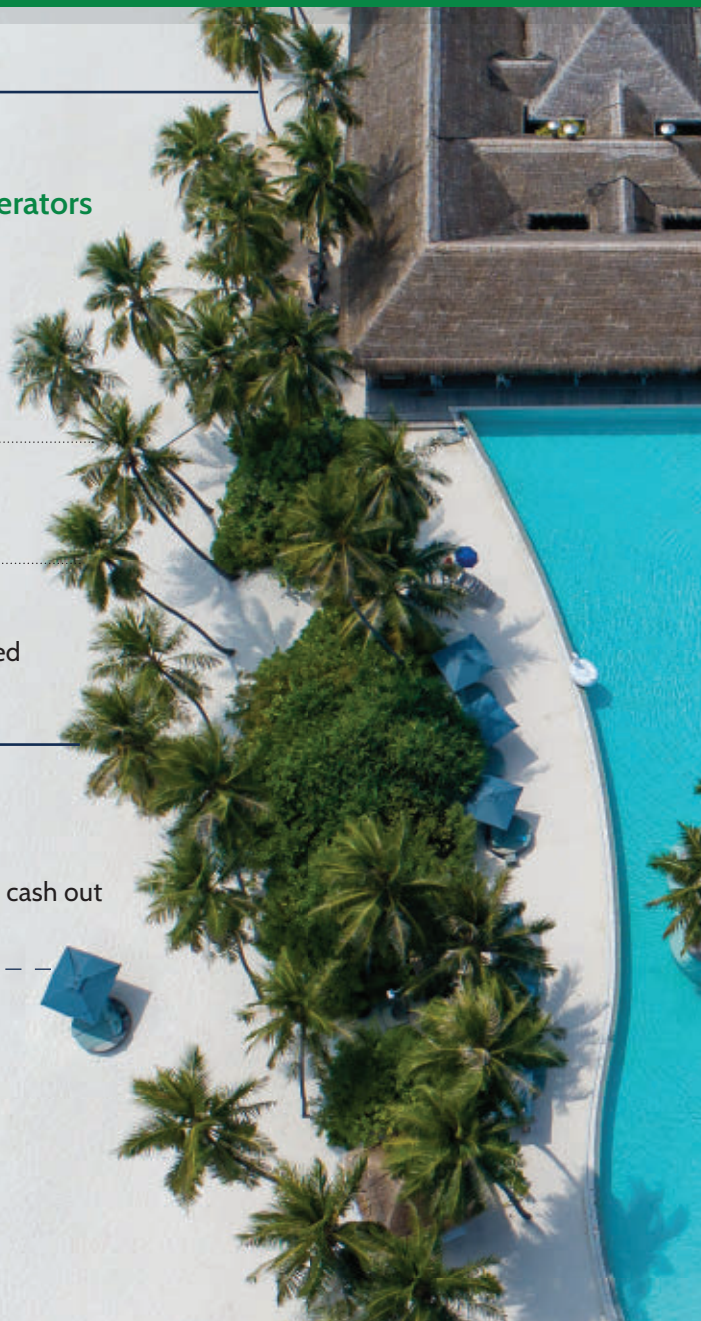
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If your strategy doesn't include quality healthcare benefits, you're missing out on a pool of incredible talent that could catapult your hotel's success.”

effort to make staff feel valued. The hotel industry needs to seek out benefits that provide high-quality health care and low costs for employees.

Beyond that, it's time to spark cultural transformation within your hotel. This transformation starts at the top with you. Leaders create cultural change through transparency, authenticity, credibility, and character. The best way to reinforce cultural change to your employees is by ensuring you're all speaking a common language that places your staff at the forefront of your mission.

In Shuman's past role as a CHRO, he spearheaded a cultural transformation throughout a company of 50,000 people. Throughout this time of change, he and the leadership team conducted what they

called the "fishbowl" exercise. The goal was to be totally transparent with their employees and take any mystique out of the work they were doing to build a better culture.

The exercise consisted of the leadership team collecting feedback from employees of all levels throughout the company and then empowering them to provide their thoughts and opinions. Not all feedback was sunshine and rainbows, but it was impactful. It was proof the leadership team valued all employees' feedback and helped them stay true to their commitment to transparency.

When you value your employees, increased retention and recruitment will follow. You want to build a culture within your hotel to which candidates

are immediately attracted. If your strategy doesn't include quality health care benefits, you're missing out on a pool of incredible talent that could catapult your hotel's success. Value your employees, and they, in turn, will value you. ■



Geoff Rowson is the senior vice president of sales at Totem Solutions, a benefits consulting company and an AAHOA Platinum Industry Partner that handles

everything from administration to enrollment and employee advocacy. For more information on employee benefits and employee benefits consulting, visit totemsolutions.com or contact Geoff at geoff@totemsolutions.com.

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Clean water, fresh air

Help the environment, improve the guest experience, and save some money in the process

by FRANK J. PIETRUCHA

“SUSTAINABILITY IS NOT ABOUT GUMSHOE LIBERALS HUGGING TREES,” INSISTED BETH HEIDER. “A prosperous business is our objective and sustainability is a path to getting there” noted the former Chairperson of the Board for U.S. Green Building Council. Heider believes there is plenty of “green” to be made while going green, but it’s also clear that the importance of enterprises making sound decisions to protect our threatened environment is among her top priorities.

But, Heider added, sustainability isn’t the only movement afoot in 2022. The COVID-19 pandemic has ushered in a new era of heightened awareness about personal health and well-being that isn’t likely to disappear even if the coronavirus does. Consumers want greater assurances that the air they breathe, the water they drink, and the food they eat is pure and fresh. When it comes to choosing between establishments, cleanliness is most certainly closest to godliness for today’s guest.

These two themes, sustainability and healthy living, roll into one interconnected jumble that links fear of environmental demise with worry about staying well in an uncertain world. A looming potential ecological catastrophe together

with the COVID-19 fury fuels the perfect storm. The hospitality industry must respond to the demands of an evolved consumer who wants a safe place to sleep tonight but also demands promises for a brighter, or at least less fatalistic, tomorrow.

BUSINESSES’ SUSTAINABILITY IMPERATIVE

Heider, now a sustainability consultant based in Alexandria, VA, feels the message is getting out. “Finally, sustainability has connected with business. You win, your brand wins, the world wins.”

The hospitality industry is a good place to look for examples of sustainability in action. Hotel

operators see great potential to do good things for the planet while pleasing their guests and, in many cases, making strides to improve their own bottom line. The big players already have made big, very public moves to go green. Marriott International posts its sustainability goals for 2025 on its site. Promising a reduction in their environmental footprint and an increase in responsible sourcing. Hilton vows to cut its environmental footprint in half by 2030.

Sure, it’s important that hotels, and all businesses, take environmental issues more seriously for our own preservation as humans. Beyond our sense of responsibility to the next



“

The COVID-19 pandemic has ushered in a new era of heightened awareness about personal health and well-being that isn't likely to disappear even if the coronavirus does.”

generations, however, is also a need to project the right image for our establishments. Public perception on eco-friendliness is becoming an increasingly more important factor in hotel selection. According to Heider, “Younger consumers are walking the talk. They are choosing brands that reflect their belief systems.”

If your website doesn't boast enough green accomplishments, would-be guests might instead check into an establishment that better reflects a sincere understanding of sustainability.

CLEAN LIVING

While these same consumers are scrutinizing your property's carbon footprint, they also may be pondering whether your establishment offers them a sufficiently healthy experience. The pandemic has shone a bright light on details some of us have overlooked. Fear of getting on planes or trains, or being packed into a tight restaurant, because the air we breathe in those places could get us sick is a new worry many are taking more seriously.

While not all consumers are obsessing over clean air or water when choosing a hotel, they may find it welcoming to learn the place they've selected is looking after their health and well-being. Communicating to your potential guests that your hotel is not a sick building but in fact a healthy environment, can be welcoming news that seals the deal to securing a booking.

HEALTHIER STAYS

According to Heider, transforming a property into an environmentally forward, healthy enterprise doesn't need to be completed overnight nor does it require millions of dollars to get started. A good place to start your green ambition would be the U.S. Green Building Council, whose motto is “Healthy people in healthy places equals a healthy economy.” On their website, www.usgbc.org, you can learn how to transform your building and what steps to take to reach the coveted status of being LEED certified.

For sustainability newcomers, Heider suggests looking at initiatives that impact a hotel's water and air systems for more affordable, easier fixes. Taking proactive steps in these areas can help reduce your property's carbon footprint, create a healthier environment for your guests, and help you save money in unexpected ways. ■



Frank J. Pietrucha is a freelance writer and communicator based in Washington, D.C. He attended Cornell's School of Hotel Administration but realized his true calling was to be a hotel guest, not a hotelier. He can be contacted at definitivedc@gmail.com.

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IN ACTION

During the General Session at the G6 Conference, AAHOA Chair Vinay Patel took the main stage to present an AAHOA update, including significant findings from the Oxford Study, AAHOA's latest initiatives, federal, state, and local advocacy priorities, and much more.



In honor of Women's History Month, Female Director Eastern Division Lina Patel and Female Director Western Division Tejal N. Patel hosted a Women's Reception during the G6 Conference that was attended by more than 140 women. AAHOA Chair Vinay Patel and Vice Chairman Nishant (Neal) Patel came out in support.

AAHOA Future Hotelier Neev Saraf received an official citation from the Maryland General Assembly for his community service efforts. Neev, the son of Lifetime Members Prakash and Manjila Saraf, has been involved in community service for the past nine years. He also was the recipient of the AAHOA Youth Volunteer Award.



The house was full for North Carolina Regional Director Akshat Patel's Town Hall in Asheville.



Female Director Eastern Division Lina Patel and Mid South Regional Director Harikrishna (HK) Patel hosted a gathering on involvement, leadership and executive level involvement, succession Planning, and overall well-being.



Georgia Regional Director Vik Zaver hosted an informative and well-attended O'Connor & Associates Dinner & Learn in Atlanta.



At left, Arkansas gubernatorial candidate Sarah Huckabee Sanders (with AAHOA Treasurer Bharat Patel) was the keynote speaker as Regional Director Danny (Chintu) Patel welcomed a packed house to his Town Hall in Fayetteville, pictured above.



Alabama Regional Director Sanjay Patel hosted a well-attended Town Hall in Birmingham.



At left and above, North Texas Regional Director Dhiren Masters welcomed more than 200 attendees, including AAHOA Vice Chairman Nishant (Neal) Patel, to his Town Hall in Irving.



Above, North Carolina Regional Director Akshat Patel (second from left) and Ambassadors Rajendra (Raj) Patel (from left), Pinkesh Patel, Abhijit Shende, and Janak Patel welcomed Congressman Mark Walker (center) as guest speaker for a Town Hall in Greensboro, pictured below. Walker is currently running for the U.S. Senate.



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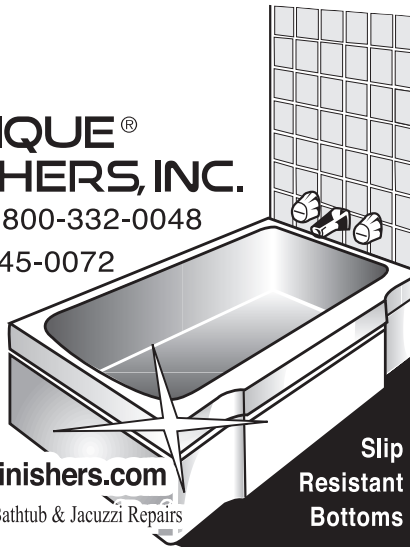
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†\$1 OFF CREDIT OFFER: Offer ends 12/31/22. Offer is available to new or renewing Hospitality and Institutions customers with a 3-year programming agreement. Properties must subscribe to FAMILY™ (\$410/room/mo.) or above. FAMILY™ promotional bundle price includes FAMILY™ (\$3.50/room/mo.) and technology fee (\$0.60/room/mo.). Bundled rate will be listed as two separate line items on customer bill. Customers will begin receiving credits within two billing cycles. After 36 mos., the credit will end. Offer includes H25 Analog, DIRECTV Residential Experience (DRE), HD COM System and HD COM System with NTSC-16 and Receiver-Less HD technologies. Receiver-Less equipment is only for Institutions. Five room minimum is req'd per property. **IN THE EVENT YOU FAIL TO MAINTAIN YOUR SUBSCRIPTION TO THE REQUIRED PROGRAMMING PACKAGE YOU WILL NO LONGER QUALIFY FOR THE \$1 OFF CREDIT OFFER.** **INSTALLATION:** Custom installation charges apply, and installation fee is based on hotel size. Applicable use tax adjustment may apply on retail value of installation. Availability of DIRECTV service may vary by location. In certain markets, programming/pricing may vary. Make and model of system at DIRECTV's sole discretion. Offers void where prohibited or restricted. Hardware and programming available separately. Receipt of DIRECTV programming subject to terms of the DIRECTV Terms of Service for Hospitality Establishments and the DIRECTV Terms of Service for Institutions; copy provided with new customer information packet. Taxes not included. DIRECTV programming, hardware, pricing, terms and conditions subject to change at any time. **††2022 NFL SUNDAY TICKET OFFER:** Offer ends 1/8/23. 2022 NFL SUNDAY TICKET will be delivered at no extra cost in all guest rooms for the 2022 season for all new DIRECTV Residential Experience (DRE) customers and COM System customers; customers must subscribe to FAMILY™ (\$3.50/room/mo.) or above, with a 3- or 5-year programming agreement. Other conditions apply. **Subscription will automatically continue in the 2nd year at a special renewal rate of \$99 and renew at regular rate thereafter provided that DIRECTV still carries these services at the time of renewal and unless customer calls to cancel prior to start of the season. Subscription cannot be canceled (in part or in whole) after the start of the season and subscription fees cannot be refunded.** Commercial locations require an appropriate licensee agreement. Offer excludes University accounts. NFL, the NFL Shield design and the NFL SUNDAY TICKET name and logo are registered trademarks of the NFL and its affiliates. ***SHOWTIME OFFER:** Offer ends 12/31/22. The SHOWTIME programming offer (\$0.99/room/mo.) is available only as a 2nd Premium add-on. Offer available to qualifying new or existing Hospitality accounts with a 3- or 5-year programming agreement and must not have received SHOWTIME programming from DIRECTV or any other distributor during the 24 months prior to activation. Offer is available for accounts activated on or before 12/31/22. After the applicable promotional period (3- or 5-years) ends, then-prevailing rate for SHOWTIME applies unless canceled or changed by customer prior to end of the promotional period. Offer may not be combined with any other SHOWTIME offer. SHOWTIME and related marks are trademarks of Showtime Networks Inc., a ViacomCBS Company. All rights reserved. ©2022 DIRECTV, LLC. DIRECTV is a trademark of DIRECTV, LLC.

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¹ Days Inn Worldwide, Inc. Franchise Disclosure Document dated March 31, 2021. ² YTD Q3 2021 vs. STLY, US data, vs. economy segment. ³ Based on the top performing 25% of qualified system hotels in the US operated by franchisees for the period from 1/1/2020 through 12/31/2020. The lowest performing 25% of the same qualified system hotels during that same period averaged ADR of \$58. For additional details, please see the FDD. ⁴ Full year 2020 industry data. ⁵ Phoenix BASE Brand Awareness study R12 as of Q4 2021. This is not an offer. Federal and certain state laws regulate the offer and sales of franchises. An offer will only be made in compliance with those laws and regulations, which may require we provide you with a franchise disclosure document, a copy of which can be obtained by contacting us at 22 Sylvan Way, Parsippany, NJ 07054. All hotels are independently owned and operated with the exception of certain hotels managed or owned by a subsidiary of the company. © 2022 Wyndham Hotels & Resorts, Inc. All rights reserved.