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May 2020 | todayshotelier.com

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TODAY'S HOTELIER

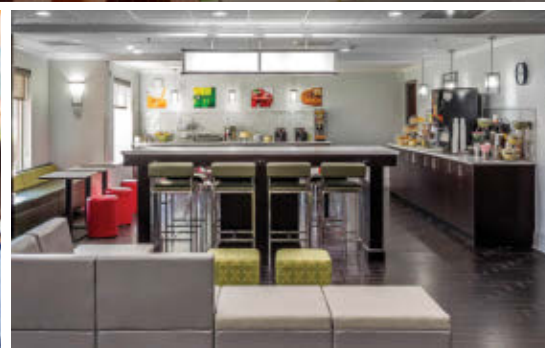
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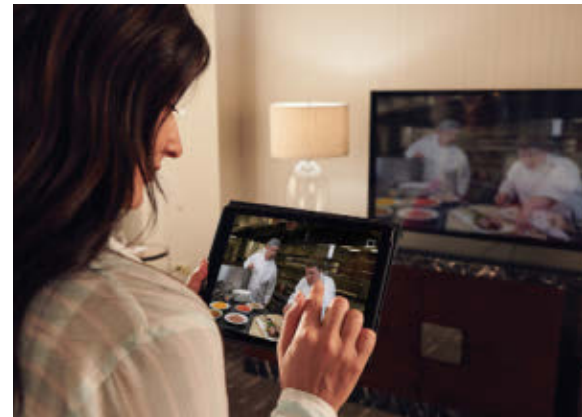
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The Name to Know in Hotel Finance

contents

May 2020 | todayshotelier.com

20

#AAHOASTRONG

With help from members and Industry Partners, AAHOA advocates for hard-hit hotel industry amid coronavirus pandemic

by NICK FORTUNA



24

As COVID-19 pandemic continues, AAHOA Members navigate new terrain

From legislation to lender woes to brand partnerships, hotel owners are trying to find a new normal amid a foggy situation

by ALICIA HOISINGTON

departments

- 10 LETTER FROM THE CHAIRWOMAN
- 12 LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO
- 14 GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS
- 42 AAHOA CLUB BLUE, PLATINUM & SILVER MEMBERS
- 44 AAHOA MEMBERS IN ACTION
- 47 CLASSIFIEDS
- 50 ADVERTISERS INDEX

columns

- THE C-SUITE..... 16
When good looks bad
by DR. JODI VERMAAS and BLAIR HILDAHL
- COMMON GROUND..... 18
Collaboration in crisis leads to swift passage of the CARES Act
by SEAN GROSSNICKLE
- FINANCE..... 30
Are there any steps hotel owners can take to lessen the negative impact of COVID-19 on their financial health?
by RUSHI SHAH
- SMALL BUSINESS..... 34
Opportunity Zones are crucial as the economy rebuilds
by ALFREDO ORTIZ
- CITY SPOTLIGHT 36
Des Moines
by ASIF LAKHANI
- LEGAL CORNER..... 38
How employers can thrive despite COVID-19
by VANESSA PATEL

5 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT AAHOA THIS MONTH

1.

COVID-19-Related Webcasts:

AAHOA is bringing hoteliers the resources you need to weather the storm. From how to fill out the PPP application and communicating in a time of crisis to a review of the CARES Act and what to do if you have to shut down your hotel, AAHOA's COVID-19 series is covering it all and we're adding new webcasts every day. Learn more at AAHOA.com/webcasts.

2.

Dedicated Website and Daily COVID-19 Updates:

AAHOA has created one of the most robust COVID-19 websites for hoteliers at AAHOA.com/COVID-19. Content is easy to find and covers everything from advocacy topics and calls to action to AAHOA-created resources and curated links from around the web, and so much more. And to make it easy, AAHOA was one of the first organizations to send out daily COVID-19 updates with information that hoteliers need to know all in one email. Learn more at AAHOA.com/COVIDArchive.

3.

AAHOA COVID-19 Action Center:

While much has been accomplished, we still have work to do. AAHOA's COVID-19 Action Center makes it easy to contact your elected officials to make your voice heard. It is imperative elected officials are constantly updated on the impacts COVID-19 is having on you, your business, and your employees as the situation continues to evolve. You can find a link to our Action Center at AAHOA.com/COVIDAdvocacy.

4.

Vendor Deals, Discounts, and Relief:

Many AAHOA vendors have exclusive deals and discounts that they're offering to members at this trying time. To learn about the latest offers, visit AAHOA.com/COVIOffers.

5.

An Email Address to Field Your Questions:

AAHOA has created a centralized location to email your questions so we can provide top-level member customer service. Send an email to covid19@aahoa.com and someone from AAHOA will get back to you as quickly as possible.

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1100 Abernathy Road
Suite 725, Atlanta, GA 30328
P: (404) 816-5759
info@aahoa.com
www.aahoa.com

AAHOA STAFF CONTRIBUTORS

Lisa Brown, Copy Editor
Heather Carnes, Director, Marketing
Peter Clerkin, Director, Communications
Sean Grossnickle, Communications & Public Affairs Coordinator
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Rachel Humphrey, COO & VP of Franchise Relations
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ASSOCIATION SOLUTIONS
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P: (800) 369-6220
www.naylor.com
todayshotelier@naylor.com

NAYLOR STAFF CONTRIBUTORS
Sunny Goel, Design/Layout

Heather Greyling, Publisher
Kira Krewson, Project Manager
John O'Neil, Advertising Director
Nancy Taylor, Senior Marketing Specialist
Geneva Toddy, Managing Editor
Tracy Venzen, Project Coordinator
Chris Zabel and Jason Zawada, Advertising Associates



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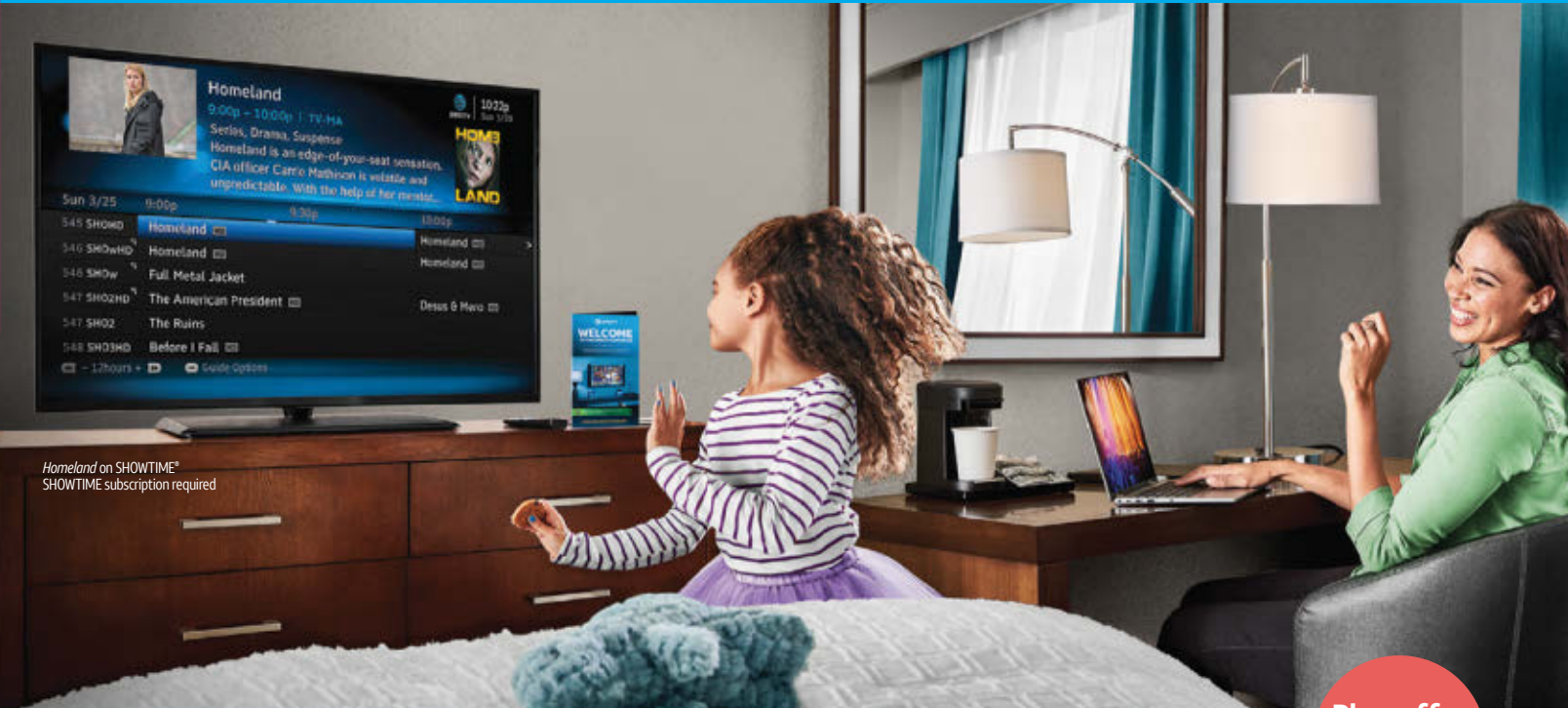
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Editorial inquiries: todayshotelier@naylor.com | Advertising inquiries: John O'Neil, joneil@naylor.com

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JAGRUTI PANWALA
AAHOA CHAIRWOMAN (2019-2020)



AAHOA remains committed to ensuring that the interests of America's hotel owners are represented throughout the COVID-19 relief and recovery process as our government works to get our country back on track."

#AAHOAstrong together

AAHOA IS DEFINED BY THE resilience, kindness, and unity of all its members. We are united in the fight against this pandemic and the struggle to come out on the other side of it. It is encouraging to see so many of you sharing your stories through the #AAHOAstrong outreach initiatives. Many of you are also making selfless acts of kindness and generosity for your communities, healthcare workers, and your employees. At AAHOA, we are stronger together, and this is even more evident when we give back to the communities we serve.

The notion of unity may seem clouded when we are forced from our regular routines, habits, and scheduled events. Spring marks the time where AAHOA convenes for our annual convention and trade show, where we connect, select our leadership, and celebrate our successes. While we must wait until August for our rescheduled convention, I'd like to highlight some of the ways in which AAHOA is staying united throughout the pandemic.

As public gatherings were cancelled to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the AAHOA team quickly organized a series of virtual events for each region. In the absence of town halls and regional conferences, these events will help hotel owners remain connected with AAHOA Officers, Board Members, Staff, and each other during the COVID-19 pandemic. If you missed yours, please check out the AAHOA resource page where you can find recordings of every AAHOA Virtual Event Series hosted to date. In the spirit of our regional conferences and town halls, the AAHOA virtual events are a way for members to share information and talk about how we are experiencing this crisis as a community.

America's hotel owners are coming together in more ways than one. Our virtual events showcase the strong networks our association boasts. Our ongoing advocacy campaigns highlight the strength of our industry's voice and influence in legislatures across the country. AAHOA Members sent more than 25,000 letters to inform state and federal lawmakers how COVID-19 is impacting hotel owners and highlight measures they should adopt to address our concerns. AAHOA remains committed to ensuring that the interests of America's hotel owners are represented throughout the COVID-19 relief and recovery process as our government works to get our country back on track.

Things are far from returning to normal, but when they do, it will give us yet another reason to celebrate our industry's strength and resilience. I thank all of you for everything you do for each other, your communities, and the hotel industry. ■

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CECIL P. STATON
AAHOA PRESIDENT & CEO

AAHOA's greatest resource is its members

THESE ARE CHALLENGING TIMES FOR us all. We are doing whatever it takes to adapt to the reality of our country's situation. Fortunately, our association entered into these times from a position of strength, and our membership numbers are at an all-time high. Many of our AAHOA Members are undergoing similar experiences as a result of the pandemic. I hope you can all find some time to confide in and comfort one another, and reach out to our staff if you are seeking advice or solutions to problems that your business is facing.

The AAHOA team is working tirelessly to assure that your needs are met, and your questions are answered. Despite the efforts of the federal and state governments, there will inevitably be moments of frustration and a lag in response to the challenges presented by COVID-19. You are not alone as our industry faces this crisis together. Please continue to reach out to us so that we can overcome these challenges together.

At a time like this, it is vital that our industry remain united to promote small business owners' needs to the administration, Congress, and state governments. AAHOA is engaging with state lodging associations, brands, and industry partners to advocate for America's hotel owners. Our daily COVID-19 updates and curated resource center, available at www.aahoa.com/COVID-19, are the best avenues to find the most up to date and relevant information for hotel owners.

As the situation surrounding COVID-19 changes every day, we will do everything in our power to evolve and adapt to these unprecedented circumstances. We are fully committed to ensuring that AAHOA continues to meet your needs and address your concerns.

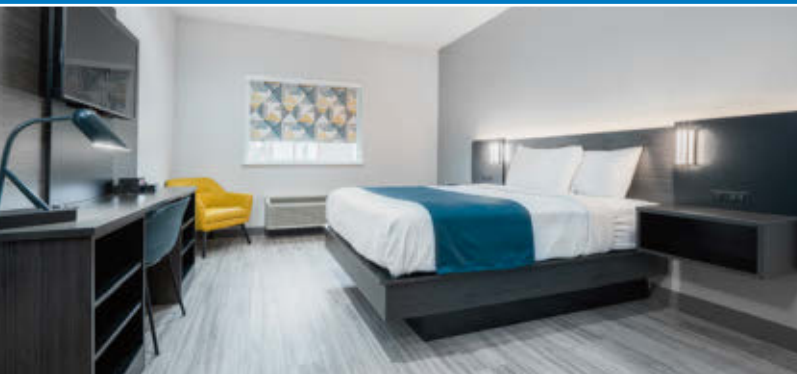
We will pull through this pandemic together by supporting each other and maintaining the values that make our association great. As you balance the concerns of keeping your loved ones safe while managing your business, just remember that AAHOA and our network of hotel owners across the country are here for you. ■

“

From state lodging associations to corporate brands, AAHOA is engaging with state lodging associations, brands, and industry partners to advocate for America's hotel owners.”



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Navigating paths through the pandemic

by SEAN GROSSNICKLE



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THERE HAS NEVER BEEN A better time to stay informed. Months ago, the COVID-19 pandemic seemed leagues away from making landfall in the United States. Most of America, small businesses included, could not have anticipated the rapid spread and devastating impact COVID-19 would have on societal health and the American economy. The full scope of COVID-19's damage and the outcome of our nation's recovery remain to be seen. In the face of uncertainty, finding the proper resources and support channels can help in navigating the pandemic landscape.

As Congress, government agencies, and the private sector move to address the impacts of COVID-19, it is critical to understand the resources available that are readily available for small businesses. Staying informed with accurate and up-to-date information can help lessen the impact of the pandemic. Without the ability to meet in person or attend industry events, finding and following credible avenues of information is vital.

AAHOA's entire team is working around the clock to keep our fingers on the pulse of the latest, most relevant updates coming from Congress and numerous government agencies. Since mid-March, AAHOA has produced daily COVID-19 updates for our members. These updates are a valuable tool to keeping AAHOA Members informed on the latest government releases, AAHOA's advocacy initiatives,

expert webcasts, and much more. AAHOA's COVID-19 resource center can be found on the front page of aahoa.com. This comprehensive resource guide is a great place to start when searching for a curated collection of relevant news, toolkits, COVID-19 relief guides, and industry updates. All of these resources are open to everyone, whether they're an AAHOA Member or not.

WHERE TO LOOK FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY INFORMATION

Posts across social media, from Facebook to WhatsApp, present viewers with a slew of home remedies, misleading information, and sensational clips. Online scammers are also looking to prey upon small businesses through phishing schemes and fake websites. The latest COVID-19 projections, sanitary advice, and public updates should only be taken from official government channels. The Center for Disease Control, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the U.S. government's Coronavirus.gov webpage are great sources for medical information, COVID-19 fact checks, and FAQs. State and local governments are also doing their part to keep citizens informed on state specific measures, quarantine

guidelines, and small business resources, which can all be found online.

WHERE TO FIND RESOURCES FOR YOUR BUSINESS

The Small Business Administration (SBA), U.S. Chamber of Commerce, U.S. Department of the Treasury, and Coronavirus.gov provide a roadmap for leading your business through the COVID-19 pandemic. Guides to disaster relief programs, like the Payroll Protection Program and Economic Injury Disaster Loan, are available and constantly updated to reflect the most current regulatory guidelines. For local assistance, the SBA funds regional development centers that offer extensive assistance to small businesses throughout the country. Government websites are home to a wealth of the most credible, up to date COVID-19 toolkits, guides, and news releases.

AAHOA remains dedicated to curating the most accurate and current COVID-19 resources. As our country continues to navigate the disruptions and difficulties of COVID-19, receiving the proper information will remain critical to pulling through this pandemic. ■

“AAHOA remains dedicated to curating the most accurate and current COVID-19 resources.”

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When good looks bad

Leading through uncertainty

by DR. JODI VERMAAS and BLAIR HILDAHL

NOW IS THE TIME THAT everyone is looking at you. How have you been leading through the COVID-19 crisis? What will you prioritize? People are asking you whether you care about your employees or your bottom line. But are these leadership choices mutually exclusive?

The truth is you are in a tough spot. Not only are you saddled with your own virus and shut down, issues but you also are called to lead your teams through unfathomable levels of stress and uncertainty. Every day you wake up to the shifting reports of health risks and medical news, to quarantines and rising unemployment.

Here's the thing. Leading your teams right now requires not only a short-term perspective but also a long-term view. Sometimes, stretching your stance to look ahead doesn't look so good; in fact, during times of uncertainty, sometimes doing good looks bad.



Blair Hildahl,
CMO/Principal,
Base4



▲
Dr. Jodi Vermaas,
CLO, Base4

“

Soon, when markets roar back into action – because they will – your firm will be ready to surge, bring back your furloughed team members, and win, proving that what looks bad in the short run often is the long-term true good.”

Let's break it down:

LISTEN AND TAKE CENTERSTAGE

Leading in a crisis is scary and unpredictable, forcing us to make new decisions and re-envision our processes. Rash or reactionary leadership will not do! Your teams need you to stand in the middle of the mess – present, listening, and ready to deliver.

You can't make sound decisions if you are spinning your wheels. Now's the time to listen, take in all the data, and embrace the challenge, even if you can't solve all the problems.

First, listen to yourself and your team, but don't heed the chatter. You built your company to success, and you know how to rebuild through the hard times. Take time to breathe and remember what's been accomplished. You don't have all the answers, but get in there with your teams, anyway. Are they scared, anxious, or overwhelmed? Show confidence in what you do know and help them do the same. That's called resiliency.

DON'T PROTECT YOUR TEAMS, SERVE THEM

We're amazed at how often we hear people blame the business leaders, shouting "Do the right thing!" as if the goal of business is to shortchange our loyal team members. In reality, the short-term perspective tells everyone to stay home and close down businesses, while paying everyone their full salaries. Honestly, for most of us, that's not possible. A long-term view instructs us to consider reducing budgets – even when it means furloughing team members – to ensure businesses can survive and rehire them as soon as possible.

At BASE4, we lead through the servant leadership model, which trains leaders to empower their teams and develop their professional skills to bring success and

serve their communities. Serving the team doesn't mean protecting them from the truth or doing things they can do for themselves, it means giving them tools to succeed through the toughest of times. The best tools are honest updates and professional support.

You might have to let some team members go. Times will get tougher before they get easier. Help them understand the current economic situation and unpredictability of the hospitality industry. Ensure access to online classes and training to improve their job skills. Find creative ways to allow teams to be productive at home. Be honest when you see layoffs coming and offer them assistance in improving their résumés or offering recommendations. Don't allow anyone to give up; inspire them to find the good and lean into their futures.

DON'T APOLOGIZE; STAND ON YOUR VALUES

Empathy must run deep as we stand on our values. Being empathic does not mean apologizing. Instead of regrets, lead with your values. Do what matters with grit and resolve.

Every leader we know has a company mission statement or values. Go back and read yours; then, *use them*. At BASE4, the "4" stands for our values: humility, honesty, respect, and fun. These values help us lead in the face of adversities from the



Standing on your values doesn't mean you forget what you know, it means you use what you know through the lens of your values, supporting both your people and your business to the best of your ability."

coronavirus and socio-political pressures, economic downturns, and groupthink.

Don't let others tell you how to live according to your values. You must listen, care, and empower your teams – and still make the tough calls. Standing on your values doesn't mean you forget what you know. It means you use what you know through the lens of your values, supporting both your people and your business to the best of your ability.

From our global offices, all of our architects, engineers, and designers are working from home, laughing together over our funny workspaces filled with our kids, pets, and relatives. Even though we can't solve every problem today, we can be present and empower our teams.

THE GOODWILL SHOW

Strong leaders serve their teams while still making the hard decisions to get through the storms intact and ready for the turnaround. Soon, when markets roar back into action – because they will – your firm will be ready to surge, bring back your furloughed team members, and win, proving that what looks bad in the short run often is the long-term true good. ■

Dr. Jodi Vermaas is Chief Leadership Officer of Base4. Blair Hildahl is Chief Marketing Officer/Principal of Base4.



You don't have all the answers, but get in there with your teams, anyway. Are they scared, anxious, or overwhelmed? Show confidence in what you do know and help them do the same. That's called resiliency."

Collaboration in crisis leads to swift passage of the CARES Act

by SEAN GROSSNICKLE



Common Ground profiles members of opposing parties who are working together to advance issues important to hoteliers.

VECTORMINE/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

THE ISSUE

The novel coronavirus has disrupted nearly all facets of the American economy and way of life. Many businesses have been forced to close, travel has been restricted, and Americans across the country face the unsettling reality of COVID-19's permeating effects. In light of this, the U.S. government has rushed to pass legislation to alleviate the economic and humanitarian toll of COVID-19.

COMMON GROUND

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act provides more than \$2 trillion in financial help for many Americans, relief for small businesses and their employees, and support for American healthcare professionals and patients fighting COVID-19. Lawmakers in Washington, D.C. worked across party lines to draft and pass this legislation in the government's "Phase 3" step to address the nationwide COVID-19 pandemic. The CARES Act garnered immense bipartisan support, passing in the Senate with a vote of 96-0 and again in the House of Representatives with a voice vote. ■

NANCY PELOSI, SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE (D-CA)

First Elected in 1987

The American people deserve a government-wide, visionary, evidence-based response to address these threats to their lives and their livelihoods, and they need it now. Again, I acknowledge the bipartisanship in which we – on which we bring this legislation to the Floor.

MITCH MCCONNELL, SENATE MAJORITY LEADER (R-KY)

First Elected in 1984

I laid out four urgent priorities for new Senate legislation to help our nation through this crisis. I led Republicans and Democrats to work together around the clock to make the bill even better. And I am proud to say the Senate stood together, acted together, and passed this historic relief package.



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¹ Talk to a Chase Representative for more details and ask to review the Schedule A Pricing Sheet.

² Next business day funding is available to eligible Chase Merchant Services customers who deposit into a single Chase business checking account. Visa®, MasterCard®, Discover®, and American Express® OptBlue® credit and debit transactions are eligible. All businesses are subject to business credit approval and all funds are subject to fraud monitoring. In addition, funding is subject to the terms and conditions of the merchant processing agreement. Chase must receive settled transactions by 10:00 pm EST (some businesses may qualify for an 11:59 pm EST settlement; talk to a Chase representative for more details). Funds are deposited on the next business day, excluding weekends and bank holidays. Some exclusions may apply. The listed payment brand(s) are not sponsors of this program. All marks are marks of their respective companies. Deposit products provided by JPMorgan Chase Bank, N.A. Member FDIC.

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#AAHOASTRONG

“

We need fewer bureaucratic obstacles and more access to capital so hoteliers can keep the lights on, make payroll, and pay the mortgage. To put this crisis in real terms for our government officials, we need you to share your stories. Tell us what you're seeing and how your business is being impacted by this crisis.”

— AAHOA PRESIDENT & CEO CECIL P. STATON

*With help from members
and Industry Partners,
AAHOA advocates for
hard-hit hotel industry amid
coronavirus pandemic*

by NICK FORTUNA

WITH THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC sending the economy off a cliff and making government intervention inevitable, AAHOA Members stepped up in a big way, making their voices heard in Washington and state capitals at a crucial time for the industry and the nation.

LEADERSHIP SPEAKS OUT

In a video message to members on March 19, Cecil P. Staton, AAHOA President & CEO, said the association's advocacy team in Washington was working with its partners in the hospitality industry, the Trump administration, and congressional leaders to ensure hoteliers and their employees were included in any economic stimulus legislation being drafted.

In addition to a rapid disbursement of financial assistance, AAHOA called for the federal government to give hoteliers more flexibility in dealing with their banks and lenders to help them address their liquidity issues.

"We need fewer bureaucratic obstacles and more access to capital so hoteliers can keep the lights on, make payroll, and pay the mortgage," Staton said. "To put this crisis in real terms for our government officials, we need you to share your stories. Tell us what you're seeing and how your business is being impacted by this crisis."

INCREDIBLE MEMBER RESPONSE

The response from AAHOA Members was overwhelming. In one week alone, members sent more than 21,000 letters to federal and state legislators, speaking with a unified voice and demanding action.

The \$2 trillion emergency spending package signed by President Donald Trump on March 27 – the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, or CARES Act – does provide some relief for the hospitality industry. It includes almost \$350 billion to create the Paycheck Protection Program, which provides loans and loan guarantees to struggling small businesses so they can pay their rent or mortgages, meet payroll, and cover other operating costs.





MINGROV YURIY/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

The PPP was designed to reduce the red tape and guardrails that can make getting loans from the Small Business Administration challenging. It also incentivizes businesses to keep employees on the payroll by offering them loan forgiveness.

ASSOCIATIONS WORKING TOGETHER

Chip Rogers, President CEO of the American Hotel & Lodging Association, praised the president and Congress for passing the bill but cautioned that it isn't nearly enough to shore up the hotel industry. The CARES Act caps the amount small businesses may borrow at 250 percent of their average monthly payroll, up to \$10 million, but AHLA was pushing for the limit to be at 400 percent.

"We are disappointed that Congress was unable to increase the limits on Small Business Administration loans so that they would be more workable for our industry during this unprecedented halt in travel," Rogers said in a statement. "Under the current limits, hoteliers will only be able to meet their payroll and debt-service obligations for an estimated four to eight weeks."

Under the CARES Act, businesses will receive SBA loan forgiveness if they rehire their furloughed employees by June 30, and the AHLA would like a future stimulus bill to push that deadline back to Sept. 30, giving the industry more time to recover.

"While we all look forward to the day when it is safe to resume traveling, the reality is that most hotels today are facing single-digit occupancy, and that is unlikely to change in such a short time period," Rogers said. "With no revenue coming in, hoteliers can't make their debt payments, which will result in the business going under and employees losing their jobs permanently.

"As Congress weighs additional stimulus programs in the coming weeks, we urge them to swiftly address this shortcoming in the CARES Act."

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE CARES ACT?

Immediately after passage of the CARES Act, many lawmakers and business advocates encouraged Congress to begin work on supplemental aid packages. The prospect of more emergency spending makes it important for AAHOA Members to continue to contact their legislators and tell them what's at stake for their businesses.

In a video message to members March 20, AAHOA Chairwoman Jagruti Panwala said it's never been more important for members to share their personal stories with the association and legislators. Doing so helps AAHOA make the case for additional financial relief to lawmakers.

"In times like these, we must remain focused and united," Panwala said. "We all need to make sure our voices are heard, and we need to let them know that they must support our industry at this time."

AAHOA's website makes it easy for members to do their part. It provides a template for a letter to federal legislators calling for a robust stimulus package. The letter makes it clear how vital AAHOA Members and the broader hotel industry are to the economy. AAHOA's nearly 20,000 members own almost half of the hotels in the United States, employing approximately 600,000 workers and accounting for more than \$10 billion in payroll annually.

The letter details the challenges facing hoteliers and proposes many solutions, including a hospitality workforce relief fund, a bolstered unemployment insurance program, increased availability of small-business loans, immediate access to capital, regulatory flexibility with lenders, and the elimination of administrative burdens in obtaining SBA disaster-relief loans.

A separate letter template urges state and local lawmakers to designate hotels as essential businesses and to consider an array of relief measures, including the deferral of state and local hotel, property, business, and sales taxes. The letter calls for the deferral



In times like these, we must remain focused and united. We all need to make sure our voices are heard, and we need to let them know that they must support our industry at this time.”

— AAHOA CHAIRWOMAN JAGRUTI PANWALA

of municipally owned utility bills and the creation of economic development programs, grants, and loans for business owners.

“As you have noticed, these brands are listening and taking actions to mitigate the cost pressures that we are all facing,” Panwala said. “One brand even cut their royalty fee by 50 percent. But we’re not done yet. Owners are hurting, and we will continue to advocate for more relief for our hoteliers, who are the backbone of this industry and of these brands.”

GET INVOLVED AND STAY INFORMED

Panwala also encouraged hoteliers to speak with their brand representatives about their ongoing challenges.

AAHOA has been updating the COVID-19 section of its website daily, consolidating information and resources from the Department of Labor, SBA, and other government agencies, to name a few. There are letter templates for dealing with vendors, suppliers, and financial institutions. And AAHOA’s partners at Ecolab have developed a hospitality resource library to help hotel operators learn best practices for cleaning and disinfecting amid a pandemic. The library offers downloads and instructional videos, among other resources.

By the end of April, the association had produced more than 60 webcasts, each covering an important pandemic-related issue

for hoteliers. Topics have included leadership in a time of crisis, a detailed look at the CARES Act, the impact of the pandemic on hotels’ supply chains, and sales and revenue tips for a down market.

Through April 17, those webcasts had been viewed by more than 9,000 hoteliers.

Members with specific questions about navigating any aspect of the pandemic can email the association at covid19@aahoa.com.

Though the circumstances surrounding this pandemic are unique, the hotel industry has seen its share of hardship over the years, and it’s always persevered. In April, Staton sought to remind AAHOA Members of their resilience, and that they can count on the association to advocate for them in good times and in bad. He also noted that things eventually will return to normal, even if normal is hard to envision at present.

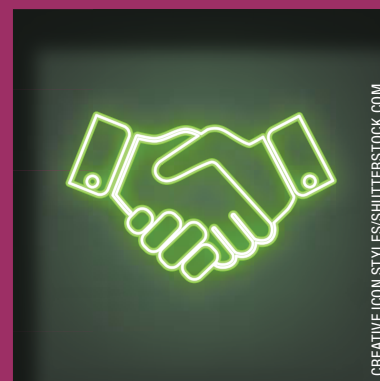
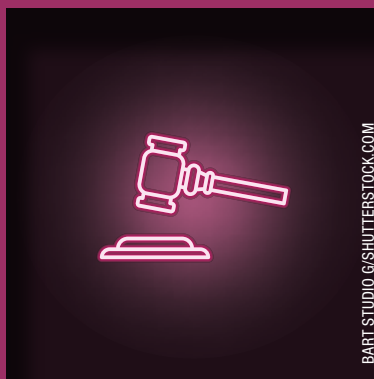
“People will still travel, and they will still need a place to stay when they do,” Staton said. “Our industry weathered 9/11. We made it through the financial crisis of 2008. We’ve been through many recessions. And we’ll get through this crisis by supporting one another and standing strong together. AAHOA is here for you now so you can be there for your employees and guests now and when we get through this crisis.”

For more information on how AAHOA is helping hoteliers navigate this devastating pandemic, visit aahoa.com/covid-19. ■



In one week, AAHOA Members sent **21,000 letters** to legislators.

The Paycheck Protection program included in the **CARES Act** allocates **\$350 billion** to small businesses.

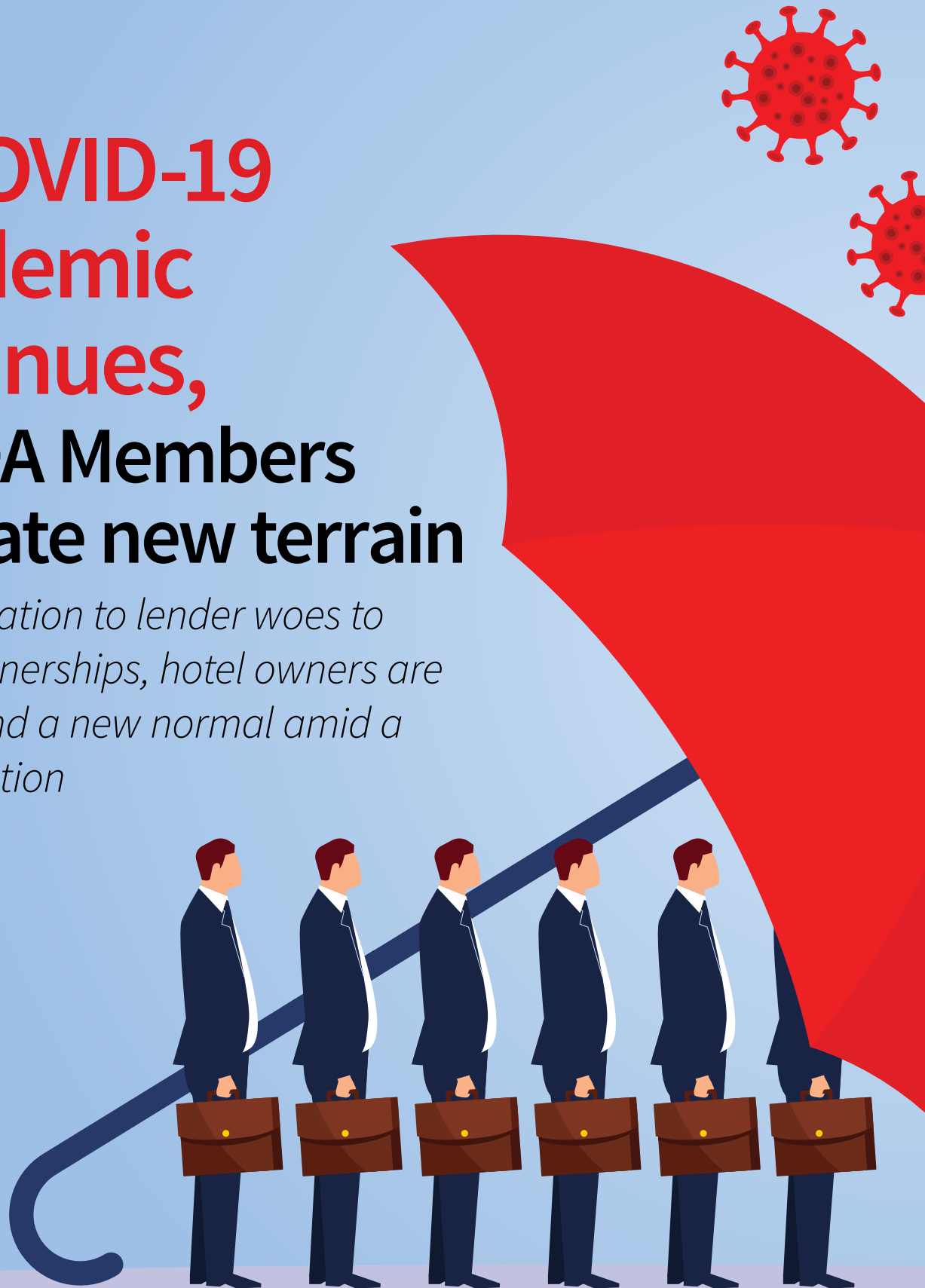



AAHOA Members are responsible for **600,000 employees** in the U.S. and **\$10 billion** in paychecks annually.

As COVID-19 pandemic continues, AAHOA Members navigate new terrain

From legislation to lender woes to brand partnerships, hotel owners are trying to find a new normal amid a foggy situation

by ALICIA HOISINGTON





WHILE THE GLOBAL COVID-19 pandemic continued its tear across the world in April, many AAHOA Members spent the month trying to navigate a devastating loss of business, the effects of furloughed or laid-off employees, and the government lifelines that turned out to be complicated or lacking.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act, or the CARES Act, was signed into law in late March. For small businesses, \$350 billion was provided in relief to prevent layoffs and closures while employees are required to stay home during the pandemic. Companies that employ 500 employees or fewer were able to receive up to eight weeks of assistance via the Payroll Protection Program (PPP). Business owners were able to request 2.5 times their monthly payroll costs up to \$10 million. Loans, with payments deferred for the first six months, are set to mature in two years. If businesses maintain their payroll with the loan, then that portion used to cover those costs, interest on mortgages, rent and utilities is to be forgiven.

But while hotel owners looked to the program to find some relief, it wasn't without its problems.

BEYOND THE FINE PRINT

"The problem with the bill and the PPP program attached to it is that it assumes you have cash right now. For example, for my hotels, I went from making \$15,000 a day to on some days making \$1,500," Montu Patel, President of Innovative Hospitality Management said. "We have to reduce our expenses, but still a number of fixed expenses aren't changing. No one has talked about property taxes and insurance payments yet. No one has told me those would be relieved in any way, so I need to stay current."

Parth Patel, President of VIPA Hospitality, said the PPP is a short-term solution. "At most, if a single hotel owner is going to get some funds, they're not going to last six months," he said.

Dharam Chaudhari, CEO of Westbridge Hotel Group, whose hotels' occupancies have plummeted to an average of 6-10 percent, agreed that the solution isn't a long-term one. "The CARES Act only covers eight weeks, and the majority of the relief is for employees, not business owners," he said.

“

Owners are taking on a lot of the risk, and it's a lot of liability. We have everything on the line.”

— DHARAM CHAUDHARI,
CEO OF WESTBRIDGE HOTEL GROUP

EMPLOYMENT IMPLICATIONS

Parth Patel said that relief focusing so much on employees could have some unintended consequences. For example, the legislation covers \$600 per week from the federal government on top of the state's weekly unemployment stipend. So, that could mean some employees would be getting paid more on unemployment than if they returned to work or payroll on the PPP.

“If we want to hire them back under the PPP plan, there's a forgiveness period for certain amount of payroll,” Parth Patel said. “There might be a chance they are getting more money for the period than working a full 40 hours a week, and we might find a situation where they might not want to come back because they are making more money on unemployment.”

“I'm not saying everyone is going to do that, but it could be a possibility.”

TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE

Another issue owners face: When will they see the money? When the PPP kicked off and banks opened up shop in early April to receive loan applications, the process wasn't smooth. Many applicants reported issues during the mad dash to the banks. Because the money was being offered on a first-come, first-served basis, media reports outlined chaotic scenes and confusion as some banks struggled to work within a rushed timeline and guidelines. Some applicants found that they didn't qualify at their banks, depending on what type of account holders they were. What's more, the available funds ran out fast. The program opened up for applicants on a Friday, and by Sunday, Wells Fargo announced it had reached its limit.

“I have a challenging time if I have \$150,000 to \$200,000 in the bank right now in cash. How long will that last me before I run out of money?” Montu Patel said. “Because the CARES Act gives comfort that one day you will get money for operating expenses, but that doesn't help me today. It doesn't help tomorrow or next week, either. And I'm not sure it's going to help in next six to eight weeks. How are we as business owners who are paying people going to pay them with funds that we don't have yet?”

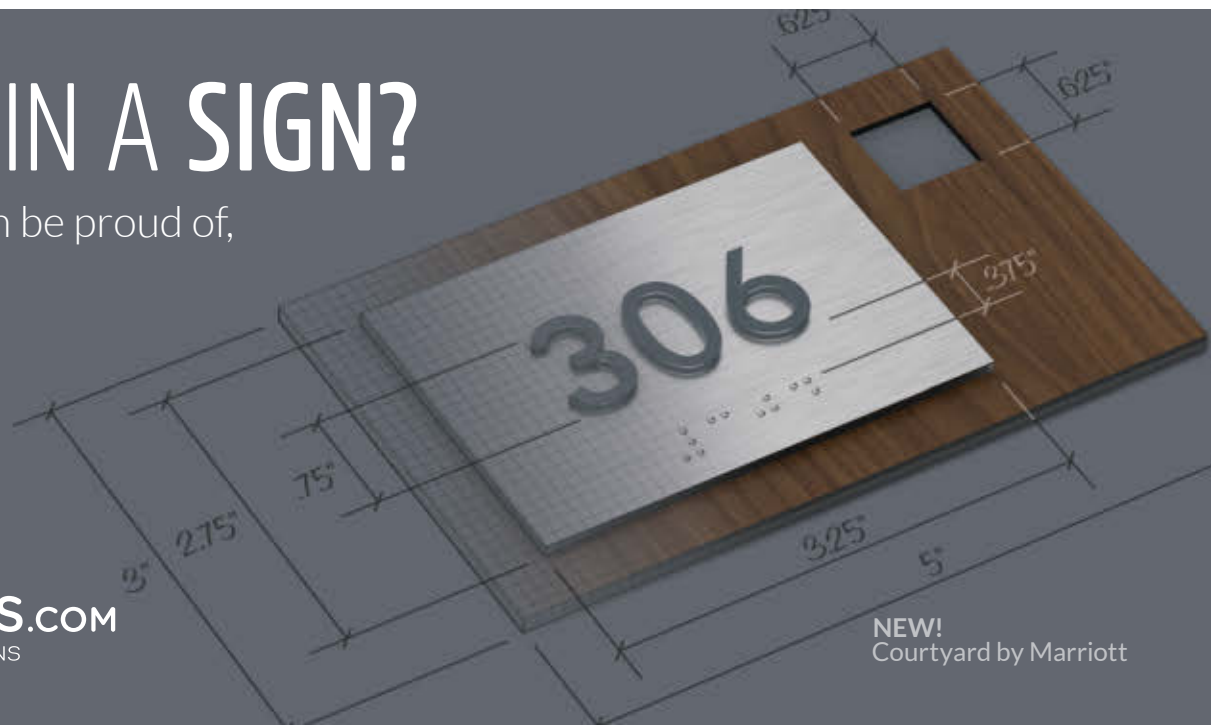
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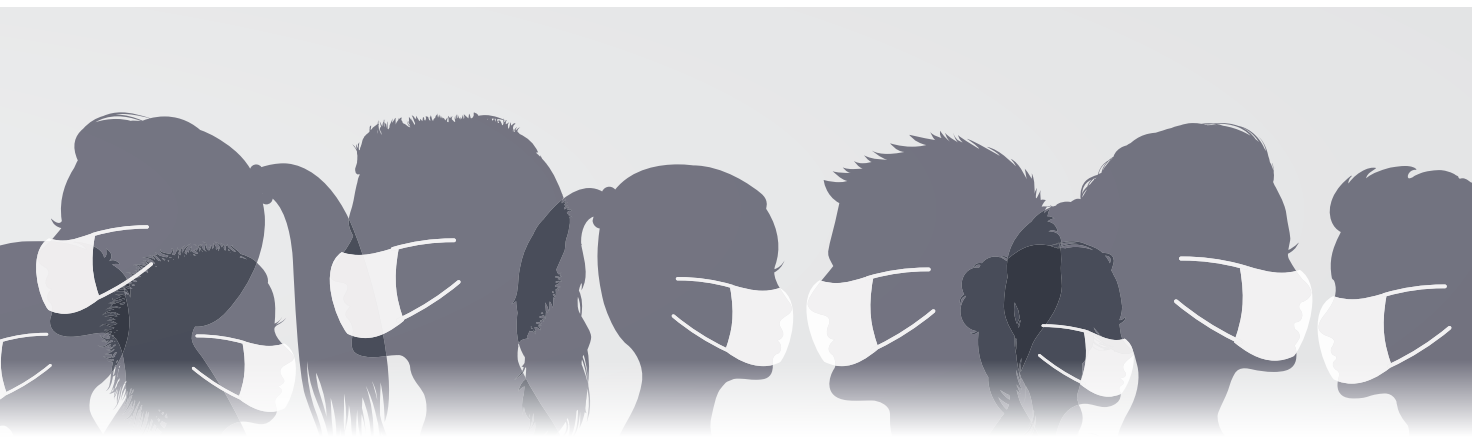
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LENDER CONCERNS

All of those issues come to a head when hotel owners decide whether it makes more sense to close their hotels or stay open. But, often that decision isn't a simple one – especially when it comes to mortgage obligations.

While, as of press time, Montu Patel's have remained open, he said that doesn't mean they haven't stayed empty. "I don't think 99 percent of hotels are staying open because they are profitable. They are staying open because they want to do the right thing," he said. "I also have CMBS debt, and I don't want to break the terms of the loan by closing."

Although Montu Patel and Parth Patel both said that conventional lenders have been largely working with owners to provide some relief, the path is less clear for CMBS loans.

"I'm very concerned because I have CMBS loans," Parth Patel said. "Right now, anyone with a conventional loan, those lenders are working with hotel operators. But CMBS, it's such an unregulated market, so nothing pertains to them."

Even so, Parth Patel has had to temporarily close four of his six hotels. Three of those closed hotels have CMBS loans on them. "Under normal circumstances, that would be a default on the

loan. With CMBS loans, there's probably 50 different ways you can default on the loan," he said. "I've reached out to them and told them we closed. I was upfront. But, your guess is as good as mine. We haven't heard from them to see if there's any relief or if they will let us forgo the mortgage payment."

WORKING WITH BRANDS

Hotel owners also have been concerned about meeting their obligations with their brands as cash flow dramatically drops or halts and fees come due.

"Owners are taking on a lot of the risk, and it's a lot of liability," Chaudhari said. "We have everything on the line."

That means owners have been proactive in communicating with their brand liaisons. And, for the most part, brands are listening and responding.

"I reached out to all of our respective brands that we work with, especially the ones we have had to close. They have mostly been able to work with us, and there were maybe a couple of forms to send in and some questions. We were able to close in a painless manner. Brands have alleviated some brand standards, such as breakfast," Parth Patel said. "But, we are asking the brands to



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— MONTU PATEL, PRESIDENT, INNOVATIVE HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT

do something about fees, and some have. Some have told us we can pay late without penalties.”

However, brand relief is different across the board, he said. The most common change is the elimination or limitation on breakfast. Additionally, he said many brands are allowing owners to defer property improvement plans for a year or more. But again, a big issue for owners remains the inability to pay some fees.

“There are a lot of fixed costs in a franchise fee bill like the system fee and PMS fee. There are a lot of fixed costs, and they have waived some minor ones but not some major ones,” Parth Patel said.

“I can tell you that I don't have the money to pay them,” Montu Patel said. “It's deciding whether I pay those fixed expenses and our employees, or different companies that can help currently.”

HOPE ALONG THE HORIZON

But what Montu said is a silver lining is those brands that are being proactive in their communication with owners. He said he reached out to Hilton's CEO and got a response almost immediately. “That's a huge company, and I'm a pebble in the sand,” he said. “I really think (the brand) is trying to do the right thing just by being in communication, and that helps with the uncertainty that we have.”

And that's important for owners who view their brand relationships as partnerships. “In 36 years of doing this, I have never been late on a payment,” Montu Patel said. “I don't expect any franchisor to default me, because we're all in this together. We as small business owners understand that it is our bricks and sticks that allow franchisors to get paid. Without us, there is no them; it's that simple.”

Chaudhari agreed, adding that small business owners can often feel the weight of many facets of the industry on their shoulders. But still, he remains hopeful.

“We start from nothing, and we are hopeful,” he said. “We have a personal liability and personal responsibility of everything in our business, and we start from little to nothing and could lose everything. But, we are hopeful that time will pass and we will learn something.”

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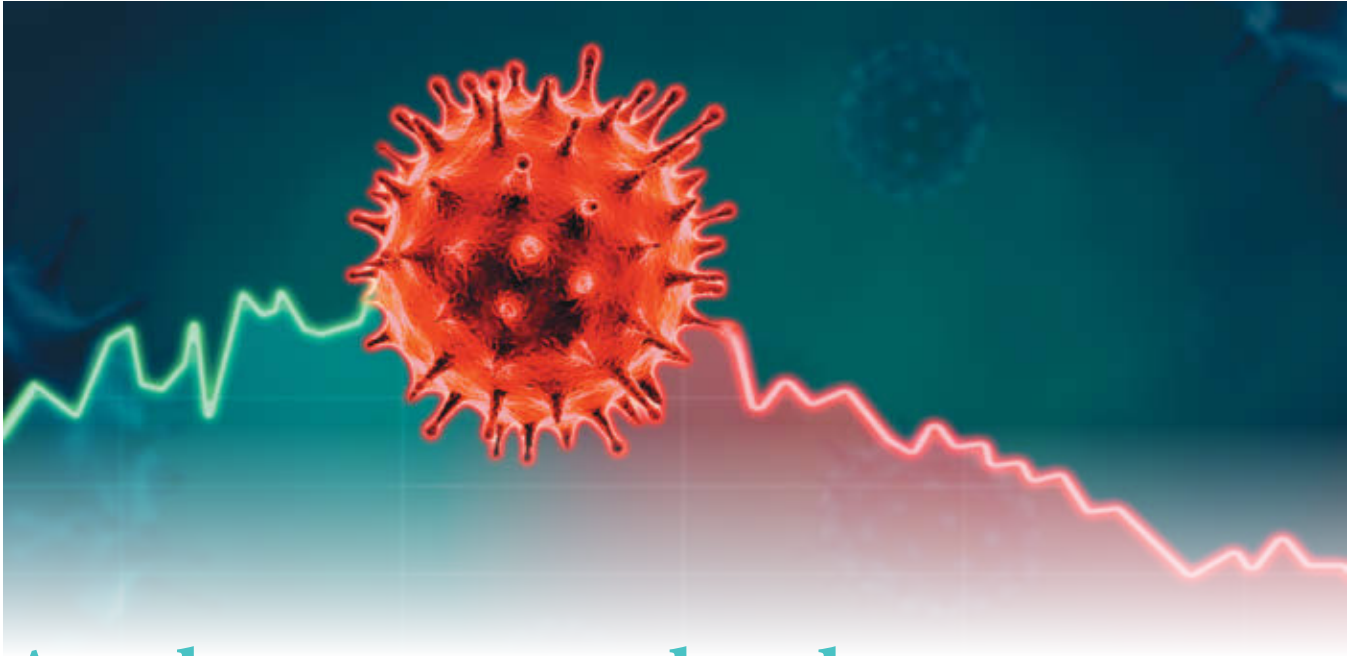
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Are there any steps hotel owners can take to lessen the negative impact of COVID-19 on their financial health?

by RUSHI SHAH

EVERY BUSINESS IN AMERICA has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and we are facing an unprecedented crisis in world history. Today's environment is uncharted territory for most business owners and especially jarring for hoteliers, who have enjoyed robust returns for a long time.

We are in the midst of the very definition of a black swan event. In other words, a high-standard deviation, low-probability event that usually occurs once in a lifetime for an average person. While investing in real estate or any other asset class, investors often look at these types of events as outliers or anomalies, subsequently discarding them from their investment thesis. Hence, they make a mistake of paying a higher price for an asset that merits a lower valuation. Hindsight is of course 20/20, and as they say, markets are efficient. So, most

private and public assets should reflect these risks in their prices.

According to a recent Trepp report, which merges real data and educated assumptions to create predictive models, cumulative losses in the lodging sector may reach as high as 34.8 percent by the time this crisis subsides. This means that within the next 18 months, a staggering 34.8 percent of all hotels will likely face default. Retail is not far behind with predicted cumulative defaults of 16 percent. The federal government has stepped up to put money into citizen's pockets and provide financial relief for businesses. But with every industry facing an immense magnitude of losses at the same time, it can only do so much. Not to mention it also must navigate the political obstacles (especially for our current administration) of appearing to favor hospitality over other industries.

Considering these significant challenges, it is imperative that hotel owners proactively address their current financial situation in a thoughtful, logical, and rational manner. Otherwise, they risk losing their hard-earned assets to creditors and bondholders. There are steps hotel owners can take, but available tactics will depend on the type of financing currently in place.

WHAT BANKS AND OTHER BALANCE SHEET LENDERS CAN OFFER

Conventional balance sheet lenders such as regional and local banks, and credit unions are more inclined to be flexible in deferring payments for a short period of time (typically three months with a possible three-month extension, if needed) because their loans are full recourse. These entities understand and can quantify their

ability to recover these loans when the market improves. Additionally, these lenders are simply adding the interest to the back end of the loans, in most cases charging interest on interest. Similarly, SBA loans are backed by the full faith and guarantee of the federal government. Thanks to the extensive stimulus package signed by the federal government, SBA lenders are compelled to waive interest and principal payments for six months. The federal government announced that it will make debt service payments for six months for all current and new SBA loans, which, I believe, is an extremely accommodative stance on its part.

WHAT MOTIVATES COMMERCIAL MORTGAGE-BACKED SECURITIES (CMBS) INVESTORS

Unlike bank and SBA loans, CMBS loans are packaged into bonds and sold to private bond holders. This mechanism has increased the availability of non-recourse capital for hotels in secondary and tertiary markets, and enabled borrowers to secure attractive, long-term financing without personal guarantees while also monetizing the value they had built up as cash out. Those bonds are further bifurcated into controlling class and non-controlling class of bonds. The controlling class is typically owned by the b-piece buyers, who assume the lion's share of risk. Some examples of b-piece buyers are Rialto, Ellington, Prime, KKR, Eightfold, Torchlight, C-III, and Argentic. This is important in today's crisis, because if b-piece buyers fail to collect debt service on these loans, they could lose their principal balance. To protect their investment, b-piece buyers nominate special servicers (either owned/controlled by them or a third party) that the primary or master servicer (where payments normally are sent and who has no authority to make changes to the loan) can invoke to review and grant any changes to the loan. At the time of this writing, the special servicers have not come out with any wholesale guidance on how to handle the current COVID-19 triggered crisis. For CMBS borrowers who were in good standing on the loan prior to the crisis, however, the

special services may grant a forbearance or deferment up to 120 days as a temporary reprieve. Consequently, it is likely in a CMBS borrower's best interest to have their loan moved to special servicing. Another approach that has worked is to ask the CMBS servicers to apply any collected reserves toward the loan payments. This eliminates the need to move the loan to special servicing.

Despite the inflexibility of the servicers, as we enter into a prolonged slow period, hotel owners with non-recourse CMBS loans may actually be in a better position compared to assets with full recourse loans. CMBS borrowers benefited from the valuable tax-free cash outs that allowed them to grow their portfolios, longer-term savings from low interest rates and increased cash flow due to longer amortizations, all without the burden of personal guarantees. In addition, at the time of origination, the valuation for most assets that were administered for CMBS loans were likely higher than what they would typically get with a local appraisal. Furthermore, the borrower holds the negotiating leverage with a non-recourse loan. If the CMBS lender refuses to negotiate, the borrower can simply give back the asset and the lender cannot go after the borrower's personal assets. This is starkly different from a guaranteed loan, where the borrower's personal wealth is always on the hook to satisfy the loan. Looking back at the 2008 market crisis, the borrowers that avoided massive personal losses were those with non-recourse loans.

WHAT CMBS BORROWERS CAN DO TO SEEK RELIEF

If you have a CMBS loan and are in distress, it is critical that you communicate with your primary/master servicer as soon as possible to provide a compelling reason to transfer your loan to special servicing or request to apply reserves for payment. In addition, be sure to ask for temporary crisis-related payment relief. When requesting to defer payments or be granted forbearance, you must offer reasonable structure in exchange, so the

RELIEF FOR CMBS BORROWERS

Communication is key. When requesting special servicing from your primary servicer, be sure to include the following information:

- State your loan number, asset name, and location clearly.
- Describe your situation in detail – succinctly and quantitatively.
- Compare and contrast your asset before the COVID-19 pandemic, how it is now, and your post-crisis expectations.
- Include data to back up your claims. Provide your good history, positive guest satisfaction score, quality reports on your property, pre-crisis STR, and compare your situation to your peers.



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lender knows you have no intention of defaulting in the long run.

In your communication, include your loan number, the name of the asset, and the location of your asset very clearly. Describe the situation succinctly, specifically, and quantitatively. Demonstrate how your asset performed pre-crisis, how your asset is doing now, and how you expect your asset to perform post-crisis. Include as much data as possible to back up your assertions. For example, compare current PACE reports with the same period in 2019. Include cancellation data and cash flow projections for the immediate future. Be sure to highlight your good history, guest satisfaction scores, and quality reports of the hotel. Include your RevPAR penetration per your pre-crisis STR report before crisis, and your current ranking compared to your peers. Also address any recent capital expenditures you've put into your asset. Finally, address what is happening locally and show that if it weren't for the COVID-19 crisis, your hotel would otherwise be fine.

HOW NEW GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS CAN HELP

Prudent hotel owners who are committed to holding onto their properties should ensure they have enough cash to withstand the current business shutdown brought on by this crisis, as well as the likely ongoing economic slowdown. The federal government also is stepping in to help. Through its various SBA programs and authority, it has rolled out and expanded several programs

to help all business owners to its maximum ability. Hotel owners can take advantage of three specific programs to help alleviate short-term cash flow needs.

ECONOMIC INJURY DISASTER LOAN

Hotel owners can apply for an Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) directly through the SBA. This program provides loans up to \$2 million based on 50 percent of 2019 gross revenue.

PAYCHECK PROTECTION PROGRAM

The Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) within the CARES Act offers non-recourse, non-collateralized loans for 2.5 times the average monthly payroll up to a maximum of \$10 million for companies with 500 employees or less. The loan is designed to retain workers and can be used to cover payroll, health care benefits, mortgage interest, rent, and utility payments. It is 100 percent non-recourse, unsecured, and fully forgivable.

SBA EXPRESS LOANS

The SBA Express Loans for Working Capital under the CARES Act provides loans up to \$1 million (increased from \$350,000) with 36-hour approvals. Hotel owners can apply for PPP and the SBA Express Loans through SBA-designated banks or intermediaries with pre-existing relationships with SBA lenders. All of these new programs, and any existing SBA programs, will waive six months of debt service. These loans can help cover most limited-service hotels for a short-term disruption in operations.

To further improve their chances of success, hotel owners can leverage expert resources, such as an experienced financing intermediary or a restructuring specialist. Resources are available and willing to help. Having an expert who understands CMBS, has relationships with SBA lenders and their programs, and can serve as an advocate can be a positive game-changer as owners navigate these challenging times. ■

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

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

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Opportunity Zones are crucial as the economy rebuilds

by ALFREDO ORTIZ



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IN ITS WAKE, THE GREAT Recession left behind neighborhoods and communities that severely lacked economic stability. But tucked in the pages of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act – 2017 legislation that implemented pro-growth fiscal measures – was an added breath of fresh air for these areas: Opportunity Zones.

Similarly, the COVID-19 outbreak has caused uncertainty and instability. In the months ahead, Opportunity Zones will become extremely important as businesses look to rebuild, and the economy regains its footing amid economic challenges the virus left behind.

By using both federal and state tax incentives to attract long-term investment and economic activity to low-income areas, Opportunity Zones are a win for investors, business owners, and communities. Through tax incentives, Opportunity Zones encourage businesses to invest, build, and hire in distressed areas in need of an economic kick-start.

WHAT DO THE NUMBERS SAY?

There are more 8,700 designated Opportunity Zones across the country that are in need of economic reform.

A report released by the Economic Innovation Group finds that one in six Americans live in an economically distressed community. These areas are disproportionately impacted by economic downturns, losing 6 percent of their jobs and a similar amount of business establishments between 2011 and 2015. Individuals living in these areas often have a family income of 37 percent below the state median.

While the statistics are not yet available, it is understood that similar – if not higher – numbers will be the result of the most recent pandemic.

After the Great Recession, the lack of economic investment created a domino effect that led to high unemployment rates and stagnant wages. The inclusion of Opportunity Zones was a necessary addition to the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act that created a market approach to helping these communities get back on their feet. And, so far, the program has shown promise.



In the months ahead, Opportunity Zones will become extremely important as businesses look to rebuild, and the economy regains its footing amid economic challenges the virus left behind.”

APPLIED SUCCESS

Individuals and businesses large and small are taking advantage of the programs. According to Novogradac, a tax-advising firm, \$6.7 billion has been invested in low-income communities across the nation through Opportunity Zones.

In Ohio, otherwise taxable capital gains have been reinvested into 85 new businesses. On top of federal incentives, the Buckeye state offers an additional 10-percent tax credit, saving investors \$240 million by opening businesses in Opportunity Zones. A developer in Arizona recently broke ground on a \$75-million mixed-use development. This long-term investment will offer housing, offices, and restaurant space in a low-income area, sparking economic stability.

In Twin Falls, Idaho, an old clinic has been purchased with the plans to turn the Opportunity Zone area into a charter school with apartments next door. In Colorado Springs, hotels are being built in Opportunity Zones, filling a void of much-needed lodging options for the growing area.

Even small business owners benefit greatly from these incentives. In South Carolina, Victor Fuewell opened a shoe store in an Opportunity Zone. He has had such success that he plans to open a car wash next door.

Additionally, the Economic Development Administration (EDA) is granting a Pennsylvania county \$5.6 million to a designated Opportunity Zone. Local stakeholders also are projected to contribute \$1.4 million. It's expected to create 240 employment opportunities and retain 1,300 jobs, improving the lives of nearly 120,000 residents.

As progress to rebuild businesses and communities continues in the coming

months, Opportunity Zones will be more important than ever before. As the country returns to its normal routine, businesses and investors will be taking advantage of the incentives that this program provides.

Additionally, these low-income communities will need the support and stability of good paying jobs to help many get back on their feet. Other building projects that are in the works will provide lodging for tourists to help local economies. As the economy rebuilds, Opportunity Zones will provide a financial oasis for investors and builders who are looking for long-term ventures that will benefit them greatly in the years ahead.

THE AMERICAN DREAM LIVES ON

Opportunity Zones make the American Dream a realistic achievement for all individuals, despite where they live or their economic situation. As investors, business owners, and entrepreneurs continue to reinvest in communities that need the extra support, they are doing much more than growing their business or improving their personal economic standing; they are shaping communities for decades to come.

Small businesses, franchisees, and first-time investors should take great advantage of the financial support the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 provided with this legislative program. Many individuals and families will benefit.

As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “America is another name for opportunity.” Opportunity Zones help to make that characterization a reality. ■

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

Des Moines

by ASIF LAKHANI



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THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC has put life as we know (or knew) it on pause not only for Americans but also for people all around the globe. It seems as if every industry has been impacted by the virus, some feeling it worse than others. Tourism companies and the hospitality businesses are among some of the hardest hit by COVID-19. As a result, travel bureaus around the country are working to create solutions to help restaurateurs and hoteliers during this tough time.

In Des Moines, IA, sustainable measures have been put in place to ensure that hospitality, leisure, and tourism businesses

are not neglected by local governments or consumers. The capital city's tourism and travel bureau, Catch Des Moines, has been leading the charge.

When knowledge of the pandemic and its potential impact became known to the general public in mid-March 2020, Catch CEO Greg Edwards wrote a letter to hotel executives in the Greater Des Moines area assuring them that they are still viewed as "the biggest asset of our tourism community." Edwards also announced the roll-out of his team's crisis plan that is being enacted to mitigate the impact the virus has and will have on their businesses.

One element of the crisis plan is informing companies under Catch's umbrella

about the Iowa Small Business Relief Program, developed by the Iowa Economic Development Authority, about grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$25,000 to cover costs, defer eligible taxes, and waive interest penalties for disrupted businesses. Debt relief and bridge loans are being offered as well.

Catch Des Moines has increased its communications frequency, sending a "Des Good News" newsletter about feel-good stories from the community out weekly and driving a new social media initiative with the hashtags #DSMLocalChallenge and #CATCHdsmllocal for people to show their support and provide updates for local organizations. The hashtags had four million impressions from Friday to Sunday on

the first weekend they were rolled out. A local tech company also set up the website 515local.com for restaurants to post their hours, availability, and more in one place.


The self-proclaimed “fastest growing area in the Midwest,” Des Moines, IA, also might be the region’s best kept secret. While more than a million visitors come annually for the state fair, there are more than a dozen other sites for visitors to see and opportunities for hoteliers to invest and grow.

Tourism generated \$2.2 billion in total spending from 13.7 million visitors in 2016, according to Catch’s data. The average age of visitors to Des Moines was 42.1, with women slightly edging out male travelers percentage-wise. Roughly 5.2 million of the travelers were overnight stays, however, while 8.5 million just made day trips. This could be attributed to Des Moines being less than a six-hour drive from Chicago, St. Louis, and Milwaukee.

There are currently 13,000 hotel rooms in the Greater Des Moines area, Edwards said. Hotels had about 65-percent occupancy for an ADR of \$105/night, he added. Conference and banquet room rentals are exempt from Iowa’s 5-percent excise tax on room rentals, up to 7 percent in taxes on hotels/motels, and 6-percent sales tax, per the Iowa Dept. of Revenue.

Des Moines plans to bring seven new hotels with about 800 total rooms online in the next few years, Edwards says. One of the biggest hotel projects is a Hilton renovation to an early 1900s historic building originally known as Hotel Fort Des Moines, to which the Downtown Des Moines (DSM) development authority contributed \$37 million. The finished property will be rebranded as the Hilton Hotel Fort Des Moines – a part of the Curio Collection – and have 290 rooms. It is scheduled to open later this year. Hilton also is bringing a 98-room hotel to the edge of downtown Des Moines with a grand opening targeted for 2021, according to the *Des Moines Register*. The \$15.5-million hotel will be part of the Tru by Hilton brand and is the company’s second hotel of its kind in Iowa. Tru by Hilton hotels are designed to have playful atmospheres and emphasize affordability and sustainability to draw


INVESTMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR HOTELIERS TO KEEP IN MIND IN DES MOINES:



UNDER CONSTRUCTION

The Lauridsen Skatepark will be the home to the largest outdoor skatepark and will be equipped to host major competitions.

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DEVELOPMENT

The city agreed to provide \$2 million in a tax increment finance grant to developers.

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EVENTS

Des Moines has hosted large events, such as the USA Gymnastics Championships, increasing the need for hotel rooms.

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younger professionals. Element by Westin plans to open a brand-new 112-room hotel in Des Moines’ East Village by summer 2021, according to the *Register*. The city agreed to contribute \$2 million in a tax increment finance grant to developers. The total cost of construction is roughly \$21.5 million, per the report. **As of press time, most hotel construction was scheduled to continue despite COVID-19 slowdowns.**

In terms of other development, the Greater Des Moines Partnership’s Downtown Des Moines initiative has invested \$3 billion into development in the past 10 years and proudly boasts “an average of 40 ongoing development projects happening at any given time.” Development incentives include revolving loans (using repayments from outstanding loans for other businesses), site development, tax abatement, land banking, and more.

From an annual tourism perspective, the biggest draw of all is the annual Iowa State Fair, which has had more than one million visitors every year since 2002, according to the event committee. **This year’s event was scheduled to take place August 13-23. Des Moines also planned to host the 70.3 Ironman Triathlon for three consecutive years starting in June 2020. The effect of the pandemic on both events is unknown at this time. In the**

past, Des Moines has held other marquee events such as *Hamilton* and March Madness in addition to agriculture conferences and more.

There are also hundreds of miles of trails to explore in the Greater Des Moines region. Des Moines also will be home to the largest outdoor skatepark in the country once the Lauridsen Skatepark officially opens in downtown. The 88,000-square-foot skatepark, located alongside the picturesque Des Moines River, has been in the works for years and had its \$6.3-million price tag paid via fundraisers, donations, and grants. The skatepark has the capacity to host major competitions and accommodate 40,000+ visitors a year, according to a newspaper report. The city has hosted multiple rounds of the NCAA Men’s Basketball Tournament in the past as well.

Prior to the pandemic, Des Moines was gaining traction as a secret gem of the Midwest because of its affordability, livability, charm, natural scenery, culture, (legitimate) skyline, and emerging prosperity. Once the pandemic subsides, it’s very possible that the Greater Des Moines region could become the next great American destination for those reasons in addition to its urban planning and development potential. ■

How employers can thrive despite COVID-19

by VANESSA PATEL



AS THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC CONTINUES to impact the country, hoteliers are facing unprecedented challenges. Many of you have had to make difficult staffing decisions to adjust to the new normal. Below are tips to help you cope and prepare your hospitality business for success during and after the pandemic.

FURLOUGHS

If you have furloughed employees (placed employees on a temporary unpaid leave of absence), you should assess ongoing obligations under the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) Act and its counterparts in your states. Review applicable health insurance

plans to determine the extent of available benefits for furloughed employees and discuss any needed changes with your insurer so you may continue providing benefits to your employees during the furlough period. If you terminate or lay off an employee while on a furlough, ensure proper legal protocols are followed, including providing notices and paying wages or accrued paid leave, as required by state or federal laws.

COMMUNICATION WITH EMPLOYEES

The pandemic has likely led to stress, confusion, and panic for your employees. The uncertainty of the situation only compounds matters. Check on the well-being

of your staff and take steps to maintain their loyalty so they are ready to come back to work as you resume full operations. Reinforce that you intend to resume full operations as soon as possible to build employees' confidence.

LEAVES AND ACCOMMODATIONS FOR EMPLOYEES

For current employees, ensure compliance with the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA). The FFCRA is in effect through at least Dec. 31, 2020. In evaluating requests for leaves or accommodations by employees, also ensure compliance with the Family and Medical Leave Act and state counterparts, if applicable, as well as the Americans with Disabilities

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Act (ADA). Concerns under these laws may arise if an employee requests personal or family leave or an accommodation for a COVID-19-related reason. Note that not all regulations will apply to you and exemptions from the requirements may be available. Finally, hoteliers should gather and maintain proper documentation to claim applicable tax credits.

RECALLING EMPLOYEES

As you resume operations, consider which employees will be called back to work and ensure a process that is free from the potential for unequal treatment or impact. Create a process that is based solely on legitimate, business-related reasons, and follow that process. Review pay and salaries for exempt and non-exempt

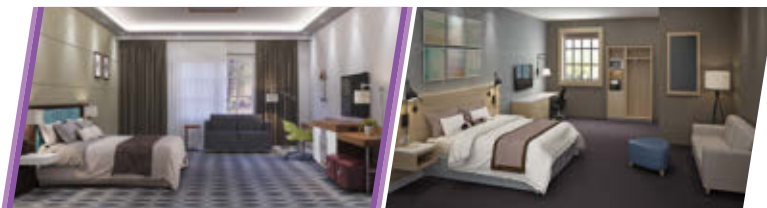


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employees and job classifications, and determine if adjustments are needed to comply with applicable wage and related laws. As you resume full operations, ensure your property complies with the Occupational Health and Safety Act, as well as other local, state, and federal requirements, and guidance from the CDC.

EMPLOYEE AGREEMENTS/ EMPLOYMENT HANDBOOKS

This is an ideal time to assess employee agreements and ensure your employee handbooks and workplace policies and procedures are updated. Many may need to be updated based upon changes made to your workforce and employment policies as a result of COVID-19. Prepare now to make those changes so revised documents are ready as you resume business.

TITLE III OF THE ADA

Hoteliers are likely familiar with the onslaught of Title III litigation against business owners in the recent years. Take this time to assess your property for compliance with the applicable building standards and plan for any needed improvements. Additionally, review all websites, including third-party booking websites, and ensure those websites comply with applicable standards. Taking these simple steps will help you avoid litigation in the future. ■

Vanessa Patel is an attorney with the international firm Ogletree, Deakins, Nash, Smoak & Stewart, P.C., based in the Tampa, FL office. She regularly guides and defends employers throughout the country. Ms. Patel may be contacted at vanessa.patel@ogletreedeakins.com or 813-221-7440.



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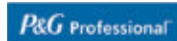
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1



2



3



4



5

1. Regional Director Mayur (Mike) Patel, Female Director Western Division Nimisha Patel, and Female Director Eastern Division Lina Patel held a Women Hoteliers Town Hall in Coppell, TX.
2. Central Midwest Regional Director Hitesh Patel hosted the first Dinner & Learns sponsored by O'Connor & Associates in Oklahoma City and Ardmore, where attendees learned how to save money on their property taxes.
3. Southwest Regional Director Imesh Vaidya hosted his first Dinner & Learn sponsored by O'Connor & Associates in Denver.
4. Washington DC Area Regional Director Sandip Patel, Director at Large Jayesh D. Patel, and the Regional Ambassadors hosted a Town Hall in Washington, D.C.
5. Southwest Regional Director Imesh Vaidya hosted a Dinner & Learn sponsored by O'Connor & Associates in Phoenix.



6



7

- 6. North Carolina Regional Director Akshat Patel and the Regional Ambassadors hosted a Town Hall in Fayetteville.
- 7. AAHOA Lifetime Member Nila Patel spoke on the main stage of the Radisson Hotel Group's Americas Business conference. The panel discussion focused on tips for training, leadership development, and keeping staff engaged.



8A



8B



9A



9B

- 8A. North Central Regional Director Bhavesh Patel and Female Director Eastern Division Lina Patel co-hosted a Dinner & Learn sponsored by O'Connor & Associates in Dayton, Ohio.
- 8B. Women hoteliers turned out in force for the Dinner & Learn sponsored by O'Connor & Associates in Dayton, Ohio.
- 9A. AAHOA Ambassador Priyesh Patel and Fort Bend County, TX, Judge KP George were on hand for the Small Independent Motel Association (SIMA) event.
- 9B. Bharat Patel (from left) and AAHOA Ambassador Priyesh Patel with Sri Preston Kulkarni, who won the Democratic primary for the Texas 22nd Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives and hopes to become the first Indian American Congressman.
- 10. Former South Carolina Regional Director Mahesh Patel (left) and current South Carolina Regional Director Chetan (Chet) Patel met former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley during the campaign kickoff event for Congressman Ralph Norman.



10

The Lodging Conference 2020

Stay Well - See You In September

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

As this issue goes to print, our nation, and our industry are reeling from the effects of COVID-19. I've been on the phone with industry leaders from AAHOA, AHLA, as well as hundreds of hotel owners, and service providers. It is clear to me that our industry leaders are doing everything they can to ensure the viability and survival of our great hotel industry.

Our industry went through a similar test in the wake of 9/11. The result was that a resilient industry emerged even stronger. On September 11th, we had to postpone The 7th Annual edition of The Lodging Conference which was to begin on that day. The result was an even larger conference just months later. Similarly, the industry emerged stronger after the financial crisis of 2008. With this in mind, I have no doubt that we will survive and emerge stronger.

We look forward to seeing all of you this September in Phoenix where we can gather, engage, exchange strategies, hold up a glass and toast each other and our extraordinary hospitality industry. Until then, please stay out of harm's way and do whatever you can to help AAHOA, AHLA, your employees, colleagues, and clients. We are all in this together.

As always,

Harry Javer
Founder, The Lodging Conference

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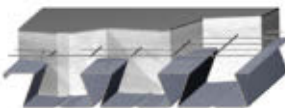
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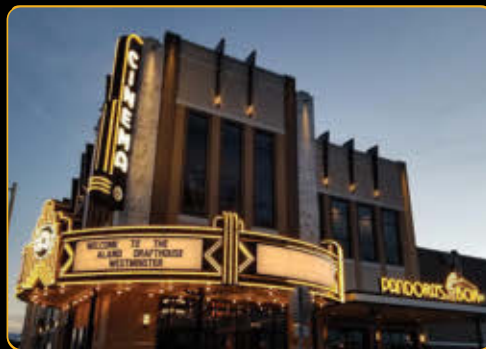
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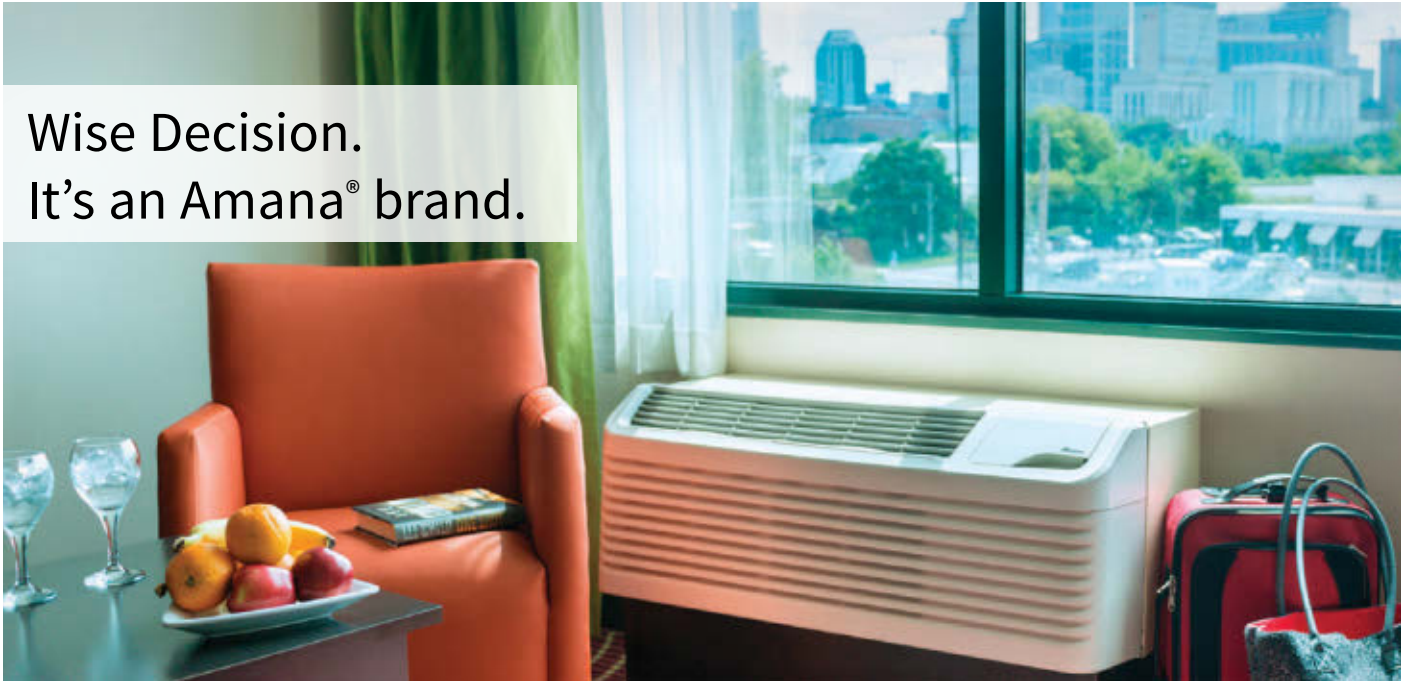
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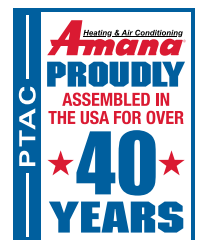
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