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August 2021 | todayshotelier.com

The Official Publication of AAHOA



Looking back, Moving ahead

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Ushers in
a New Era**

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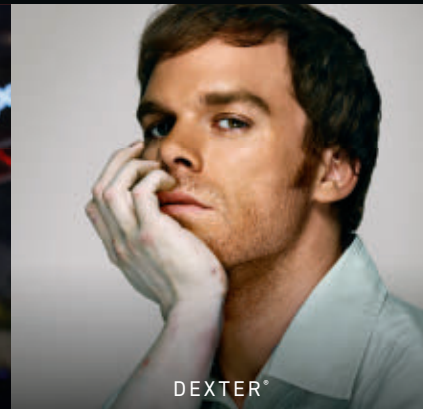
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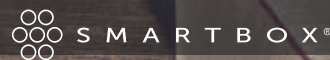
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5 Things To Know About AAHOA This Month



1 AAHOACON21 WILL USHER IN A NEW ERA.

The 2021 AAHOA Convention & Trade Show will bring together the industry for education, networking, and dealmaking. However, it's also the time during which members will elect the 2021-2022 Board of Directors and Vice Chair Vinay Patel becomes Chair of the Board. The AAHOA elections are always electric and momentous, filled with excitement and, sometimes, big surprises. You'll want to be in Dallas when they happen to personally welcome and congratulate our new leaders. www.aahoa.com/2021candidates



2 2021 CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENT SERIES WINDING DOWN.

AAHOA concludes its 2021 Charity Golf Tournament series this month, so it's not too late for you to contribute to our charitable efforts and help make a difference in your community. Our charity golf tournaments are always fun-filled days of competitive golf where you can get some exercise and fresh air, and also network with other industry professionals, all while supporting worthwhile charities and ongoing COVID-19 relief efforts. Find one near you and sign up today! www.aahoa.com/golf

3 REGIONAL SEASON KICKS OFF THIS MONTH.

AAHOA launches its 2021 Regional Conference & Trade Show schedule this month. This year, the regionals will be in-person after going virtual last year because of COVID-19. Our regionals give attendees access to top vendors, incredible networking opportunities, and region-specific industry updates you won't see anywhere else. These events are open to all hotel owners, even if you're not already an AAHOA Member. www.aahoa.com/calendar



4 SAVE THE DATE FOR HX, POWERED BY AAHOA, BECAUSE IT'S BACK!

After the event was canceled in 2020 because of the pandemic, HX: The Hotel Experience Powered by AAHOA is returning to New York City's Javits Center in 2021. Set for November 14-15, the conference and expo bring buyers and sellers together and offers unparalleled opportunities to experience today's must-have hospitality innovations. There also will be a Young Professionals Reception, giving up-and-coming industry professionals the chance to connect with like-minded peers. thehotalexperience.com



5 JOIN AAHOA AND THE INDUSTRY AT THE LODGING CONFERENCE NEXT MONTH!

The Lodging Conference, set for September 27-30 in Phoenix, brings together the hotel industry's most influential owners, operators, presidents, CEOs, and dealmakers to strategize about every aspect of the industry's development, finance, franchising, management, construction, design, and operations. Hear from a full slate of industry experts, including the AAHOA Officers and AAHOA Past Chair Biran Patel, during this unique conference that offers attendees the opportunity to actually participate in the discussions and help solve problems. www.lodgingconference.com ■



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BIRAN PATEL
AAHOA CHAIRMAN (2020-2021)

“
I’m proud to have been at the helm of the Association when we announced the Strategic Plan in January. Our mission will be realized on the foundations we have laid.”

Stronger now than ever before

FRIENDS AND FELLOW AAHOA MEMBERS: SERVING AS THE CHAIRMAN OF THIS GREAT association has been the honor of a lifetime. When I first joined AAHOA in 2003, I encountered a growing group of passionate hoteliers bound together by a collective vision of AAHOA’s boundless potential. Throughout its history, AAHOA has had a strong sense of community – one that unites 20,000 members across the country in pursuit of prosperity, charity, and hospitality. Our strong sense of community is the foundation of the association’s past and the driving force of its future.

AAHOA has a rich history within the hospitality industry. Our new mission statement – to be the foremost resource and advocate for America’s hotel owners – drives us to innovate our services and operations. This mission statement is the essence of the AAHOA 2021-2023 Strategic Plan. In the next three years, AAHOA will serve our members as the foremost source for hotel industry education and information, advancing hoteliers’ business interests through advocacy, being the primary resource for connecting the industry, and attracting, retaining, and developing top talent to the Association. It is an ambitious yet worthy endeavor. I’m proud to have been at the helm of the Association when we announced the strategic plan in January, and I believe that our mission and vision will be realized on the foundations we have laid.

As we look to the future and envision the heights AAHOA can ascend, we will often revisit the events of the past year as reminders of our strength and resilience. The pandemic upended our industry unlike any crisis before it, and AAHOA Members rallied together to confront challenges in their businesses and communities. Hoteliers gave out free meals, distributed vital PPE, and even now continue to fundraise for causes both at home and abroad. AAHOA was called upon to lead the industry in trying times, and we demonstrated what we are capable of. We showed the world that we are AAHOASTRONG.

The spirit of the AAHOA community embodies the best of our past and makes us stronger for the future. Today and every day you are a part of AAHOA, I encourage you all to engage with one another, lift each other up, and drive the innovations needed on the road to recovery. The work we do is not possible without the time and energy many pour into the Association. I extend my sincere gratitude to the AAHOA Board of Directors, the past AAHOA Chairs, our Ambassadors, Committee members, our Industry Partners, and the countless others who make AAHOA what it is today. As I conclude my term as AAHOA Chairman, I know that we are in very good hands. Vinay Patel will excel as the new Chair, and I wish him utmost success.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve this great association. ■

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KEN GREENE
AAHOA INTERIM
PRESIDENT & CEO

“
AAHOA
Members have
played a huge
role in my life
and early on
in my career.
Many have told
me what my
peers haven't
done or haven't
done well.”

When one group is targeted, we're all targeted

DURING THE PAST FEW MONTHS, WE'VE SEEN A RISE IN HATE CRIMES IN THE U.S. and around the world. The FBI released data in late 2020 showing hate crimes in America rose to the highest level in more than a decade. The Oxford dictionary defines hate crimes as ones motivated by prejudice on the basis of ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or similar grounds. We've seen countless stories in the news lately where people from all backgrounds were targeted for simply being who they are.

As an organization founded due to discrimination, it behooves us to speak out. AAHOA was created in 1989 in response to Asian American hoteliers facing discrimination within the industry, specifically from insurance companies and banks. Despite these barriers and obstacles, AAHOA and its founding leaders helped launch its member hoteliers to a new level of economic success.

Years ago, in 2003, at my first AAHOACON in Long Beach, CA, I remember meeting hundreds, if not thousands, of AAHOA Members. Many of them took me under their wing and helped guide me as I navigated the hospitality field. AAHOA Members have played a huge role in my life and early on in my career. Many have told me what my peers haven't done or haven't done well. Not only did we build professional networks together, but we became lifelong friends.

It's hard to imagine that not long ago, the generations before them were not afforded that same guidance because of prejudices. And it's a shame that in 2021 we're still seeing people suffer for their uniqueness, but I see these statistics as an opportunity. We cannot, and will not, accept a culture of silence. The time is now for AAHOA to give back and make a difference. It's obvious how far we've come as an association, but if the FBI's data teaches us anything, it's that we have a lot of work to do when it comes to addressing hate and discrimination in America.

Much of my success can be attributed to my connections with members early on in my career. Now, I want to return the favor. AAHOA is truly an example of the American Dream; we have a rich history of persevering. I'm committed to being accessible, listening to your stories, and doing the right thing. I'm looking forward to reconnecting and leading the way, proving AAHOA is a leader in the industry, and beyond.

Throughout my first month as Interim President & CEO of AAHOA, I traveled all over the country and met and connected with members at industry events and AAHOA Town Halls. With AAHOACON21 just days away, the first in-person convention since 2019, it's a chance for us all to reconvene with friends, old and new. It's time to network, learn, and get inspired. Now is my chance to do for AAHOA Members what they once did for me, and I am committed to that.

When one group is targeted, we're all targeted. AAHOA's familiarity with discrimination makes us more empathetic and understanding to the needs of our members and the hoteliers we serve. If thousands of people congregating at AAHOACON21 is a testament to anything, it's a symbol for all the success and the strong will of those who had to overcome difficult obstacles and break through discriminatory conditions.

See you there. ■

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AAHOA and AHLA launch the



by SEAN GROSSNICKLE

A AHOA AND AMERICAN HOTEL & LODGING ASSOCIATION (AHLA), the preeminent national hotel and lodging associations, announced the launch of the American Hospitality Alliance (AHA) in late June at the International Society of Hotel Association's meeting in Boston, Massachusetts. The vision for AHA was years in the making and built on the expertise, resources, and long-standing partnerships AAHOA and AHLA maintain with state lodging associations. The AHA will strategically focus on advancing policies and political relationships vital to hoteliers at the state and local levels. As the hospitality industry recovers from the pandemic's devastating effects, the AHA will engage with legislators to advocate for policies that address the slate of issues pressing hoteliers today, from COVID-19 economic recovery to drive-by lawsuits.

MISSION

The AHA was established to elevate all facets of the hospitality industry at the state and local levels. Building on AAHOA, AHLA, and leading state hospitality associations' expertise, resources, and connections, the AHA will proactively identify key issues and bring together industry members, legislators, and lobbyists to advance critical policies in areas of importance around the country.

ADVOCACY

The AHA has already engaged in multiple advocacy areas across the country. With 10 years of industry growth stunted by the pandemic, economic recovery and the ongoing labor shortage are two of the topline issues. In the AHA's launch announcement,

the Alliance notes "COVID-19 liability, relief, and recovery, illegal short-term rentals, drive-by lawsuits, tax reform, and workforce" as the principal topics for engagement.

AHA was designed to pivot quickly and efficiently to address state and local issues important to the industry. In an interview published by Hotel Management's Jena Tesse Fox, Ken Greene, AAHOA Interim President & CEO, outlined the Alliance's strategy to confront new issues that may arise in two to three years. "The idea is to accelerate the advocacy efforts that we've all been doing [but maybe were doing] in a fragmented way and not necessarily always in a coordinated way. We can start to accelerate, getting positive change to happen," Greene said.¹

STRUCTURE

AAHOA and AHLA are co-chairs of the AHA with Ken Greene of AAHOA and Chip Rogers of AHLA steering the Alliance Advisory Board. Seventeen industry representatives and staff from AAHOA and AHLA are serving one-year terms on the advisory board and will direct the Alliance's policy priorities and initiatives with input from the Alliance's membership. More than 40 state and local lodging associations have joined the AHA since it launched. For more information, visit the AHA's official website at www.AmericanHospitalityAlliance.com. ■

¹ Fox, Jena Tesse. (2021, June 28). *AHLA, AAHOA partner to create new advocacy alliance*. Hotel Management. <https://www.hotelmanagement.net/operate/ahla-aahoa-partner-create-new-advocacy-alliance>.

The Save Hotel Jobs Act introduced in both chambers of Congress

by SEAN GROSSNICKLE

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

THE ISSUE

After a year of lockdowns, Americans are once again hitting the road to enjoy the summer travel season. State and local restrictions have been lifted across the country and more than 150 million adults have received vaccinations, spurring a wave of domestic travel. Unfortunately, thousands of hospitality businesses, from restaurants to hotels, have yet to recover the millions of jobs lost throughout the pandemic.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that three million leisure and hospitality jobs lost during the past year have not yet returned. Even as the industry experiences a slight economic upturn, many AAHOA Members are struggling to recruit and retain employees. AAHOA conducted a survey in May to gather insights on the ongoing labor shortage and the employment situation among our members. In the AAHOA Hospitality Labor Report, more than 95% of survey respondents reported job openings at their properties. In an effort to attract new talent, 96% of respondents have raised wages for their open positions.

COMMON GROUND

Rep. Charlie Crist (D-FL) and Sen. Brian Schatz (D-HI) introduced the Save Hotel Jobs Act in their respective chambers, sponsoring two pieces of companion legislation that provide hotel owners with up to \$20 million to assist with up to three months of payroll costs and other measures to ensure laid-off employees can return to their positions safely and promptly. Rep. Crist (D-FL) introduced the bill on the House floor in April, and it has since gained the support of 20 co-sponsors from both sides of the aisle. The Save Hotel Jobs Act offers targeted relief to hospitality workforce through payroll grants, recall rights, and PPE credits. AAHOA and our industry partners thank Rep. Crist (D-FL), Sen. Schatz (D-HI), and the other members of Congress for their continued support for the Save Hotel Jobs Act. As we continue down the road to recovery, AAHOA is firmly committed to work alongside lawmakers to address this developing challenge through community engagement and sound public policies. ■



Rep. Charlie Crist (D-FL), Sponsor of the Save Hotel Jobs Act

“These unprecedented times call for unprecedented support. Hotels and hotel employees across the country, and especially in Florida, are still reeling from the pandemic. I’m proud to introduce legislation, supported by both our unions and our hotels, to help this critical Florida industry get back on its feet.”

Sen. Biran Schatz (D-HI), Sponsor of the Save Hotel Jobs Act

“The pandemic has left millions of hotel employees out of work and many more struggling to get by with fewer hours. They need help. Our bill creates a new grant program that will bring back hotel jobs, pay workers, and help our economy recover.”

Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), Co-sponsor of the Save Hotel Jobs Act

“Hyper-partisanship is the single biggest threat facing our nation. Bipartisanship is the only remedy that will save and heal our nation. Which of these paths one chooses determines whether they desire to be part of the problem or part of the solution. If one chooses partisanship and condemns those who think differently, they are part of the problem. If one chooses bipartisanship and seeks to build bridges with those who think differently, they are part of the solution. I have chosen, and will continue to choose, the path of bipartisanship and problem solving because I love the United States of America, the greatest country on Earth.”

Tried and true lessons in travel pave the way forward

Craig Davis, President & CEO of VisitDallas, shares his thoughts on what hoteliers can expect as guests begin to return

by CRAIG DAVIS

ASK SEASONED TRAVELERS FOR ADVICE ON MAKING TRAVEL MORE ENJOYABLE, AND THEY'LL LIKELY SHARE A COUPLE of practical things they've learned along the way. During my time in the industry, here are a couple of the most common themes I have heard.

PLAN AHEAD

First, being prepared will make your travels easier. Second, be flexible. Things don't always happen as scheduled, and sometimes, a Plan B might even exceed the expectations of Plan A. Third, be patient. Often, the best things in life take time. Fourth, always be receptive to trying and learning new things.

During the past 15 months, how often have these same lessons applied to our broader industry? Here in Dallas, our organization has landed on Plan G instead of Plan A more than I would like to admit, and the number of times I've grown frustrated and weary from the uncertainty is countless. But travel teaches tenacity,

rewards endurance, and exemplifies resilience.

As an eternal optimist who has been in this industry for almost three decades, I know firsthand how tough and adaptable we are, so I've remained confident in the safe return of travel. Given this confidence, I knew the pandemic wasn't the time to press pause but was instead an opportunity to continue our work with patience and flexibility.

As the pandemic progressed, research indicated that when the doors of hotels and attractions reopened, travelers would be ready to leave their homes with a spending power rivaling pre-pandemic levels.

At VisitDallas, we chose to continue our marketing,

advertising, and sales efforts, knowing it was important to keep Dallas at the forefront of our visitors' and clients' minds. Like many, we had to scale back given funding limitations, but nevertheless, we persisted to accomplish our goals with reduced resources via new platforms and little bit of extra elbow grease.

STAY THE COURSE

Early in the pandemic, we knew we had to be flexible in the coming months, so VisitDallas led the nation as the first destination to seek the Global Biorisk Advisory Council (GBAC) STAR accreditation, the gold standard for cleaning, disinfection, and infectious-disease prevention protocols. To date,

our convention center, both airports, and several dozen hotels and venues have achieved this stringent accreditation, certifying their facilities as sanitary and safe.

Research indicates that more than half of individuals are ready for convention travel, but still, our VisitDallas-led research shows that 80% of meeting planners from across

all market segments continue to find safety and cleanliness protocols incredibly important as they plan events. Given this information, our GBAC protocols will remain intact at certified locations for the foreseeable future.

This accreditation helped us safely host events during the pandemic, such as the Mecum Auto Auction in October 2020,

and set a foundational standard for what future events, such as AAHOACON21 this month, will look like moving forward as our industry continues to recover.

I've suffered greatly from video-call fatigue since March 2020. Every day, I woke up looking forward to when we could welcome guests back to Dallas. I missed the shared meals, the conversations, and the exchange of ideas. This past year has certainly taught us new lessons, but the foremost for me is this: What we do matters. People gathering in person, experiencing new things, and enjoying life's simplest pleasures are irreplaceable, and for that, we are incredibly fortunate. ■

“What we do matters. People gathering in person, experiencing new things, and enjoying life's simplest pleasures are irreplaceable, and for that, we are incredibly fortunate.”



Craig Davis,
President &
CEO, VisitDallas

Looking back, Moving ahead.

Catching up with the 2020-2021 AAHOA Officers for their insight on the industry as it stands today, where they think it's headed, and AAHOA's role in getting there

by PETER CLERKIN



Biran Patel

Chairman



WHAT HAS AAHOA ACCOMPLISHED DURING THE PAST YEAR THAT YOU'RE MOST PROUD OF?

Biran Patel: I'm incredibly proud of how AAHOA helped hotel owners tackle the unique challenges caused by the pandemic. There were so many questions about the virus, and the economic fallout pushed many businesses to the brink. Our education team created more than 200 webcasts with the majority addressing COVID-specific issues that affected hoteliers and their employees, and we pivoted with virtual events. These provided hoteliers, industry partners, brands, and experts opportunities to remain connected and share information and ideas about how to keep the lights on. To that end, AAHOA was also instrumental in urging the administration to grant affiliation waivers that allowed owners with multiple hotels to secure PPP loans for each property.

WHAT EXCITES YOU MOST ABOUT AAHOA'S 2021-2023 STRATEGIC PLAN?

BP: The commitment to improving communication among hoteliers, vendors, brands, and other industry partners is exciting because it will help our entire industry during the recovery process. More collaboration will help spread good ideas and practices, and it will make our partners more aware of the challenges different parts of our industry are facing. This includes our franchise relations efforts to facilitate better understanding between brands and owners. Their mutual success is dependent on a good working relationship, and communication is key to making that happen.

“

AAHOA was also instrumental in urging the administration to grant affiliation waivers that allowed owners with multiple hotels to secure PPP loans for each property.”

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE HOTELIERS WILL FACE IN THE LATTER PART OF 2021?

BP: The labor shortage is the most pressing challenge hoteliers will face as America reopens. Competition for workers is fierce. The pool of available workers may increase later in the year as more Americans get vaccinated and enhanced unemployment insurance ends in September, but with airline bookings filling up and occupancy rates increasing, hoteliers need to be competitive in attracting and retaining workers.

HOW IS AAHOA FULFILLING ITS VISION TO BE THE FOREMOST ADVOCATE AND RESOURCE FOR AMERICA'S HOTEL OWNERS?

BP: AAHOA's educational offerings are key to helping us fulfill this vision. The Hotel Owners Academy™, AAHOA Human Trafficking Awareness Trainings, our certificate programs, and our library of hundreds of webcasts are valuable resources for hoteliers. Our advocacy efforts connect hoteliers with their lawmakers, and an informed constituent is the best advocate for their interests. AAHOA education is key to helping hoteliers understand and seek legislative remedies for the issues they face.



Vinay Patel

Vice
Chair

WHAT HAS AAHOA ACCOMPLISHED DURING THE PAST YEAR THAT YOU'RE MOST PROUD OF?

Vinay Patel: I am proud of the education that we have provided our members during the toughest times in our lifetime.

DURING YOUR TIME WITH AAHOA, HOW HAVE YOU SEEN THE BOARD SHAPE THE ASSOCIATION'S DIRECTION?

VP: Our Board is very engaging and isn't shy to speak up. This gives us the pulse of our membership, so we can make quick decisions in everyone's best interests.

WHAT EXCITES YOU MOST ABOUT AAHOA'S 2021-2023 STRATEGIC PLAN?

VP: That we are going to be the foremost resource and advocate for hotel owners on many different fronts, not just legislatively but also with franchisee issues and OTAs, and be the expert thought leaders on issues that impact America's hotel owners.

IS THERE SOMEONE IN YOUR PROFESSIONAL LIFE WHO HELPED SHAPE YOUR CAREER PATH?

VP: Nancy Johnson, who was with Radisson Hotels, guided me when I was young to get involved with the industry, which taught me how to communicate, how to take advantage of networking opportunities, and give back to the industry that has given us so much.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE HOTELIERS WILL FACE IN THE LATTER PART OF 2021?

VP: The biggest challenge for me is the unknown. We are all guessing as to how the industry will change, travel habits, guest expectations, and who will be the first to get it right.

HOW IS AAHOA FULFILLING ITS VISION TO BE THE FOREMOST ADVOCATE AND RESOURCE FOR AMERICA'S HOTEL OWNERS?

VP: We are the subject-matter experts on hotel ownership. We are talking to lawmakers, brands, and our vendor partners to make sure our issues are addressed. We are making an impact at all levels.

Nishant (Neal) Patel, CHO

Treasurer

WHAT HAS AAHOA ACCOMPLISHED DURING THE PAST YEAR THAT YOU'RE MOST PROUD OF?

Neal Patel: I firmly believe that education is our strongest asset, especially during COVID. I don't think anyone could touch what AAHOA did when it came to educating members during a crisis. We reached more than 50,000 people across the industry.

DURING YOUR TIME WITH AAHOA, HOW HAVE YOU SEEN THE BOARD SHAPE THE ASSOCIATION'S DIRECTION?

NP: The development of the Strategic Plan has been a crucial component of AAHOA's success. We're more focused on strategically moving AAHOA forward, which is vital because by the time you realize it's necessary to make changes, it's too late. I've also seen AAHOA fine tune its ability to anticipate member needs and create content based on what membership wanted. We're not 100 percent there, but we're trying to improve every day.



“

We are leveraging the strength of nearly 20,000 members and creating strong, mutually beneficial partnerships while protecting members' NOI. Protecting members' bottom line is AAHOA's bottom line.”

WHAT EXCITES YOU MOST ABOUT AAHOA'S 2021-2023 STRATEGIC PLAN?

NP: The member advocacy component is a key piece of the plan, and not only with regards to creating positive relationships with federal and state elected officials but also by continuing to protect our vendor partners. For example, our net operating income (NOI) is shrinking, and AAHOA must continue advocating for cutting expenses.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE HOTELIERS WILL FACE IN THE LATTER PART OF 2021?

NP: We're looking at a big challenge with online travel agencies (OTAs). When an OTA takes so much from the top, it doesn't leave much of anything for the hotel. How can we leverage 20,000 members to get a better rate or partnership for our members to protect the industry?

HOW IS AAHOA FULFILLING ITS VISION TO BE THE FOREMOST ADVOCATE AND RESOURCE FOR AMERICA'S HOTEL OWNERS?

NP: We are leveraging the strength of nearly 20,000 members and creating strong, mutually beneficial partnerships while protecting members' NOI. Protecting members' bottom line is AAHOA's bottom line.



Bharat Patel, CHO, CHIA

Secretary

HOW IS AAHOA FULFILLING ITS VISION TO BE THE FOREMOST ADVOCATE AND RESOURCE FOR AMERICA'S HOTEL OWNERS?

Bharat Patel: I believe the top priority for AAHOA is ROI – return on investment. The work of our volunteer leaders and our staff must absolutely focus on putting more money in the pocket of owners and less money in the pocket of brands, OTAs, and the government. The double and triple-dipping on fees by brands has to be addressed.

DURING YOUR TIME WITH AAHOA, HOW HAVE YOU SEEN THE BOARD SHAPE THE ASSOCIATION'S DIRECTION?

BP: During the past year, the Board took the first step toward AAHOA's progress by passing a strategic plan, along with a budget and a timeframe for that plan.

Now we have to take the second step toward progress – namely, we have to act. We have to implement the plan. But I especially want to ensure that what we do at the board level always has relevance and benefit for our members. For me, members aren't just a priority; they are *the* priority. Member engagement is vital. Membership being kept informed of what the organization is doing to support their businesses must be communicated often.

WHAT HAS AAHOA ACCOMPLISHED DURING THE PAST YEAR THAT YOU'RE MOST PROUD OF?

BP: I'm confident we have a strong understanding of the problems facing owners in this post-pandemic period, and we also know what needs to be done to solve these problems. I hope in the year ahead, we will focus less on negotiating and debating and more on hammering out answers with the brands and the legislators/regulators who directly impact the bottom line of our members. ■



AAHOA
SILVER
MEMBER

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Meet Ken Greene

Get to know AAHOA's Interim President & CEO

by MELISSA STERN

ON JUNE 8, AAHOA announced a change in leadership, unveiling Ken Greene as Interim President & CEO. A highly respected industry veteran, he brings a wealth of experience to the role, and he will continue to hammer away on AAHOA's initiatives as outlined in the 2021-2023 Strategic Plan. But he's not always serious. Here's a look at the lighter side of Ken.

WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST WORK PET PEEVE?

Ken Greene: My biggest work pet peeve is when there is a lack of urgency and responsiveness. To be successful, we must be motivated, respect time and deadlines, and refuse to fail.

WHAT ENERGIZES YOU OUTSIDE OF WORK?

KG: Friends and family. These days, work-life balance can sometimes seem impossible, especially since we're all constantly plugged in, thanks to technology. Being able to connect with family and friends always helps me recharge after a busy day.

Ken Greene, AAHOA
Interim President & CEO

How do you prefer to start your day?

KG: I always start my day with a cup of coffee. While having my coffee, I'm usually catching up on emails and reading the news. I always try to have a conversation with my wife before starting my busy day!

WHAT IS A MISTAKE YOU MADE EARLY ON IN YOUR CAREER, AND WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM IT?

KG: How much time do you have? In all seriousness, I realized most mistakes come from lack of communication. Having strong interpersonal relationships and making sure people have the tools and resources needed to succeed leads to better understanding.

WHO HAS INFLUENCED YOU MOST WHEN IT COMES TO HOW YOU APPROACH YOUR WORK?

KG: I had a great mentor at age 23 right out of graduate school. He told me to always have a good strategic plan, a good team, and good competitive information.

That same mentor told me three important things:

1. Be a sponge; soak everything up.
2. Do things with passion, whether you enjoy doing them or not. If you do things that no one else steps up to do, it leads to bigger opportunities.
3. Never forget your roots and those who helped you along the way. Always remember that as you climb the ladder. Help those who reach out to you for guidance. You were once in their shoes.

WHAT IS SOMETHING – BIG OR SMALL – YOU'RE REALLY BAD AT?

KG: Golf! I love to play, but I'm not good at it.

CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR FAMILY?

KG: My wife, Kristie, who goes by Kiki, is an artist. My son, Nathanael, who goes by Nat, is 22 and is in university studying marketing and business. We joke that he's a global child since I had to move around a lot for work. They both live in Toronto, Canada. We took in my wife's niece, Brooke, when she was 12, and she's grown to be a wonderful young lady.

WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF AAHOA AND ITS MEMBERS?

KG: I believe AAHOA is in a strong position in the industry, and I'm excited about the opportunities to further strengthen AAHOA's position. I'm looking forward to leading the charge and working together as Team AAHOA. We have so much more to accomplish together. I'm looking forward to reconnecting with members and ensuring they know they're in good hands when it comes to advancing and protecting their business interests. ■



photo taken prior to Covid-19

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Come together – right now

by CARTER DAVIS

WHY DID YOU JOIN AAHOA? SURE, IT'S GREAT TO GET TO KNOW YOUR PEERS BETTER, establish meaningful relationships with your fellow hoteliers, and gain insights to help with your day-to-day operations. But a big part of your “why” is quite likely the collective power of nearly 20,000 fellow hotel owners to achieve together what you cannot accomplish alone.

The core of any association should be its ability to affect change for its members and proactively engage with legislators, community leaders, and decision-makers to stay in front of troublesome issues that threaten the livelihood of its members.

Whether meeting with legislators, sending letters or participating in advocacy events, AAHOA Members taking action make a big difference in the political process, and AAHOA's partnerships with hospitality associations, national advocacy groups, and industry leaders are invaluable when advocating more effectively for hotel owners.

With that in mind, here's an inside look at AAHOA's recent advocacy efforts, including a recent key hire, legislation specifics, priorities, and more. We are stronger together than we are alone, and your participation is vital to the continued health and prosperity of our industry.

Welcome to the team

AAHOA recently brought on Department of Labor veteran Dean Heyl to serve as Vice President, Government Affairs. He brings a wealth of experience to the team and will help further develop AAHOA's advocacy efforts at the federal, state, and local levels. Want to get to know him a little bit better? Keep reading.

1. PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND

"After graduating law school and passing the bar, my career began in the Idaho Attorney General's Office, where I served as press secretary/speech writer/senior advisor/driver for the Attorney General. I was later picked up by the Governor's Office to handle everything from law enforcement, insurance, finance, and building safety issues. My last job in the Gem State was as the Attorney General's Legislative Liaison."

"Prior to starting at AAHOA, I served three years at the Department of Labor (DOL) as Director of the Office of Public Liaison, which was responsible for stakeholder outreach. When my time there concluded, I was fortunate to have several job opportunities to consider. I knew AAHOA well not only from my time in the private sector but also arranged for DOL Secretary Acosta to speak at AAHOACON as well as appearing in *Today's Hotelier*. AAHOA was one of the first groups DOL Secretary Scalia and I called during the early days of the COVID pandemic. I applied immediately when the Vice President of



Prior experience

Legislative Liaison,
Idaho Attorney
General's Office

Press Secretary/
Speech writer/
Senior Advisor,
Idaho Attorney
General's Office

Executive
Director, Coalition
for Affordable
Accounting

Director of
Government
Relations, Direct
Selling Association

Chief Legal Officer,
International
Franchise
Association

Government Affairs position opened up. I've been promoting the interests of entrepreneurs throughout my career, and I knew AAHOA's advocacy issues well. It's been a great fit and I couldn't be happier with my decision."

2. POLITICALLY ENGAGED MEMBERSHIP

"I'm so impressed with the organizational structure of AAHOA's Regional Directors and Ambassadors. AAHOA's members are the most effective spokespeople on their issues. Elected officials and staff always want to hear from their constituents. And although there are several groups out there that have politically active members, I don't know of any that come close to AAHOA."

3. EVOLVING ADVOCACY

"I think technological advances will drive the evolution of AAHOA's advocacy efforts. The days of simply testifying on a piece of legislation or sending a letter to such-and-such committee are over. To be effective these days, a campaign approach is necessary for victory. This includes the traditional shoe leather, face-to-face lobbying but also using social media and writing op-eds, just to name a few. Getting decision-makers' attention with so many competing distractions gets harder every day."

4. STAYING IN THE KNOW

"The No. 1 thing I do is reach out to AAHOA's members to hear firsthand what issues they're facing. AAHOA has been blessed with a great Government Affairs team that constantly gathers information on regulatory/legislative issues from local, state, and federal sources. AAHOA has strong working relationships with more than a dozen (and growing) state hotel and lodging associations. These groups are our 'canaries in the coal mines' and give us real-time updates. Similarly, AAHOA is active in many coalitions, which generate a tremendous amount of shared information."





MEET THE **GAME CHANGERS**

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Jatin Patel | RLH Portland & RLH Port Angeles | Advisory Board Chair

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Quitters never win

Quick examples of AAHOA's tireless efforts to spike punitive and harmful legislation

OKLAHOMA HOTEL TAX REPEAL

The Oklahoma legislature passed a \$5 hotel tax during AAHOACON18. Approximately 100 hoteliers joined the Oklahoma Hotel & Lodging Association for a rally at the State Capitol and met with lawmakers to express their concerns. AAHOA Members also sent 1,000-plus letters to their lawmakers in opposition. The legislature eventually repealed the tax within a few days. (Taxes are rarely repealed.)

PENNSYLVANIA HOTEL TAX

The Pennsylvania legislature also considered a proposal to increase the hotel tax by 5%, one of the highest national hotel taxes. Along with the Pennsylvania Restaurant & Lodging Association, AAHOA Members sent letters and called lawmakers to express concerns, and the proposal failed to move forward. After the defeat of the hotel tax, one of the legislators contacted PRLA Government Affairs Vice President Melissa Bova and asked her to tell the AAHOA Members to stop calling him.

“

Along with the Pennsylvania Restaurant & Lodging Association, AAHOA Members sent letters and called lawmakers to express concerns, and the proposal failed to move forward.”

Winners never quit

A brief look at AAHOA-backed advocacy efforts that crossed the finish line


HOTELS DESIGNATED AS ESSENTIAL BUSINESSES

AAHOA worked with state hospitality associations and state leaders to advocate for hotels being designated as essential businesses. Discussing the critical role hoteliers play in their communities by providing housing for health-care professionals, supply-chain workers, and vulnerable populations, and making sure hoteliers can still operate their businesses.

SBA DISASTER DECLARATION IN EVERY STATE

To apply for the SBA Economic Injury Disaster Loan, every county in each state had to file a declaration showing economic harm, and then the state's governor could file a SBA disaster declaration. AAHOA encouraged the governors to expedite the process in their own states, and the AAHOA Government Affairs team worked with the Small Business Administration Office to expedite the process.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN DOLLARS

Under the American Rescue Plan Act, states received \$195.3 billion in aid, divided according to each state's number of unemployed workers. Local governments, meanwhile, received \$130.2 billion, split between cities and counties. While much of this money remains unallocated as of this writing, AAHOA and its state partner associations are actively negotiating to have as much of this funding as possible directed to hotels and the workers and communities they support. For example, in Virginia, AAHOA Members have sent more than 1,000 letters to their legislators in support of a hospitality grant program. Gov. Ralph Northam has included the hospitality industry in his list of ARP funding priorities. 



And that's not all

Here's a rundown of some of AAHOA's efforts (and some successes) in the name of spearheading and championing hotelier-friendly legislation. And the advocacy team works tirelessly to educate members about the benefits of countless proposed bills, rally support in favor of them, and lobby lawmakers on members' behalf.

COVID-19 RELIEF

- *PPP Flexibility for Farmers, Ranchers, and the Self-Employed Act (S. Cardin, R. Velazquez)*: Allows hotels formerly ineligible for PPP (opened after Feb. 15, 2020) to become eligible
- *Healthy Workplaces Tax Credit Act (S. Portman, R. Rice)*: Allows tax credits for employer expenses for protecting employees from COVID-19
- Advocate for additional targeted relief, including EIDL loan increase up to maximum of 2 million per entity (waive affiliation rules and total cap at 2 million)
- Advocate for an increase in 504 and 7a debt relief funding

COVID-19 RECOVERY

- *Hotel Jobs Act (S. Schatz, R. Crist)*: Provides grants for payroll and PPE credits to support rehiring grants for payroll calculated by multiplying by three the average total monthly payments for payroll costs in a three-month period to be used over 270 days
- *Back to Work Bonus Act (S. Risch, R. Brady)*: Provides one-time bonus for unemployed workers who reenter the workforce
- *GSA Per Diem Rate Freeze (R. Crist, R. Bilirakis)*: Sets the GSA per diem ceiling for FY22 and 23 at pre-pandemic levels

- *Hospitality and Commerce Jobs Act (S. Cortez Masto, R. Horsford)*: Provides tax credits for attending/hosting a convention, individual non-business travel tax credit, expansion of ERTC

PROTECTING SMALL BUSINESS HOTELIERS

- *Save Local Business Act (S. Marshall, R. Comer)*: Codifies a "direct" control joint employer standard in both the Fair Labor Standards Act and the National Labor Relations Act
- Preserving 1031 Like-Kind Exchange: In outlining the American Families Plan and in the FY2022 budget, the Administration called for eliminating 1031 exchange deferrals for gains of more than \$500,000
- Preserving 199A, Small Business Pass Through Deduction: Not included in Biden Administration proposals thus far, testament to the work of a coalition we are in to defend 199A from early sunset (it is set to sunset in 2025 per Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017)
- EB5 Reauthorization



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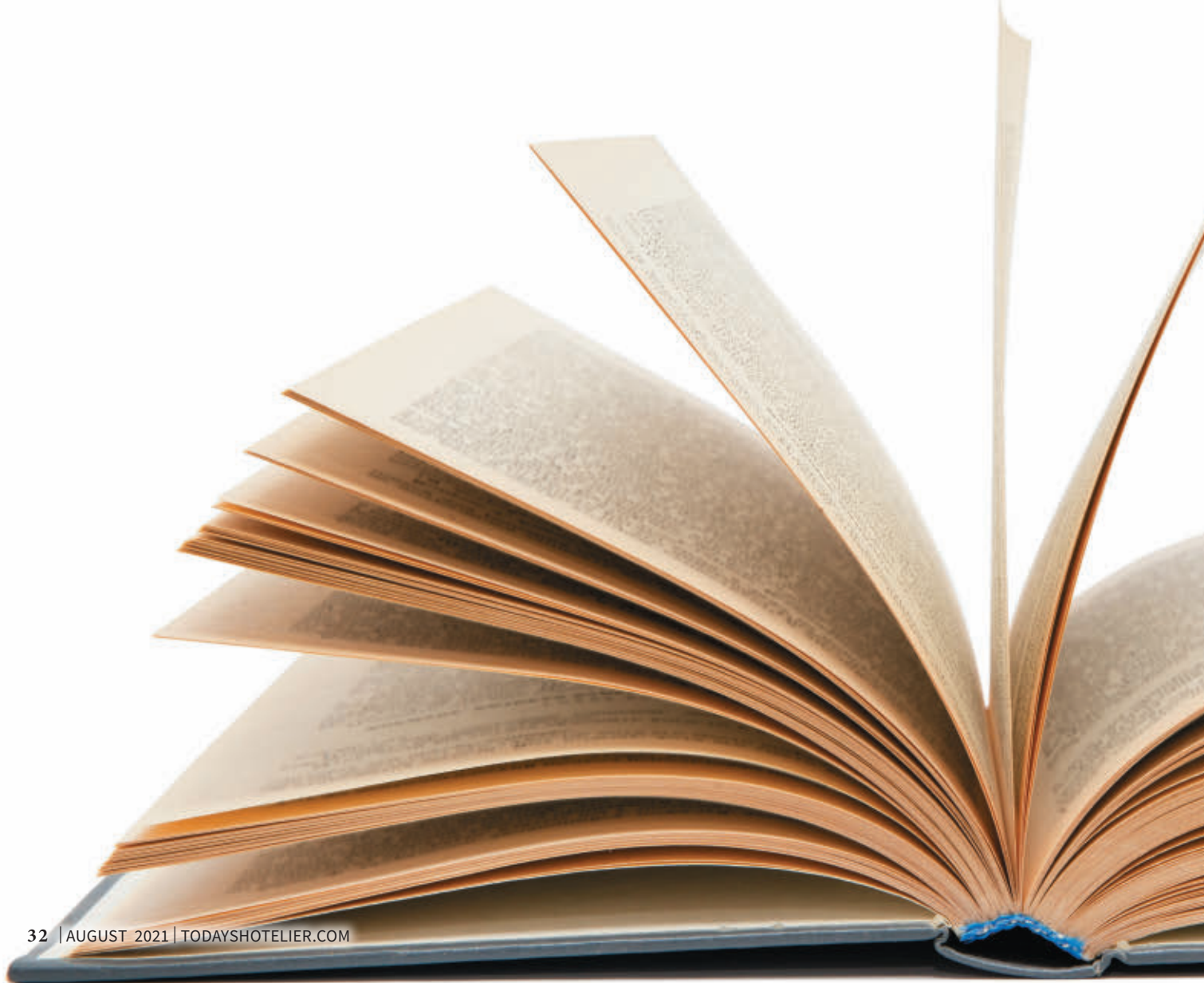
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Be the **author** of your own story

Examining the political advocacy of three AAHOA Members

by CARTER DAVIS

REGARDLESS OF ETHNICITY, RELIGION, income, background, or any other seemingly life-defining and limiting factors, there is one overarching theme that has proven itself true time and again within the American experience: Within reason, your future is largely of your own making. The American experience is littered with examples of people altering their trajectories through resilience, perseverance, and intentional dedication.



To wit:

“The only person you are destined to become is the person you decide to be.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson

These words, from the famed 19th-century American author’s book, “Self-Reliance,” are a testament to the power of human will and the ability we possess to shape our own destinies. And they should ring constantly and as clear as crystal in the ears of any man or woman who goes into business for him or herself.

Business owners should abhor complacency, despite the innumerable obstacles thrown their way that usually require monumental effort to overcome. And AAHOA Members are nothing if not a group with a proven track record of success, so it should come as no surprise that AAHOA counts among its ranks many hoteliers who are deeply engaged in the political process and take an active role in shaping the industry’s future by developing relationships with legislators at all levels of government.

GET INVOLVED

If you gathered several dozen AAHOA Members in a room, it’s likely many would recount a specific situation or culmination of incidents as the “a-ha” moment that led to them to dip their toes in the political waters in an attempt to have more oversight in managing their own businesses. In fact, each AAHOA Member interviewed for this article expressed nearly the same sentiment.

“I began my involvement in politics locally when I became frustrated with the local building inspectors becoming unreasonable in their code enforcement,” recalled Premier Hospitality CEO and AAHOA Southwest Region Director Imesh Vaidya. “The regional and national involvement developed from the onslaught of ADA lawsuits in my region. The inability of the legislative branch to prevent the frivolous lawsuits, which continue today, was the stimulus for my increased engagement in politics.”

That involvement, Vaidya said, took the form of providing information to politicians and campaign donations, and it has resulted in building strong, tangible





It should come as no surprise that AAHOA counts among its ranks many hoteliers who are deeply engaged in the political process and take an active role in shaping the industry’s future by developing relationships with legislators at all levels of government.”

relationships with many government leaders, including those in New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and Utah, where he cited “very strong relationships” with mayors, state legislators, attorneys general, state cabinet members, and governors.

“Also,” he added, “the constant communication with our congressional delegations in these states has been quite beneficial on the national level in having our voice amplified on topics such as the ADA lawsuits, 1031 exchange, minimum wage, and federal aid for the hospitality industry during the pandemic.”

And those relationships are continuing to pay dividends. Vaidya points to local and state-level successes such as legislation allowing a 60-day cure period for ADA lawsuits in Arizona, limiting the increase in minimum wage in Colorado, the prevention of a tax increase in Utah, and delaying sick leave proposals in New Mexico.

“Involvement in politics at any level,” he said, “will benefit our industry by protecting our assets and reducing burdensome legislation and costs.”

BE INFORMED

A phrase that gets thrown around to varying effect during election seasons is “If you don’t vote, don’t complain,” and that logic is echoed by Montu Patel, Principal at Lotus Park Senior Living and President of IHM.

“When you don’t make your voice heard, don’t complain afterward,” said Patel, who traces his own political awakening in part to an AAHOA Legislative Action Summit. “Don’t be surprised when tax increases, greater regulation, lawsuits, or other small-business issues impact your livelihood. Just know that other groups are advocating for their issues, which could put you out of business.”

And Vaidya cautions against thinking that advocacy is only necessary based on the prevailing political climate of the moment. Regardless of the party in power, the governing philosophies being espoused by the leaders at present, the economy’s overall health, or any other factors, it’s vital to maintain vigilance in political awareness and activity.

“There are always groups that wish to impose additional burdens and taxes on business,” he said. “Constant involvement allows the industry to have a say in the drafting of the legislation instead of reacting to it.”

It’s a sentiment echoed by Patel who made the point that “Political advocacy is about education and consistency. Having memorable and impactful messages to our lawmakers is much more important than the political climate of the day.”

THE PEN IS MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD

Danny Gaekwad is an investor, entrepreneur, and hotel owner with a long history in the hospitality industry. To hear him tell it, political advocacy on behalf of the industry to which he’s dedicated the majority of his life is almost as natural as breathing.

“It’s very simple,” said Gaekwad, who also serves as Chair of the AAHOA Government Affairs Committee. “There are factors affecting your business you will not be able to control, or at least affect, without being active politically. To ignore that is irresponsible, reckless, and foolish.”

And though he is a tireless networker and industry advocate with a list of government contacts in his phone deeper than the Mariana Trench, his advice is remarkably simple. For any campaign donation made, require the politician to show up in person to collect the check and use that as the jumping-off point.

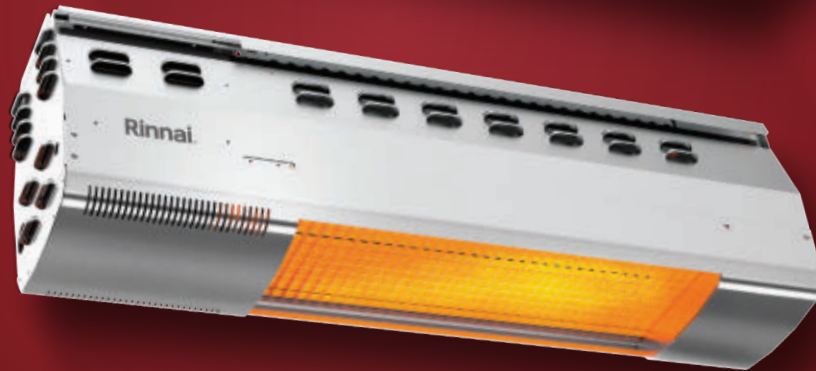
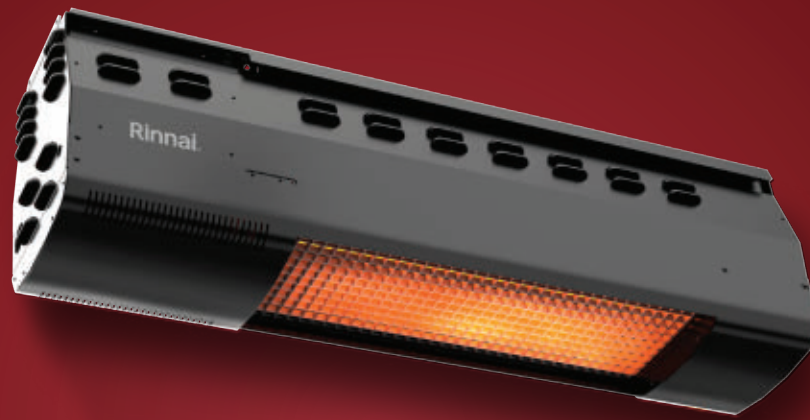
“We are building relationships,” he said. “Anyone can write a check, but this is all about the relationship. It’s a slow process, and the money opens the door, yes. But without a relationship, your money means nothing. It’s not a cookie jar. You can’t just put your hand in and keep expecting to get something if you don’t put something in yourself.”

Gaekwad’s philosophy, like so many active in politics, is one of insurance. After all, don’t we all maintain numerous policies on our vehicles, homes, property, health and much more? Political engagement, he reasons, is essentially a form of livelihood insurance.

“Why wait for the catastrophe to happen?” he asks. “Because it will happen if your head is in the sand. Would you rather have a relationship in place already that can help you prevent a totally avoidable disaster, or would you rather wait for the storm to hit to come up with a plan? It’s great to run a profitable business, and money is great. But money without power is useless.” ■



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Jesal Patel, AAHOA Member and Mayor, Village of Lincolnwood, Ill.



Leading by example

by HEATHER CARNES

IN MID-APRIL, AAHOA MEMBER JESAL PATEL EARNED THE NOD AS THE NEXT MAYOR OF THE Village of Lincolnwood, Ill., an inner suburb of Chicago in Cook County. Patel, the owner of Patel Realty and an AAHOA Member for 20 years, has served in various capacities within the Lincolnwood government and has called this village his home for several decades. Patel, also an AAHOA Upper Midwest Region Ambassador, took a few minutes out of his day as a government leader, entrepreneur, and business owner to talk about his experience and plans, and why it's important for those in the hotel industry to be politically active.

CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOURSELF, YOUR FAMILY, AND HOW YOU GOT STARTED IN THE HOTEL BUSINESS?

Jesal Patel: I have been involved in real estate from a young age. I like to tell the story of how I made my first hotel deal at just 10 years old. Granted, it was after securing the marquee properties of Boardwalk and Park Place in the game of Monopoly, but the lessons learned in that game have been invaluable to me ever since. My family business, Patel Realty, was founded in 1995, and I have worked with my father, Babu (Marsha) Patel, and my brother, Adesh, ever since. We have

extensive experience in all areas of real estate working as brokers, developers, investors, and consultants, with a focus in the retail and hospitality industries.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH AAHOA, AND HOW HAVE YOU BEEN INVOLVED THROUGH THE YEARS?

JP: I have been an AAHOA Member since 2001 and have regularly attended events in that time. In 2015, I became more involved and was asked to become an Ambassador for AAHOA. My role as Ambassador has been very rewarding, both professionally and personally.

I look forward to continuing to advocate for our industry to affect meaningful change.

YOU'VE BEEN A PRIME EXAMPLE OF GETTING INVOLVED IN GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY THAT SUPPORTS SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS DURING YOUR CAREER. WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT TO YOU?

JP: Our industry is often overlooked despite its strength and importance in the economy. Our advocacy gives us a seat at the table rather than a place on the menu.

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Our industry is often overlooked despite its strength and importance in the economy. Our advocacy gives us a seat at the table rather than a place on the menu.”

DO YOU HAVE PLANS TO RUN FOR HIGHER OFFICE?

JP: My focus is on serving my community as mayor. In my service, I will surely continue to learn and grow and so I will leave the door for future service open. Come on in and let’s talk about it.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO AAHOA MEMBERS THINKING OF RUNNING FOR ELECTED OFFICE?

JP: If you have the time and desire to serve, then do it. After being a father and husband, my most meaningful and rewarding efforts come from those in my role in local government.

KNOWING YOU’VE BEEN INVOLVED IN YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY OF LINCOLNWOOD, IL, FOR MORE THAN A DECADE, WHAT HAS THE EXPERIENCE BEEN LIKE FOR YOU? WHY WERE YOU COMPELLED TO GET INVOLVED AT THE LOCAL LEVEL?

JP: Having lived most of my life in Lincolnwood and with my business based here, I have a strong attachment to the community. My experience handling entitlements as a developer led me to my role in local government. I brought a different perspective to our Village Board and learned a lot about the entitlement process, in turn, making me a better developer.









WHAT PROMPTED YOU TO RUN FOR MAYOR OF LINCOLNWOOD?

JP: Having served as a Village Trustee for most of my adult life, the move to mayor was a natural one. While serving as a trustee, I was able to present and advance plans, but the ability to guide the Village toward the progress I have sought is reserved for the mayor’s seat.

TELL US ABOUT SOME OF YOUR INITIATIVES FOR LINCOLNWOOD REGARDING ENTREPRENEURSHIP, DEVELOPMENT, AND SUPPORTING SMALL BUSINESSES.

JP: I’ve been a strong advocate for business development throughout my tenure on the board. From the creation of tax increment financing districts to revisions in the zoning code welcoming a wider range of businesses, my efforts have led directly to more than \$150 million in new developments in Lincolnwood.

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My experience handling entitlements as a developer led me to my role in local government.”

AS MAYOR, WHAT DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS FOR LINCOLNWOOD DO YOU HAVE IN THE PIPELINE?

JP: The Purple Hotel site (the original Hyatt House location) and the Lincolnwood Town Center Mall are two of our largest development sites. The Purple Hotel site is set to be redeveloped with an all-new mixed-use development, including a new dual-branded hotel dubbed District 1860. The Lincolnwood Town Center Mall has recently fallen into foreclosure and we look forward to the opportunity to attract new development at

this important intersection. The linked concept plans for the two sites are prime examples of efforts that local governments can employ to attract such developments.

HOW CAN LOCAL OFFICIALS LIKE YOU MAKE A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS?

JP: We have the perspective from our knowledge and experience that’s needed in government at all levels. Service in an advocacy role helps bring our issues in front of our legislators and allows our voices to be heard. ■



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The future of the hospitality industry through the lens of the capital markets

by RUSHI SHAH

FOR COMMERCIAL real estate, the pandemic was the most severe watershed event since the tax law changes at the end of 20th century. The hospitality industry in particular saw a massive reckoning that will potentially change the industry forever. As hoteliers reexamine their risk vs. reward, there's an increased focus on the relationship between hotel

franchisee and franchisor, as well as between borrower and lender. Owners have spent more than a year experiencing the good, the bad, and the often-ugly consequences of agreements they have in place with their franchise, their lenders (including CMBS and other institutional lenders), and their service providers. They now realize brands and capital sources have the most

leverage, and they want to correct the imbalance.

GOOD NEWS FOR THE INDUSTRY

This new awakening of hoteliers should spark active discussion among the players, thus improving the health of the industry and maturity of its participants. Owners empowered and educated by this experience will be able to

negotiate better agreements, avoid ill-advised shortcuts, understand the importance of having the right expert for the right transaction, optimize their portfolios, and more expertly evaluate their capital stacks. We also are likely to see a renewed appreciation among hotel owners for various non-fungible concepts such as non-recourse loans, balance-sheet lending, or paying a premium for debt solutions that offer more flexibility and can cap their risk.

The COVID-19 crisis also has taught owners how to accurately evaluate potential risk and return and demonstrated that an equity investor should be entitled to higher returns than a senior debt investor for the same transaction. As the level of experience, knowledge, and maturity increases within industry members, there's an

opportunity to institutionalize the small, mom-and-pop entrepreneur.

If inflation continues to rise, hoteliers' positions also will be strengthened by the pricing elasticity of hotels compared to other asset types. When inflationary pressure hits wages, materials, and services, a hotel's revenue profile can be quickly adjusted to achieve supply-and-demand equilibrium. Hoteliers can change room rates much sooner than apartment, retail, and office landlords can update longer-term leases. This flexibility translates into more opportunity for hotel owners to capture higher revenue and offset higher expenses as travel resumes.

As demands increase from the risk-taking hotel owners, other capital market participants will have to adjust their practices. A CMBS lender may decide to offer a more convenient borrower experience by increasing loan servicing standards, keeping servicing in house or acting as their own B-piece buyers. Franchise companies also are likely to respond favorably to customers' requests by providing increased transparency and more win-win issue resolution.

EXPECTATIONS FOR HOTEL PRICING

The industry recently experienced its toughest time in history and is primed to attract newcomers and opportunistic and institutional capital. As a

result, there's risk of creating froth in the market and artificially inflating asset prices. Higher construction costs may also push hospitality prices upward, which existing assets can use to their advantage when calculating replacement costs.

LOOKING AHEAD

The worst of the pandemic appears to be behind us, and the outlook for hospitality is growing more and more positive. There will be a renewed acceptance for hospitality assets by the capital markets. Expect to see an increased appetite from the institutional lending markets for assets that historically weren't considered financeable. ■

“The industry recently experienced its toughest time in history and is primed to attract newcomers and opportunistic and institutional capital.”



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.

No meeting space? No problem

How to increase group bookings

by JONATHAN BURLESON

GROUP BUSINESS REPRESENTS a significant portion of many hotels' revenue, but smaller hotels and motels often lack the meeting space to go along with a room block. However, there still are numerous ways that hotel owners can attract group business and cash in on this lucrative sector of the industry.

SMALL MEETINGS ON THE RISE

As pandemic recovery picks up speed, smaller meetings are the first to return. According to a recent Global DMC Partners survey, 75% of planners expect to hold face-to-face meetings in 2021, but 67% of these meetings will host fewer than 250 attendees.

By capitalizing on the return of these smaller groups and meetings, small and independent hotels can increase occupancy, create consistent and predictable revenue, and speed their post-pandemic recovery.

5 ways to increase group business

Planners often source smaller hotels thanks to their lower rates, proximity to venues, complimentary breakfasts, happy hours, and free parking, which all add up to significant savings on their overall spend. Here are five ways to attract more of this group business to your property.

1 Consider groups that don't need meeting space. Groups that need room blocks but not meeting space include sports teams, wedding parties, religious organizations, fraternities or sororities, military, family reunions, parents and guests for graduations, and students and their families moving in and out of colleges and universities.

If you have an on-site bar, restaurant, or café, these groups will drive ancillary revenue in addition to the room block.

Make the most of the space you have. Hotels with a cafeteria or lounge area could transform the open space into an informal reception area. Given the ongoing pandemic, many planners have opted to set up events on lawns and other outdoor spaces.

2

3 Cultivate local business relationships. Hotel managers can form ties to local event venues, meeting spaces, and convention centers for group referrals, as well as hotels that could refer any overflow.

Join and advertise with a local CVB to boost your visibility to incoming groups. Hotel managers also can join the city council, mayor's advisor board, and other professional groups that widen your referral network.

Partner with transportation companies. Hotels can add value to their group packages by offering shuttle service to and from the event venue or convention center, as well as key points in the surrounding city.

Reach out to part-time planners. Many executive assistants, office managers, and human resources personnel plan multiple smaller events and meetings each year, but planning is only one of their many tasks.

The best way to reach them is through direct email campaigns and advertising in publications aimed at groups such as the American Society of Administrative Professionals, the Association of Executive and Administrative Professionals, and the Society for Human Resource Management.

4

5 Automate manual tasks. Given the current lack of staff at hotels of all sizes, managers who implement technology can book more business, while freeing up time and energy. Consider platforms that streamline digital RFPs from prequalified planners and offer instant online booking for groups.

Hotel staff can also implement room-block management software that allows group guests to book and manage their own reservations online. Any initial learning curve on these kinds of tools will reap a significant return in saved time, reduced labor costs, and increased income.

IMPLEMENT FINANCIAL PROTECTIONS

When a group represents a significant portion of the overall hotel room count, managers should ensure they have adequate contractual protections to shield them from the inherent financial risk.

These include:

- **Attrition clauses** allow for a certain percentage of rooms in the room block to go unsold without financial penalty. This incentivizes the planner to fill the block and protects the hotel from lost revenue from unsold rooms withheld from inventory.
- **Cutoff dates** for room blocks are usually 21 to 30 days before the group actualizes. Any rooms not sold by that date are returned to inventory and sold to transient travelers or other groups.
- **Cancellation policies** ensure that any group that doesn't actualize at all will lose their nonrefundable deposit.

If your hotel is integrated with an online group booking system, the booking process should include a standard terms-and-conditions clause that outline any consequences for cancellation.

At the same time, hotel managers should be as flexible as possible with planners who might need to make last-minute changes given the ongoing uncertainty around the pandemic.

BE MINDFUL OF COVID-19 PROTOCOLS

Even as the pandemic begins to recede, travelers still expect a much higher level of cleanliness. Meeting planners and group organizers have additional needs and concerns that go along with bringing people together in a public environment. If you haven't done so already, implement stringent cleaning protocols and consider property improvement plans (PIP).

Current hotel practices include:

- A clearly communicated cleaning regimen in rooms and public spaces
- Masks on hotel staff to protect guests
- Automated processes such as check-in and checkout when possible
- Prepackaged food and beverage offerings
- Clean filters in packaged terminal air conditioners (PTAC)
- PIPs and renovations to remove room carpeting and improve ventilation by installing more robust HVAC systems, more modern PTACs, and commercial-grade air purifiers

The hospitality industry will continue to recover, so now is the best time to position your hotel and motel properties to make the most of group revenue as meetings and events get back to business. ■



Jonathan Burlison is Vice President of Account Management for Groups360, an AAHOA Silver Industry Partner. As an original founder of Groups360, Jonathan led the sales team from 2013 to 2019. He now oversees total account management for customers of the company's full-service advisor division, helping clients find the best solution for all aspects of their meeting execution.

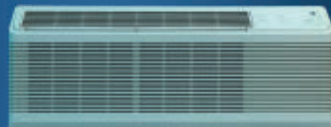
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Navigating new data collection techniques

by DAVID TYRE

POST-COVID LIFE IS A NEW WORLD FOR HOTELIERS, and in the highly anticipated travel boom, there are many new factors for a hotelier to consider, including the implementation of new privacy policies and laws.

While consumer privacy has been a challenge since the dawn of digital marketing, users have become increasingly aware of data tracking, and as the market continues to change, hoteliers must consider a new approach to data-collection techniques. Here are just a few of the newest privacy policies and laws in place, as well as an examination of how hoteliers can alter their data collection techniques to meet shifting requirements while ensuring digital marketing strategies remain successful.

1. POLICY: APPLE INTEGRATES AN OPT-OUT FEATURE

With the iOS 14.5 update on April 26, Apple is now enforcing a Tracking Transparency Prompt for all apps in its App Store. Users will have the option to block the IDFA (Identifier for Advertisers), meaning that iOS will hide a user's personal information while still providing in-app data. While users have always been able to opt-out of data collection manually, Apple's newest policy has made it much easier to do so, and the opt-in rate has dropped from an estimated 70% to around 5%.

The impacts of Apple's newest update include reduced tracking capabilities and reduced personalization, which may make it more difficult to measure the success of advertising campaigns.

SOLUTION: TRANSPARENCY AND STRATEGIC DATA COLLECTION

Even prior to Apple's Tracking Transparency Prompt, data privacy should have always been built into any marketing solution considered by a hotelier. Trust and transparency are the top priority for consumers, who value safety and the enhancement of their digital experience. By informing users on the type of data being collected, why it's being collected, and how it's used, hoteliers will find that consumers will feel more at ease opting into data collection.

Although increasing transparency will prevent users from opting out of data collection, a decline in Apple users opting in is inevitable. Therefore, hoteliers must look for an alternative data collection method. More often, travel brands are working with smart-data providers to create innovative, consent-based methods to identify, profile, and categorize consumers. One such method is the implementation of Smart Wi-Fi, a tool that requires a guest to accept the terms of use before accessing a hotelier's internet. Once signed up, a profile is created in the smart-data provider's database, which is often connected to a worldwide system. Because industry-leading smart-data providers have thousands of hotspots available globally, when a hotelier's guest logs into any of these, further information is compiled to create an increasingly complete data profile. Not only must hoteliers utilize alternative data collection, but they must strategically use the data collected. After creating guest profiles, industry-leading smart-data providers offer features to implement ad content without connecting to a third-party ad publisher.

2. POLICY: GOOGLE GOES COOKIELESS

Last year, Google introduced plans to go cookieless by 2022. In March, they announced that they won't introduce alternative identifiers to track individuals. Not only will this policy affect Chrome, but Mozilla's Firefox and Apple's Safari will also begin to block third-party cookies by default.

Browser-based, desktop-focused cookies have played a key role in data-driven marketing techniques, and the implications of its removal are enormous.

SOLUTION: FIRST-PARTY COOKIES AND CONTEXTUAL MARKETING

There are two types of cookies: first-party and third-party. While third-party live within a user's device, first-party cookies live on a singular domain. First party-cookies, which are blocked by only 5% of web users, are useful in their own right. Hoteliers can still identify visitors returning to their website and store user preferences. But even after shifting a marketing strategy toward first-party cookies, the elimination of third-party cookies means new methods must be found to connect behavior across several websites during a long period of time.

Contextual marketing may help close the information gap left by third-party cookies. Tying a content strategy with a hotelier's brand, destination, and competitors have always been vital, but when tracking a campaign's success is difficult to measure, contextual targeting will always ensure hoteliers are reaching users actively engaging with similar content.

3. LEGISLATION: EVOLVING GLOBAL PRIVACY MEASURES

On the heels of the European Union's General Data Protection Regulations come a wave of U.S. privacy acts. The passing of the California Consumer Privacy Act was followed by bills introduced in Virginia, New York, and Colorado, with more likely on the way.

Not only must hoteliers ensure compliance in each state, but they must tailor their data collection services and marketing strategies to meet specific regional needs.

SOLUTION: MARKETING THROUGH LOYALTY

In the wake of the newest laws and regulations, content and creativity will return as key factors for future digital marketing strategy. A focus on loyalty marketing, which is opt-in and permission based, may play a key role in navigating the new digital marketing field and can provide hoteliers with valuable customer data information.

Partnering with a smart data provider may help a hotelier build out their loyalty marketing techniques. Leading smart data providers offer built-in loyalty options, including smart Wi-Fi, AI, and facial recognition services. In turn, these further develop guest profiles, allowing hoteliers to continue creating smart, effective, data-driven marketing campaigns.

PREPARING FOR FUTURE PRIVACY PROTECTION

Policies and legislation surrounding data privacy will continue to evolve and may threaten to unravel a hotelier's digital marketing strategy if preventive measures aren't taken. In addition to utilizing the newest technologies, hoteliers hoping to ensure a secure digital marketing strategy should also map out the personal data processing operations in place. Upon clarifying which newly introduced legislation will affect a hotelier, determining the level of compliance necessary is an important factor to consider, and proper plans should be put in place to ensure the swift enactment of a new digital marketing strategy upon the passing of new legislation.

As advertising technology continues to develop, a shift in marketing strategies is inevitable. By utilizing the right data providers, hoteliers can ensure continual compliance with developing legislation, while simultaneously delivering effective marketing campaigns. ■



David Tyre serves as VP of Business Development - North America for Zoex Smart Data, an international technological solutions provider, and he has more than 15 years of experience in hospitality

technology solutions, Wi-Fi managed services, network operations, and management. He can be reached at [linkedin.com/in/davidtyre](https://www.linkedin.com/in/davidtyre).

Hotels, COVID-19, and franchise agreements

by JEFFREY M. GOLDSTEIN

MANY FRANCHISEES believe the law will protect them from being terminated if they have failed to perform all their franchise obligations due to COVID-19, but that's not always correct. Now that the worst of COVID appears to be behind us, many businesses are moving toward reinstating normal expectations, standards, and requirements. In the franchise world, this means that although many franchisors adjusted operations to allow franchisees more operational leeway, they now appear ready to rigorously enforce system standards.

In general, a franchisee that failed to perform under a contract or franchise agreement points to two general, related-but-different defenses: First, most agreements have force majeure clauses that are set forth explicitly as a term in a contract;

and second, some states have common-law doctrines of impossibility, impracticability, and frustration of purpose.

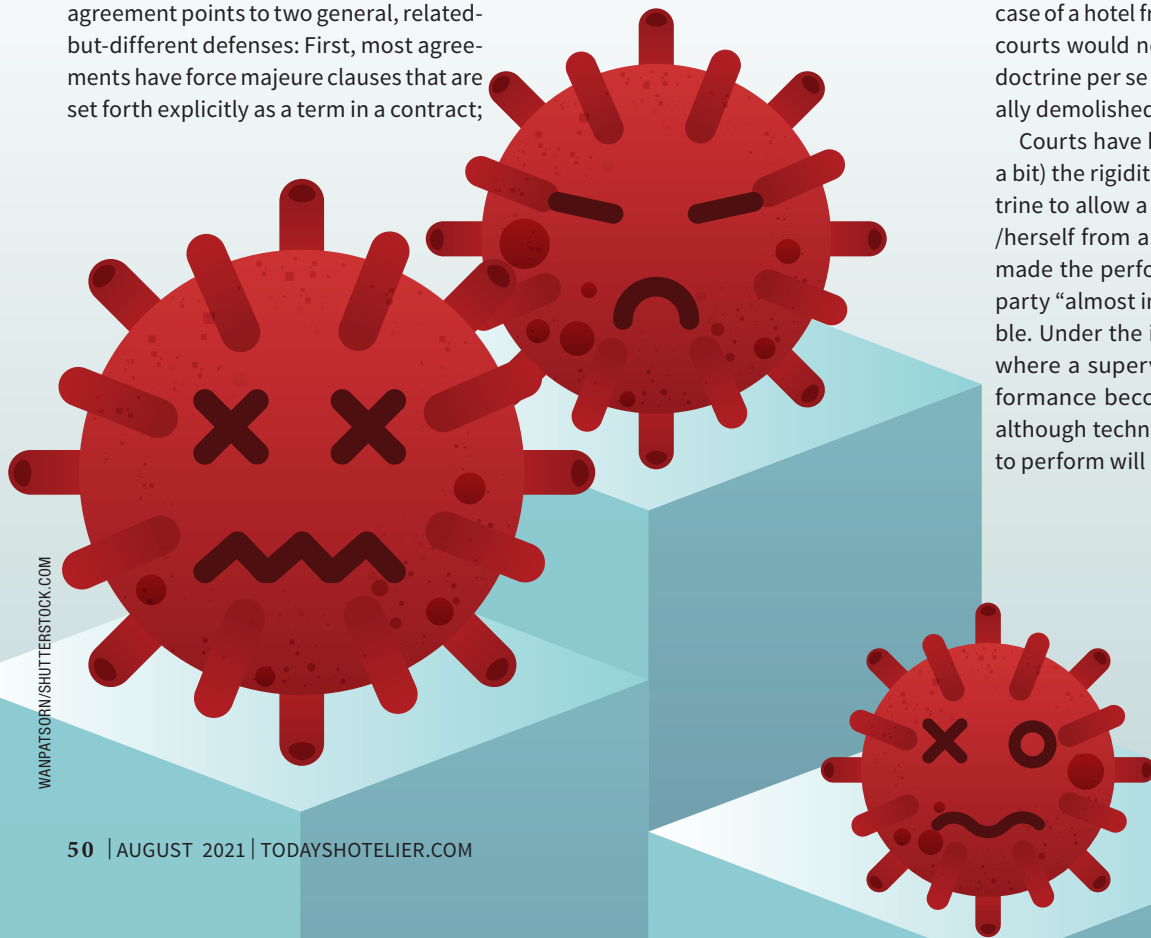
Although every force majeure clause is different, they all share the notion that an unanticipated third-party event has prevented or impeded the ability of a party to complete performance under a contract. For instance, the inability-to-travel and government-closure orders might suffice as force majeure events. Interpreting the language of such contracts is a complex undertaking, and you should rely on a seasoned litigator with many years of complex litigation experience to provide accurate answers. Moreover, even when a lawyer can tether your case to a force majeure incident, some courts may require a breaching franchisee to show that it took

reasonable and timely measures to mitigate the impact on that franchisee's contractual performance.

Where there is no force majeure clause in the relevant agreement, the party searching for a legal excuse for the failure to perform due to COVID-19 will have to look at older common-law doctrines, such as impossibility, impracticability, and frustration of purpose.

The doctrine of impossibility holds that if it becomes impossible for one of the parties to a contract to meet and complete its contractual obligations, that promising party will be discharged or excused from having to carry out its obligations under the contract thereafter. This doctrine, however, is exceedingly restrictive and almost never applied. For example, in the case of a hotel franchise agreement, some courts would not apply the impossibility doctrine per se unless the hotel was literally demolished.

Courts have begun to loosen (but only a bit) the rigidity of the impossibility doctrine to allow a party to extricate himself/herself from a contract where an event made the performance of the promising party "almost impossible" or impracticable. Under the impracticability doctrine, where a supervening event makes performance become overly burdensome, although technically possible, the failure to perform will be discharged.





Franchisees should not overlook the possibility that COVID-19 or events caused by COVID-19 can excuse their past, current, and future performance and failures to perform in whole or in part.”

BUT WHAT ABOUT...?

Another legal excuse that evolved to allow a similar type of contractual discharge is known as the frustration of purpose doctrine. This focuses on the purpose of the breaching party for having signed the agreement rather than the destruction of the property that would be used for carrying out the contract. For instance, if a party leases an apartment for a few days in NYC to watch the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade, and a week before the parade, all of the parade-masters are taken hostage requiring the parade to be cancelled, although it would still be possible for the lessee to physically sit in the apartment, the purpose in having rented the apartment would have been entirely frustrated and excused.

Franchisees must watch out for the situation where they receive poor legal advice to the effect that COVID-19 by itself always authorizes a franchisee to sue its franchisor for breach of contract merely because the franchisor attempts to collect on fees due under the franchise agreement. Further, some courts impose a rigorous causation requirement on a franchisee asserting an impossibility-type claim. Recently, a federal court in Massachusetts rejected a distributor’s force majeure claims embracing such reasoning.

Even in cases where a nonperforming party can anchor his claim in a force majeure or impossibility excuse, it may nevertheless be incumbent on the party to muster significant proof of related issues, including causation, mitigation, and damages. Further, as the business world escapes from lockdown, it is likely courts will be called upon to determine the legal impact of informal understandings reached between franchisors and franchisees during the darkest days of COVID-19. Many of these understandings will be

What would a litigator address?

- 1. Can the breaching party establish a causal link between COVID-19 and the party’s failure to perform?**
- 2. Did the agreement implicitly or explicitly exclude foreseeable events? For example, while COVID-19 may not have been foreseeable before 2019, it surely will be now.**
- 3. Does the force majeure provision explicitly list COVID-19 or a pandemic?**
- 4. Does the force majeure clause set forth any type of catch-all language that could include COVID-19, such as “an act of god” or “other like events”?**

informal, oral, non-specific, and not bargained for, which makes such understandings difficult to enforce to the extent they aren’t found to be waivers or modifications.

Franchisees should not overlook the possibility that COVID-19 or events caused by COVID-19 can excuse their past, current, and future performance and failures to perform in whole or in part. ■



Jeffrey M. Goldstein, Esq., is an attorney with Goldstein Law Firm, one of only four national franchise law firms in the country that represent exclusively franchisees and

dealers. His practice covers prolific and myriad commercial complex litigation matters, and he is regularly sought out by franchisees and dealers from foreign countries (e.g., UAE, South America, United Kingdom) to represent them in disputes with United States franchisors and suppliers. He can be reached at jgoldstein@goldlawgroup.com or 202-293-3947 or www.goldlawgroup.com.



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What's next

by BOB EKMAN

AFTER SPENDING CLOSE to 40 years in the hospitality industry, so much has happened during that time in this crazy industry we call hospitality. It's all amazing.

And in that time, we've seen no less than four economic recessions that have knocked our beloved industry off its feet. In the early 1990s, we experienced high interest rates and overleveraging of real estate, including hotels resulting in government takeover of numerous properties by their Resolution Trust Corporation (RTC). Then, there was 2001 with the attack on U.S. soil on September 11 and the dotcom bubble burst. And surely most recall 2008 and 2009 with the sub-prime mortgage crisis, which led to the collapse or failure of many of the country's largest financial institutions, including Bear Stearns, Lehman Brothers, Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, and AIG.

But none of those events compared to what has happened in

the past year and a half with COVID-19. In addition to the obvious, the U.S. has experienced travel restrictions, quarantines, and stay-at-home orders. More than 24 million people lost their jobs in just three weeks in the Spring of 2020. We all experienced it in one way or the other. Virtually no one in the U.S. was left unaffected. So the real question is, what's next?!



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NECESSARY CHANGES

Hospitality has undoubtedly started its ascent back to some normalcy, but it certainly isn't across the board and will likely take another 12 to 24 months before things truly return to pre-COVID levels.

If there is good news, and there is, we learned. Our industry learned to behave differently, and we learned to do more with less. We had to. We had to let people go, some who had been with organizations and hotels for years providing outstanding guest service and value. This hurt all of us, including the people making those decisions.

As we all know, there has been an amenity and expense creep during the most recent two-plus decades. If this has taught us anything, this might be the time to consider an amenity descent. We are all looking at things differently. Is housekeeping necessary each day of a stay? Does anyone change their sheets and towels every day at home? Is room service as we knew it a thing of the past? Is the solution grab and go, kiosks, and food delivery to the front desk (Uber Eats, DoorDash, etc.)? Brands have been playing around with kiosk or digital check-in for a long time, and while many other

“

Our industry learned to behave differently, and we learned to do more with less.”

industries have embraced it, hotels have not. Maybe it's time. How about breakfast in limited-service hotels? Is it really that important to the guest? Next!

NEW HORIZONS

And there are some opportunities that have been sitting out there just waiting for the hotel industry to embrace them.

As a quick example, companies can transition the cost of credit card processing to the customer just like in numerous other places like gas stations, restaurants, professional services, government, and more.

Industry veteran Mukesh Mowji sees this as a “gift” from the U.S. government for

business owners. “People in all walks of life are seeing this in gas stations, restaurants, and other businesses. Why not hotels?” Mowji asked. “Since AAHOA Members represent more than 50% of all hotels in the U.S. today, there is no doubt this is going to catch on with independent hotels and branded properties. It's just a matter of time.”

The truth is we have all learned that things have changed and will continue to do so. Your guests will tell you what's important and what's expected. They do expect changes as they know business owners will need to do some things just to stay in business or they simply now understand what matters to the guest. So, what's next? Stay tuned. ■



Bob Ekman is a 39-year veteran of the hospitality industry with deep ties to AAHOA. He is the CEO of Merchaneer, an AAHOA Platinum Member and a third-party company creating opportunities for business owners. He can be reached at 630-240-4747 or www.merchaneer.com



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Inflation threatens to crumble consumer confidence

by ALFREDO ORTIZ

AS THE U.S. ECONOMY CONTINUES to ramp up following the pandemic, consumers are falling back into their usual spending patterns. Travel for both work and pleasure are once again back on the docket. But as one problem dissipates, another has materialized. Though nowhere near the disruption level sparked by the coronavirus, inflation is threatening to bridle commerce.

Rising price levels are of particular concern for the hospitality sector. When household budgets tighten as a result of ballooning price tags at the grocery store or gas pump, recreational travel and dining out are among the first line items to be scaled back. In May, economy-wide year-over-year prices increased by 5%, which is the biggest 12-month jump since 2008. Inflation at hotels and other accommodation businesses amounted to 10% during the same period.

Some inflation is unavoidable and even good in certain cases. In fact, the Federal Reserve pinpoints 2% as a healthy level of annual price increases. And as the U.S. emerges from the pandemic, inflation levels were bound to surpass that threshold. Americans were hunkered down at home for more than a year.

Because the pent-up demand is being released so quickly, consumer demand in the short run is outpacing supply. With everything else held constant, supply and demand would reach an equilibrium and prices would stabilize. However, there's another factor at play throwing a wrench into recovery: Uncle Sam and his printing press.

While some spending during the pandemic has been warranted to shore-up an economy that was pistol whipped by the coronavirus and lockdowns, Congress predictably might have gone a bit overboard by trillions of dollars. The Paycheck Protection Program and relief for individuals early on was reasonable and welcomed. But spending on pet projects and lasting enhanced federal unemployment benefits

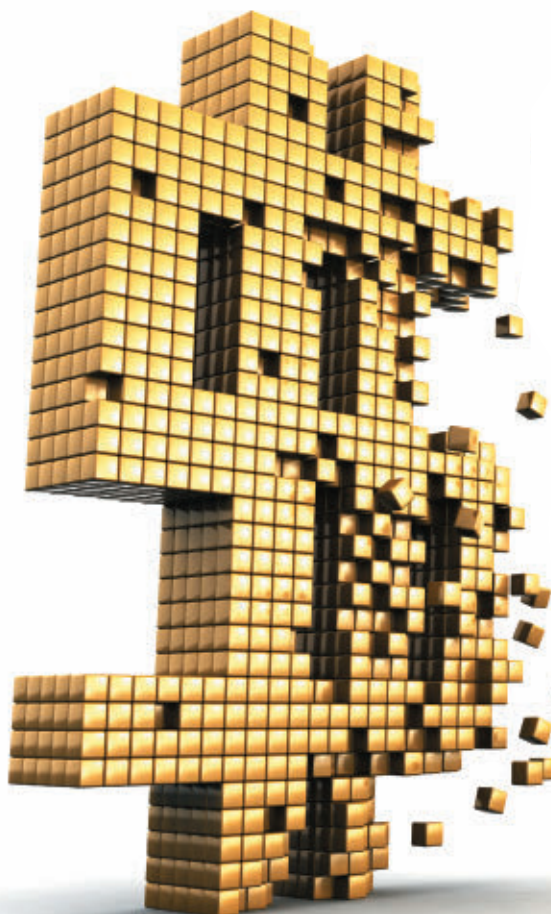
that may have incentivized staying at home rather than returning to work were counterproductive.

As spending levels surged and government revenue from taxpayers remained little changed (relatively), the U.S. had two options to make up the difference: borrow more money or fire up the printing presses. And as the supply of dollars goes up and purchasing power falls, the prices of goods and services rise in tandem.

Imagine a hypothetical scenario in which a helicopter drops a million dollars into a certain neighborhood that has a handful of restaurants. Because residents have more cash in their pocket, consumer demand would subsequently spike. The cost of a burger, for example, might jump from \$5 to \$8. A similar concept is currently playing out on a national scale.

Consumers, for the most part, have or will soon return to pre-pandemic behavior, which is good news for businesses that have been struggling. But dishing out fast, easy money fresh off the printing press could ultimately dampen recovery. Policymakers may have gone off the rails on spending, but they can avoid repeating the same mistake down the road. ■

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



AAHOA MEMBERS IN ACTION

1A-B. Washington DC Area Regional Director Sandip Patel and the regional Ambassadors hosted Town Halls in Baltimore, MD, and Leesburg, VA.



1A



1B



2A

2A. Young Professional Hoteliers Reception at Hunter Investment Conference in Atlanta, GA.

2B. AAHOA Vice Chair Vinay Patel, Chairman Biran Patel, Treasurer Nishant (Neal) Patel, and Secretary Bharat Patel at the Young Professional Hoteliers Reception at Hunter Investment Conference.



2B

2C. Bhavin Patel (from left) CHLA Chairman Bijal Patel, Heaven Douglas, and Mili Shah at the Young Professional Hoteliers Reception at Hunter Investment Conference.



2C



North Central Regional Director Bhavesh N. Patel and the Regional Ambassadors hosted a Town Hall in Cincinnati, OH.



AAHOA Member Suresh Patel, Director of GR Hospitality, was named to the Board of Directors of the Grandville Jenison Chamber of Commerce in Michigan.



Mid South Regional Director Sunil Patel and the Regional Ambassadors hosted an O'Connor & Associates Dinner & Learn in Nashville, TN.



Florida Regional Director Rahul Patel and the Regional Ambassadors hosted an O'Connor & Associates Dinner & Learn in Tallahassee.



AAHOA VP, Education Ashli Johnson (from left), President, Marriott International Stephanie Linnartz, Tina Patel, and AAHOA Vice Chair Vinay Patel at the She Has a Deal competition in McLean, VA.



Members of the AAHOA team – (from left) Secretary Bharat Patel, Director at Large Jay (Jayesh) Patel, Young Professional Director Eastern Division Bhavik Patel, Director, State & Local Government Affairs Eric Reinerman, Vice President, Government Affairs Dean Heyl, and Florida Regional Director Rahul Patel – met with Interim President & CEO Ken Greene (second from left) to welcome him to the AAHOA family.



Chairman Biran Patel was on hand as North Texas Regional Director Dhiren Masters and the Regional Ambassadors hosted a Town Hall in Irving.



10A-C. Merrill Mangalasseril (from left), representing tournament sponsor Ananta Energy Source and Clay Suter from Sonifi Solutions joined Chairman Biran Patel and Regional Director Bhavesh N. Patel for a great day of golf at the North Central Region Inaugural Charity Golf Tournament in Clayton, IN.

B-C. North Central Region Inaugural Charity Golf Tournament.



AAHOA Members met with Kansas City Mayor Quinton Lucas to discuss issues impacting local hoteliers.

South Pacific Regional Director Mike Riverside and the Regional Ambassadors hosted a Town Hall in Orange, CA.

AAHOA CLUB BLUE, PLATINUM & SILVER MEMBERS

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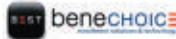
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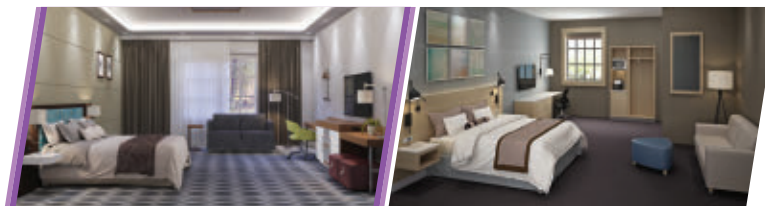
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