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October 2020 | todayshotelier.com

The Official Publication of AAHOA

"LET'S GO THERE"

When it's time to say,

*"Let's go there."*

the travel industry will be ready

TODAY'S HOTELIER

**ROGER DOW**

*President and CEO*

*U.S. Travel Association*

**Swift action in the face of COVID-19**

*A Q&A with Ash Patel, Past AAHOA Chair, 2008-2009*

**Navigating the ongoing effects of COVID-19**

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# 5 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT AAHOA THIS MONTH

## 1.

**AAHOA kicks off its 2020 Regional Conference & Trade Show season.** Registration is now open for AAHOA's virtual Regional Conferences & Trade Shows, which begins October 21. Registration is free, and the industry is encouraged to attend for every region in which they own, operate, or have interest in hotel ownership. Register for free today at AAHOA.com.

## 2.

**AAHOA Chairman to speak at 2020 Best Western Virtual Convention.** AAHOA Chairman Biran Patel will be a featured speaker at the 2020 Best Western Virtual Convention, to be held October 27-29. AAHOA also will have a booth at the virtual show, so come by and learn about all your membership has to offer.

## 3.

**RLH Corporation Virtual Conference & Expo is this month.** AAHOA will have a virtual booth within the Exhibitor Hall and Chairman Biran Patel will speak during the General Session on Day 2 of the event, to be held October 13-14. RLH Corporation owners also qualify for a free AAHOA membership at AAHOA.com. AAHOA Members who own RLH properties are encouraged to attend.

## 4.

**Latino Hotel Association conference focuses on the 'new normal.'** AAHOA Chairman Biran Patel will give opening remarks at the 2020 Latino Hotel Association Virtual Conference, which will focus on the "new normal" perspective on hotel leadership and ownership. Register now at latinohotels.org.

## 5.

**AAHOA President & CEO to speak at FRLA summit.** Cecil P. Staton will represent AAHOA as a panelist at Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association's eighth annual Marketing + Operations Summit. The event will be held October 13-14 in Destin, FL. Register for this in-person event at frla.org.

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

### AAHOA STAFF CONTRIBUTORS

**Lisa Brown**, Content Coordinator & Copywriter

**Heather Carnes**, VP of Marketing

**Peter Clerkin**, Director, Communications

**Sean Grossnickle**, Communications & Public Affairs Coordinator

**Rachel Humphrey**, COO & VP of Franchise Relations

**Kati Siconolfi**, Director, State & Local Government Affairs

**Cecil P. Staton**, President & CEO

**Kathryn Stone**, Chief of Staff

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### NAYLOR STAFF CONTRIBUTORS

**Sunny Goel**, Design/Layout

**Heather Greyling**, Publisher

**Kira Krewson**, Project Manager

**John O'Neil**, Advertising Director

**Taylor Hicks**, Senior Marketing Account Specialist

**Geneva Toddy**, Managing Editor

**Tracy Venzen**, Project Coordinator

**Chris Zabel and Jason Zawada**, Advertising Associates



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**BIRAN PATEL**  
AAHOA CHAIRMAN (2020-2021)



“During pandemic operations, hotel design must do more than attract travelers – it also must assure health, safety, and peace of mind.”

## Embrace the new dynamics of hotel design

**T**HE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY WILL REMAIN A MAJOR PLAYER IN THE NATION’S recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. From theaters to restaurants to hotels, businesses have been researching, developing, and implementing protocols to attract customers with the promise of a safe, sanitary stay. The importance of the guest experience today cannot be understated.

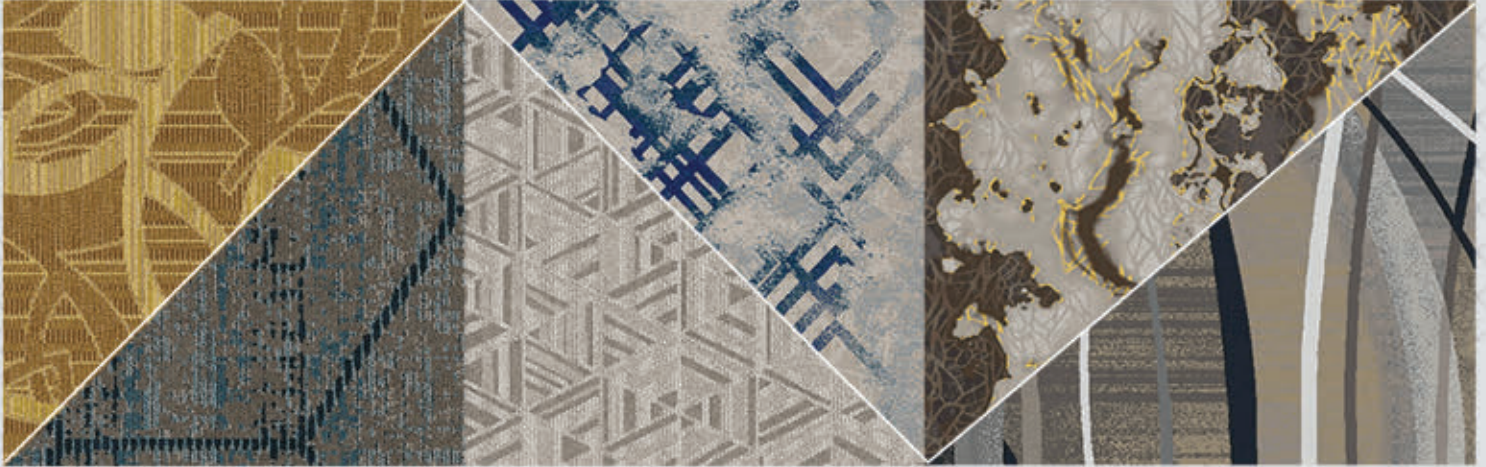
Travel has changed, and so have expectations. Industry surveys indicate guests expect more frequent, visible cleaning as well as transparency on what hotels are doing to keep guests safe and the property sanitized. Cleanliness and housekeeping procedures have been ranked as the most important attributes for hotel guests, beating out price and location. For months now, the industry has grappled with the challenge of applying the best practices in sanitation while marketing these enhanced protocols to the public. During pandemic operations, hotel design must do more than attract travelers – it also must assure health, safety, and peace of mind.

Transparency and consistency are vital touchstones of the hotel experience. Following government-issued guidance, all major hotel brands have rolled out their own safety and cleanliness protocols and training programs. Social distancing stickers, signage, front desk barriers, and hand sanitizer pumps are all among the common features in these branded protocols. For independent hoteliers and franchisees looking to supplement their current protocols, AAHOA partnered with P&G Professional to create the AAHOA/P&G Professional’s Training in Hotel Sanitization and Cleanliness, which offers free training and resources on topics from infection prevention to communications. Completion of this certification takes just half an hour, and AAHOA will mail a certificate of completion to your property within a few business days.

With hardware already in place, hotel owners should aim to deliver consistent service in accordance with the sanitary protocols and practices promised to visitors on the property. While it takes time and active engagement to enforce the best practices, the process will deliver the safest guest experience. The threat of this pandemic is still prevalent and will be for the foreseeable future. Adopting and enforcing sanitation standards is more than a marketing ploy. It’s a pledge to protect the health and safety of everyone on the hotel property. As travel adjusts to the new normal in the fall season, now is the time to subscribe to the up-to-date industry practices and provide peace of mind to American travelers.

I know these new standards of operation are a challenge and financial burden. As with every other aspect of this global pandemic, AAHOA will monitor the latest health and safety guidance, and communicate these updates to our members. Every resource and piece of information we provide will be based, first and foremost, on providing America’s hoteliers with the tools you need to safeguard the health and safety of their families, employees, and guests. ■

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**CECIL P. STATON**  
AAHOA PRESIDENT & CEO

“

Our AAHOA Members have long demonstrated a spirit of commitment and resolve that allows us to pursue meaningful impact in the legislative process, and that same commitment will be critical in the months to come.”

## Committed to engagement

**T HIS HAS BEEN AND WILL CONTINUE TO BE A LONG, TWISTING ROAD TO RECOVERY** in many respects. But in just as many ways it has been inspiring and a testament to the resilience of our association. I have been inspired by our dedicated AAHOA Member volunteers and staff, especially those members who lend their support through these complicated times, in successfully confronting the numerous trials of the pandemic. As the voice of America’s hoteliers, we are delivering advocacy, resources, and guidance not only to AAHOA Members but to the entire hospitality industry.

On the advocacy front, AAHOA has leveraged the national presence and industry insight of our strong membership to lawmakers in Washington, D.C. and state capitals across the country. Our aim is to incorporate unique perspectives and work constructively alongside politicians, both at the state and federal level, to inform impactful public policy that will help our industry recover. AAHOA provides a bridge between small business owners and political decision makers. This is a pillar of our association and will remain a driving force within our strategic plan.

Since the passage of the CARES Act back in March, Congress has been locked in a months-long negotiation stalemate to the detriment of millions of American workers and the health of our economy. Despite this impasse on a second round of COVID-19 relief, our political engagement will not relent. As champions of small business, our goals transcend the infighting that enshrouds the contentions of election year politics. The strength of advocacy efforts hinges upon member engagement. Our AAHOA Members have long demonstrated a spirit of commitment and resolve that allows us to pursue meaningful impact in the legislative process, and that same commitment will be critical in the months to come.

This continuous commitment to our advocacy is reflected in a number of grassroots metrics as well as our internal production of webinars, virtual events, and convention. Coupled with our engagement efforts, our growing library of COVID-19 “Back to Business” webcasts are tapping into the breadth of resources allowed by and available to our members. Free to any hotelier, our collection of resources offers leading insight, guidance, and forecasts for the hospitality industry.

Many small businesses have had to confront new standards of operations and uncertainty these past months. I am impressed and thankful for how, as an association and as a community, we have risen to the challenge of the pandemic, and I am confident that we will continue to uplift our industry in the months ahead. ■

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# A year to prioritize civic engagement

by SEAN GROSSNICKLE



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**2020 IS A PIVOTAL YEAR FOR THE** future of American politics. The forms we fill and ballots we cast will not only determine which candidates represent us in the White House, Congress, and state legislatures but will also shape how populations are counted, districts are drawn, and funding is allocated. The intersection of the U.S. Census, held once every 10 years, and the November elections raises the stakes of every American's civic engagement.

## CENSUS LOGISTICS

Since mid-March, households have had the opportunity to submit the 2020 Census form online, by mail, or by phone. Most American households received a mailed pamphlet that includes a unique code and instructions for completing the form online, and the Census Bureau again followed up in April with mail sent to homes that had not yet responded. In total, the questionnaire takes no more than 10 minutes to complete, and only one member per household needs to fill out the form. There is no citizenship question included in this year's Census, and the information requested is fairly basic, pertaining to name, age, birth date, sex, and race. All information submitted to the Census Bureau is bound by Title 13 of the U.S. Code, which guarantees that all

private and identifiable information will not be released to any other government agency, law enforcement, or court. This information is kept strictly confidential and is solely used to paint a statistical picture of the nation's population.

## MEETING THE DEADLINE

The coronavirus pandemic extended the 2020 Census collection deadline until October 31, yet federal appointees and Trump administration officials have sought to conclude the data collection much earlier. Depending on the outcome of ongoing litigation, the response deadline may be moved up to October 5, as indicated by the Census Bureau. The data reporting deadline could also be affected by the outcome of the current litigation, with reporting totals going to the desk of the President as early as December 31 or as late as April 30.

It is not too late to complete the Census or inform members of your community about the significance, ease, and lasting effects this decennial data collection can have. An accurate Census count is the cornerstone of America's representative government. The 2020 Census will not factor into this year's election cycle, but its data will be instrumental in reshaping political representation, economic decisions, and resource allotment for the next 10 years. It

is more than a simple population tally. Data collected in the Census will become a basis for a wide range of government and private industry research, affecting business decisions as well state-level districting, apportionment of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, and allocation of government funds.

## ROCK THE VOTE

Much like the Census, the 2020 elections have been complicated by the pandemic. False and misleading claims regarding the security of this year's election are running rampant, but rest assured that the electoral process remains secure, valid, and safe while offering voters several ways to cast their ballots. AAHOA Members have free access to our Civic Action Center, featured both on our website and in many of the daily COVID-19 digests. Registering to vote is quick, simple, and a civic duty of all Americans. Check the status of your registration through our action center or through your local election authority. Now is the time to make a plan to vote. Vote early, request a ballot, or locate your in-person polling location. The significance of the 2020 Census and elections cannot be overstated. Engagement in these incredibly important civic activities ensures trust, legitimacy, and accurate representation in the democratic process. ■

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# When it's time to say, "Let's go there," the travel industry will be ready

by ROGER DOW



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION.

Roger Dow addressing Destination Capitol Hill 2019.

*"Let's go there"*

**IT'S THE FEELING SO MANY OF US** have missed these past months – the excitement of planning a trip, the thrill of waiting for a new adventure to begin, the anticipation of connecting with others, of new experiences, and creating memories.

This is the unifying theme more than 75 businesses and organizations (including AAHOA) – from large companies to destinations of all sizes and including brands from outside the travel sector – formed

the Let's Go There Coalition. Together, we developed a plan to inspire Americans to begin thinking about and taking steps to plan a future getaway, trip, or vacation.

The idea is straightforward: the simple act of making travel plans can boost Americans' happiness and energy levels and increase their sense of well-being, and will eventually put the country's travel industry on the path to recovery.

If you've ever felt that planning a trip is the point when the fun begins, you're not alone. There is a wealth of research that says the simple act of anticipating a trip can have a positive impact on mental and physical health.

## ARE WE THERE YET?

According to polling conducted by happiness researcher Michelle Gielan, 97 percent of respondents said having a trip planned makes them happier, while 82 percent reported it makes them "moderately" or "significantly" happier. Further, 71 percent reported feeling greater levels of energy when they had a trip planned in the next six months. These findings come at a time when studies have shown Americans are experiencing the lowest levels of happiness in 50 years.

This research complements previous U.S. Travel reports that found travel is a powerful antidote to burnout, and



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION.

Roger Dow networking during the U.S. Travel Association's ESTO 2019.

can help increase happiness levels, improve job satisfaction, and strengthen personal relationships.

**FIRST STEPS**

In addition to boosting happiness, making plans is one of the first steps to restoring travel industry jobs and putting Americans back to work. Travel supported employment for one in 10 American workers pre-pandemic, but more than half of those jobs disappeared between the onset of the pandemic and May 1. The broader travel industry has made a commitment to adhere to the highest health and safety standards and

will be prepared to welcome back visitors once demand returns.

On a personal note, so many of my friends and colleagues have shared with me how much they've missed traveling these past few months. Travel brings us together, it opens our eyes to new cultures and experiences, and allows us – even just for a few days – to forget the stressors of the world. This year has been extraordinarily challenging, and we could all benefit from having plans to look forward to.

**TAKE THE LEAP**

So, go ahead. Give yourself permission to dream of better times, to plan for brighter

days, and to feel that buzz of excitement when you book a trip. When you're ready to say, "Let's go there" and plan a trip, the U.S. travel industry will be ready to safely welcome you back.

And I can't wait to see you out there.

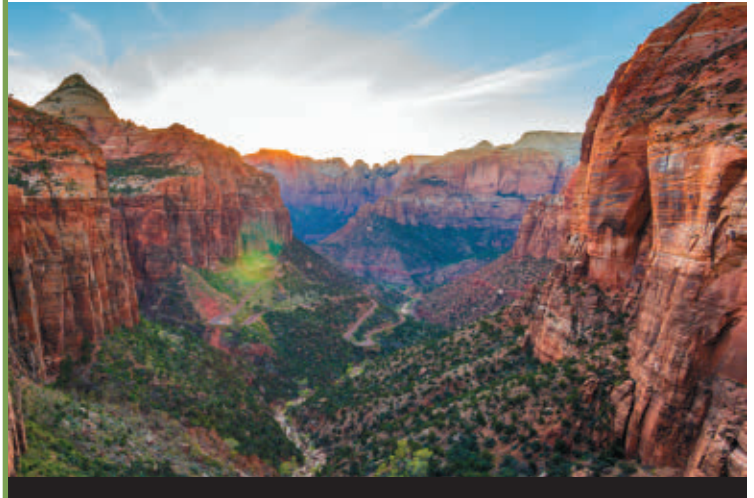
For more information, visit [LetsGoThere.travel](https://LetsGoThere.travel) and see the #LetsMakePlans hashtag. For more information about the Let's Go There Coalition and how you can join the movement, visit [ustravel.org/LetsGoThereCoalition](https://ustravel.org/LetsGoThereCoalition) or contact [info@letsgethere.travel](mailto:info@letsgethere.travel). ■

*Roger Dow is president and CEO of the U.S. Travel Association.*

# Securing the future of America's outdoors

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

by SEAN GROSSNICKLE



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(LWCF) for the Fiscal Year 2021 budget. The proposed cuts drew criticism from lawmakers, conservationists, park goers, and small businesses near the parks that provide essential services such as lodging and hospitality, which largely depend on visitors to sustain their local economies. Our national parks provide economic value, enrichment, and enjoyment. As Americans flocked to the outdoors following the breakout of the pandemic, Congress shifted into gear to ensure the public lands and LWCF receive both long term funding and protections.

## THE ISSUE

The National Park System (NPS) has grappled with years of underfunding while also handling a record number of visitors throughout the more than 400 park sites across the nation. After lockdowns warranted by the COVID-19 pandemic, Americans are finding ways to get out of the house and explore parks, trails, forests, and bodies of water. National parks allow visitors to connect with and understand the breathtaking beauty of our public lands, as well as the history and wonder they preserve. With more visitors, reduced staffing, and a \$12-billion backlog in vital infrastructure repairs, the condition of our nation's park system has been under serious strain.

Back in February, the Trump Administration proposed drastic cuts to the NPS and the Land and Water Conservation Fund

## COMMON GROUND

In the spring of 2019, the late Rep. John Lewis (D-GA) introduced H.R. 1957, the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA). The economic impacts of the pandemic, especially those on the travel and tourism industry, reignited the discourse on the NPS, public lands, and LWCF. In March, the GAOA remerged with amendments, drawing widespread bipartisan support in both chambers of Congress. Congress passed the historic GAOA by a vote of 73 to 25 in the Senate and then by a vote of 310 to 107 in the House. The President signed the bill into law in early August, securing billions of dollars in funding to address the backlog of park maintenance and guaranteeing \$900 million per year in perpetuity for the LWCF. ■

### Rep. John Lewis (D-GA), Sponsor of GAOA

*"When we take our air, waters, and land for granted; when we show a simple lack of respect for nature and our environment, we unmake God's good creation. Humanity is the most important endangered species under threat from climate change and yet we flood our ecology with poisons and pollution. It is my belief that our country needs better environmental protections and that real protections do not have to come at the expense of jobs or our economy. Whatever we do to the earth, we do to each other."*

### Sen. Cory Gardner (R-CO), Introduced GAOA in Senate

*"Years of bipartisan work have led to this moment and this historic opportunity for conservation. Today the Senate passed not only the single greatest conservation achievement in generations but also a lifeline to mountain towns and recreation communities hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. I call on the House of Representatives to pass this bill without delay in order to provide jobs to the American people, economic stimulus to communities in need, and protections for the great American outdoors for future generations of Americans to cherish."*

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**OUTSTANDING  
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**Dhruiti Patel**  
 *Eugene, OR*

**POLITICAL FORUM  
AWARD FOR  
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The COVID-19 pandemic continues to ravage businesses and communities in so many ways, but one of the most insidious and harmful effects is that it makes communities even more vulnerable to human trafficking. And while some of the effects of the pandemic are unavoidable, preventing human trafficking is not. To help members join the fight to eradicate this scourge, AAHOA offers Businesses Ending Slavery and Trafficking (BEST) Inhospitable to Human Trafficking Training Sponsored by AAHOA. This on-demand, fully digital training is completely FREE to all AAHOA Members and their employees. Now is the time to complete this brief yet highly impactful training. Earn your certificate today at [AAHOA.com/HTAT](http://AAHOA.com/HTAT).

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Businesses are reopening across the country and consumers are beginning to resume their routines. And as people begin to venture out, cleaning and disinfection are top of mind. For hoteliers, it's critical to communicate that their space is cleaned and disinfected regularly to help reassure customers that it is safe to return.

But hoteliers need to know about the latest guidance and recommendations to ensure the safety of their employees and guests. That's why AAHOA has partnered with P&G Professional on the brand-new Training in Hotel Sanitization and Cleanliness program, which will help you do your part to support the recovery of the hospitality industry. The all-digital program covers what hoteliers need to know related to infection prevention and control, high touch points, communications, sanitizing soft surfaces, elevating the guest experience, and more!

The FREE program is available to all AAHOA Members and the entire industry during these uncertain times, and participants who successfully complete the course and brief assessment receive a Certificate of Completion. Visit [AAHOA.com/CleaningCert](http://AAHOA.com/CleaningCert) to learn more. ■

# LOOKING TO SET A TREND

My Place Hotels of America launches second brand targeting hoteliers with expiring franchise agreements

by NICK FORTUNA

**I**T TAKES GUTS TO LAUNCH A NEW HOTEL BRAND AMID A PANDEMIC, ESPECIALLY since COVID-19 has hit the hospitality industry harder than most, but Ryan Rivett believes he has a winning formula, and success in the industry runs in his blood. If it's true that fortune favors the fearless, then Rivett and his company have much to look forward to, and he's inviting savvy hoteliers to come along for the ride.

Rivett is the chief executive of Aberdeen, SD-based My Place Hotels of America, which has 56 My Place Hotels across 27 states and more than 120 in the pipeline. The brand, which debuted in 2012, consists of newly constructed midscale, extended-stay properties, each with about 64 guest rooms catering primarily to transient and business travelers.

In June, the company launched its second brand, Trend Hotels & Suites, a collection of upper-midscale and upscale select-service and extended-stay hotels. The brand mostly is targeting properties built in 2005 or later that are independent or have franchise agreements set to expire. Promising reduced overall franchise fees, low conversion costs, and more robust support than rival franchisors, Rivett believes Trend Hotels & Suites offers a better value to hoteliers.

"The level of relationship-based support that we offer and our understanding of the business from the operator's perspective are really our key strengths, so that's what we're offering to franchisees who are in a position to change their affiliation," Rivett said. "We can bolster their business at a lesser cost and with a greater degree of support than they're getting from the larger franchise organizations, which have much more layering.



Trend’s brand standards offer hoteliers more flexibility in the conversion process. This rendering depicts how a conversion from a Comfort Inn might look.

“We’re offering a great deal of infrastructure from a relatively small brand at this point and an opportunity for the franchisor and franchise to grow concurrently. That’s really attractive to a lot of franchises who have said, ‘My property is well located, I’m seasoned in the business, I operate my hotel well, but in many respects, I’m paying too much for my franchise affiliation and the value it brings.’”

**ALL IN THE FAMILY**

Rivett is the grandson of Ron Rivett, who in 1973 co-founded the Super 8 brand, which is now owned by Wyndham Hotel Group. His family still owns and operates the first Super 8 hotel ever opened, in Aberdeen, along with several other properties.

With My Place Hotels continuing to grow, Ryan Rivett said he’s optimistic that Trend Hotels & Suites can build upon his family’s multigenerational success story. In early August, he said his company was in discussions with more than a dozen hoteliers about converting their properties to the Trend brand.

“It would be nice to see history repeat itself,” Rivett said. “Right now, we’re just doing what we do and, to some degree, ignoring the difficulties of the times and staying on course. It seems like a good plan, and so far, it’s been really well received.”

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Right now, we’re just doing what we do and, to some degree, ignoring the difficulties of the times and staying on course. It seems like a good plan, and so far, it’s been really well received.”

—RYAN RIVETT, PRESIDENT & CEO, MY PLACE HOTELS OF AMERICA



Trend will be looking to prove its worth by tailoring the conversion process to each individual property. This rendering depicts a conversion from Staybridge to Trend.

“

We're focused on the reality of our circumstances right now and the potential that we identify in each property that we go into. We're really focused on quality properties that were operated and maintained well pre-pandemic and are either operating well today or working toward getting their feet back underneath them.”

—RYAN RIVETT, PRESIDENT & CEO, MY PLACE HOTELS OF AMERICA

Trend properties will have a 5-percent base royalty fee, within the industry norm of 4.5 percent to 7 percent, Rivett said. But the company is aiming to keep hoteliers' total brand-affiliation costs at about 9.5 percent, compared with 13 percent to 19 percent for a typical upper-midscale, branded property, he said.

“There are a lot of us operating in the industry around that 5-percent number, but the important number is the all in – what am I really going to be writing a check for on a monthly basis? – and we're going to be under 10 percent,” he said.

Rivett said that due to steady industry growth over the past 15 years, there are many midscale and upper-midscale properties with franchise agreements set to expire soon. Some properties that were upper midscale five years ago have been pushed down-market because of increased competition and changing market dynamics. In many cases, hoteliers are facing strong competition from newer properties owned by the same parent company, he said.

“With parent companies having 20 or 30 brands underneath them, including soft branding and collection branding, what we've seen is the name brand becomes less important than the ability to distribute available hotel supply and the ability of the operator to provide a consistent guest experience,” Rivett said. “Brands have grown, but not necessarily in proportionality with the value that their name provides.



“In many cases, hotel operators are saying they’re competing with five or six different hotel brands within their same reservation system and within their same market.”

### **AN INDIVIDUALIZED APPROACH**

Trend Hotels & Suites offers flexible standards focusing on the strengths of individual properties, Rivett said. Amenities such as swimming pools, fitness centers, and free breakfasts – which typically are costly to operate, and heavily marketed but underutilized – aren’t part of Trend’s brand standards. While other brands focus on providing more services and enlarging common areas, Trend’s focus is on giving guests a premium in-room experience at an affordable price, he said.

With their smaller footprint, My Place Hotels typically operate with just a handful of staffers, whereas rivals with 80 to 120 rooms and a full suite of amenities might need two dozen employees, Rivett said. Trend hotels also are designed to operate more efficiently than their peers, which Rivett said will help them weather recessions better than other brands.

The COVID-19 recession likely will mean fewer new hotels being built in the short term, so some large brands see hotel conversions as the surest path to growth. Early indications suggest that the competition for hoteliers with expiring franchise agreements will be fierce. During recent conference calls with investors, executives at Wyndham and Hyatt said they’re devoting large sums to

conversions and possibly will offer hoteliers upfront payments and other incentives.

However, hoteliers who are looking to change brands without being demoted to economy or midscale status often must make hefty investments to renovate their properties, Rivett said. With 2020 shaping up as the worst year ever for the industry, most hoteliers aren’t in a position to spend \$1 million or more on upgrades, so they may feel that they have no choice but to stick with their brands. Even worse, they may lack the funds to adhere to stringent brand standards and may lose their affiliation.

### **LOW CONVERSION COSTS**

Trend’s brand standards offer hoteliers more flexibility and a streamlined conversion process, Rivett said. The typical conversion might require \$35,000 to \$45,000 in new exterior and interior signage, and upgrades to fix normal wear and tear may be staggered over time, depending on the condition of the property and the hotelier’s financial situation. Since the typical Trend property will be relatively new, wholesale renovations rarely will be necessary.

“It’s a more progressive schedule of improvements that occurs as performance is re-established following the pandemic and as volume continues to creep up,” Rivett said. “We’re focused on the reality of our circumstances right now and the potential that we identify in each property that we go into. We’re really focused on quality properties that were operated and maintained well pre-pandemic and are either operating well today or working toward getting their feet back underneath them.”

“Hotels are really well positioned to make brand-affiliation changes,” he said. “They may be facing the difficult decision of whether they can sustain operations after required capital improvements that will come back into play in the near future, if they aren’t in play already, depending on the brand and location.”

Rivett said Trend executives are looking to prove their worth by tailoring their marketing and sales strategies to each individual property and market, putting “boots on the ground” and using business-intelligence software. He said his company has made substantial investments in a technology infrastructure that makes My Place and Trend just as visible as larger brands.

When a property converts, a “white-glove onboarding process ensues seemingly overnight,” Rivett said. Once staff training is complete, Trend’s systems-operations team will perform the switch “so as not to miss a single reservation on the books,” he said. The brand will provide ongoing staff-development opportunities to workers, and hoteliers will get the individualized attention they need to thrive, Rivett said.

“Our understanding of each market that we go into is deep,” he said. “It goes beyond data mining and analytics. We actually put in the work to understand each market that we go into, and you get a greater level of communication with us. The access to people at every level of our company is substantially greater than what you’ll find in any other franchise organization.

“We have strategy meetings to look as deep as we can into each market that we’re in, or to identify similarities from market to market, so we know which demographic groups we need to go after to put heads in beds.” ■

PART 2

# THE PROS SPEAK UP



Ash Patel, AAHOA Past Chairman

AAHOA Past Chairman Ash Patel acted swiftly and decisively in the early stages of COVID-19

by PETER BERK

**A**S THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY CONTINUES TO FACE unparalleled economic hardships imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, PMZ is pleased to present a second in-depth interview with an AAHOA Past Chairman. These discussions shed light on the struggles and challenges they faced as individual owners and as chair, along with how those experiences prepared them to meet today's challenges. For this month's edition, we sat down for an exclusive chat with Ash Patel.

Patel has more than 30 years of hotel experience managing, developing, acquiring, renovating, and repositioning more than 25 hotel assets, representing 2,500+ rooms with brand affiliations such as Hilton, Marriott, IHG, Choice Hotels, Wyndham Worldwide, Best Western, and G6 Hospitality. Patel is currently the President and CEO of Southwest Hospitality Management, a company with 14 hotels, and an additional four in the pipeline. The Mesa, AZ-based lodging development, management, and investment firm employs more than 500 people at its properties throughout the United States.

Patel was first elected to the AAHOA Board of Directors in 2003, representing the Southwest region. In 2005, he was named Treasurer and went on to become Chairman from 2008 to 2009. Patel established the AAHOA PAC and lobbying efforts in Washington, DC, for the association. During his tenure, AAHOA hired lobbying firm Patton Boggs to represent its members,


as well as its efforts on the Hill to lobby for industry issues. He also led the Government Affairs Committee and, most recently, launched Iridescent Hotels, a third-party hotel management company based out of Keller, TX.

 **WHAT YEAR DID YOU GET INTO THE BUSINESS? WHERE AND WHAT WAS THE FIRST HOTEL THAT YOU OWNED?**

In December of 1991, my wife Asha and I started off with a small minority partnership in an Econo Lodge in Flagstaff, AZ. It was a 50-room hotel we operated as owners/managers, working 24/7 for five years. That small ownership developed into a partnership, and we ended up managing four hotels during that decade. During that time, we also built the first “Hilton-branded” hotel in Flagstaff, a Hampton Inn we opened in 1995.

 **HOW MANY HOTELS DOES YOUR FIRM OWN TODAY? WHAT BRANDS ARE THEY?**

We currently have 10 hotels representing the following brands: Marriott, Hilton, IHG, Best Western, and Choice. We also have three hotels in the development pipeline. We intend to fast-track them after the COVID-19 epidemic subsides.

 **WHEN OPENING YOUR FIRST HOTEL, YOU FACED ADVERSITY. DESCRIBE A CHALLENGE THAT WAS COMPLETELY UNEXPECTED.**

The one big hurdle we faced, which many of our fellow hoteliers can attest to, is that it is easy to go over budget and run out of money before the project is completed. You can spend money quickly when building a solid asset without cutting corners, trying to use the best material and skilled labor. I was in my 20s, still a novice in the industry, and sticking to a budget was tough. I wanted to deliver a high-quality product and learned building relationships based on trust and work ethic was going to be the key to my success, and getting a project complete in the hotel business.

 **HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THAT CHALLENGE?**

“Never give up mentally or refuse to fail” is a motto I told myself and still tell myself every single day. I leveraged all of my relationships to scrounge up the shortfall of funds and get the project complete on time and on budget.

 **WHAT WERE THE FIRST FEW THINGS YOU DID AT YOUR FIRM WHEN YOU REALIZED THE COVID-19 CRISIS WOULD BE A SERIOUS CALAMITY?**

We listened to the brands, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the local and state governments to give

us direction. There was a lot of confusion, as no one was on the same page. When we realized the seriousness of the situation, we went into a crisis mode of operations, similar to how we operated through 9/11 and the 2008 downturn. Initially, there was some panic at the property level, but our managers adjusted to the new normal. We also ordered PPE and other needed supplies early on.

Staying in constant communication with our managers was how we addressed challenges and comforted anxiety. To streamline operations, we had to cut expenses proactively and, unfortunately, had to downsize our team. So, within the first two weeks, a majority of our staff were furloughed. The only consolation was that everyone was caught in the same storm but on different boats. As of now, we are floating. However, we do not know how long we can maintain course and survive. Nothing could have prepared us for this pandemic. Still, with the help of great partners and an excellent team, we have been able to weather the storm so far. The question remains: what happens next if there is a second wave? I will have to figure it out then. As I said before, “never give up.”

 **HOW DID YOU MAKE THE DECISION TO KEEP YOUR HOTELS OPEN OR CLOSE THEM?**

We decided to keep all of our hotels open. Although we were doing single-digit occupancy for almost 12 weeks, we felt we needed to keep on as many team members as financially possible. We also made sure our hotel facilities were maintained while operating at low occupancy. Each property had a checklist to ensure its upkeep and cleanliness. Our maintenance department needed to maintain our swimming pools, filtration systems, softeners, pipes, flushing drains, and laundry machines (so they didn’t calcify) weekly.

We were cognizant about health issues that occur when an asset is shut down for months, like Legionnaires’ disease and other mold-related issues. The cost of closing down Legionnaires’ disease and reopening the property management system with the brands, along with the third-party contracts, would be as costly at the restart. We felt it was in our best interest to stay open, and that is what we did. Cost-wise, it almost evens out since we did not lose many team members, saving us the expense of hiring and training. Looking back, I have no regrets of staying open.

 **WHAT STEPS ARE YOU TAKING AT YOUR HOTELS TO MAKE TRAVELERS COMFORTABLE?**

We paid attention to the CDC, local health departments, OSHA, and the brands to guide us through the protocols of having a safe and healthy place for our customers. We practice social distancing, having signage around the properties for both staff and guests, added elevator landings, hand sanitizers at every entrance, and



We paid attention to the CDC, local health departments, OSHA, and the brands to guide us through the protocols of having a safe and healthy place for our customers. We practice social distancing, having signage around the properties for both staff and guests, added elevator landings, hand sanitizers at every entrance, and additional training and protocols that all public areas be cleaned and sanitized frequently, especially the high-touch point areas within the hotels.”

—ASH PATEL, PRESIDENT AND CEO, SOUTHWEST HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT

additional training and protocols that all public areas be cleaned and sanitized frequently, especially the high-touch point areas within the hotels. All staff members are required to wear masks and gloves; plexiglass screens have been installed at the check-in desk and the initial arrival itself. Guests are handed wellness packs upon arrival with hand sanitizer, masks, and more.

Hopefully, all of this gives our customers the confidence that we are doing what we can to keep everyone safe. Currently, those staying over do not receive housekeeping services unless requested, as we try to keep our staff from entering the room, so neither party is exposed to COVID-19. New housekeeping and laundry protocols have been established, including purchasing brand-mandated sanitizer spray units, along with brand and CDC-approved cleaning supplies to ensure our property is meeting the most stringent safety and cleanliness standards.

All non-essential items have been removed from the rooms, such as the directory, advertising materials, flyers, and the coffee maker. TV remotes are covered with plastic bags that are discarded after every check-out, and remotes are sanitized. The breakfast room is closed as our properties are only offering a to-go option, and our gyms and swimming pools are closed per local and state government mandates. Plans are in place for cleaning and social distancing in those areas when we are able to reopen them safely.

Guests are encouraged to use mobile check-in, but those who prefer a key are asked to drop them in a sanitizer bowl when checking out. The new protocols and procedures are a significant investment for us to make at a time when occupancy is low. Still,

it is the right thing to do, and we plan to continue to follow all recommendations for the safety of our guests and employees.



### **HOW DID YOUR FIRST-EVER UNEXPECTED CRISIS INFLUENCE YOUR DECISION PROCESS DURING THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK?**

My first crisis was 9/11 – our country was not prepared for a terrorist act. Since then, we have worked on and implemented crisis plans and processes. Although no two crises are the same, the majority of the processes are the same. Trust the plan and adapt to the new needs of the situation. Know there will be a ton of different emotions and challenges that come, as no two team members think or act the same. Normal life will be disrupted, and society will be in flux. Communicate with team members, stay focused, and follow the planned protocols. The safety and security of our customers, teams, and community are paramount; the rest will fall into place as we learn more. Have confidence in the decisions you make and leaders guiding the teams. With this worldwide pandemic sweeping through our cities, I am proud of our leadership teams that have guided our hotels. I feel confident that we will emerge from this successfully.



### **WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OTHER HOTEL OWNERS TO GET THROUGH THIS CURRENT CRISIS?**

Only stress about what you can control. Give it your best effort and realize that as much as you are stressed, so is your team,



“

With this worldwide pandemic sweeping through our cities, I am proud of our leadership teams that have guided our hotels. I feel confident that we will emerge from this successfully.”

—ASH PATEL, PRESIDENT AND CEO, SOUTHWEST HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT


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their families, and the rest of our country. This is an anomaly and shall pass at some point. The key thing is not to lose your humanity and health as we all go through these trying times. Stay lean on all expenses, and ensure your guests and teams that health and safety comes first. This is the time when you show customers the best service and experience possible. There is little we can control in the marketplace at this time, so focus on the fundamentals and your property. Stay involved politically, as those decisions will affect how your business will be treated, and opportunities created to survive this crisis.

**Q THE BIG CRYSTAL BALL QUESTION: WHEN DO YOU EXPECT REVPAR TO GET BACK TO 2019 LEVELS?**

We predict not for at least three years. That is if there is **not** a second wave.

**Q WHAT IS SOMETHING INTERESTING THAT PEOPLE DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU?**  
I have been riding Super Sport motorbikes since the age of 19, which is rare for a “Patel” to be doing. ■

 Peter Berk is President of PMZ Realty Capital LLC – Hotel Finance Group. He has more than 26 years of experience in the real estate industry and is a frequent lecturer at events, including AAHOA webinars and meetings. He has arranged more than \$6 billion of debt and equity transactions for hotel owners, representing more than 50,000 hotel rooms. As an industry leader, he has worked with AAHOA Members for more than 20 years on their financing needs. Berk attended George Washington University as an undergraduate and holds a graduate degree from Columbia University. He can be reached at [berk@pmzcapital.com](mailto:berk@pmzcapital.com) or 212-277-8265.

# FROM COVID-19 TO CONFIDENCE

## How the WELL Health-Safety Rating can help hotels

by TORI SHEPHERD

**P**OST COVID, COMPANIES WILL LIKELY BE EVALUATED AND DEFINED by their capability to balance performance, their capacity for adaptability. They will advance when and where they can and will have to manage all that they will encounter. Consumer confidence will come through innovation and then the ability to replicate it. They will put in place the right mitigation protocols and support to protect their guests and employees, many of whom are eager to get back to travel and work but worry about the risks.

The companies that can protect people and build the best experience with real agility will create a competitive advantage and accelerate faster out of the downturn.

### MEETING EXPECTATIONS

From now on, travelers will demand the cleanest, safest accommodations – and look for companies that proudly display their COVID-19 and safety policies. In fact, in a recent survey by PwC, three-quarters of travellers said third-party certified sanitation reviews would offer them a sense of security.<sup>1</sup> Nearly 85 percent said their travel decisions will depend on the communications they receive from hotels about safety, while 40 percent reported dissatisfaction with current communications.

Hotels have an unprecedented opportunity to step up and meet the uncertainty of this moment with clarity, credibility, and impact. But to do that requires more than cutting gym access, room service, and breakfast buffets; it means investing in the health, safety, and trust of guests.

“

The companies that can protect people and build the best experience with real agility will create a competitive advantage and accelerate faster out of the downturn.”



“

Intelligent planning will involve enabling guests and staff to respond effectively to diverse emergency situations, as well as creating plans that will allow for business continuity and a healthier re-entry.”

At the International WELL Building Institute (IWBI), we oversee the WELL Building Standard (WELL) – the world’s premier framework for advancing health in buildings of all kinds. From this vantage point, and based on our work in 63 countries, we understand the outsized role buildings can play in promoting human health and wellbeing.

That’s why, over the past several months, we have convened nearly 600 public health experts, virologists, government officials, academics, business leaders, building scientists, and real estate professionals, along with guidance developed by the World Health Organization (WHO), U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), global disease control and prevention centers and emergency management agencies, recognized standard-making bodies, such as ASTM International and ASHRAE, and leading academic and research institutions, to help inform our response to this pandemic.

Drawing on these expert insights, we’ve created new resources to help our partners fight COVID-19 – and we’ve identified four fundamental principles that can guide hotel owners, managers, and staff.

**1 Adopt operational policies and procedures that will support the health and safety of guests.** These include supporting hygienic handwashing practices, reducing surface contact through mobile key and keyless entry systems, establishing robust cleaning protocols, and using low-hazard cleaning products for safe and effective disinfection.<sup>2</sup>

**2 Implement management and maintenance protocols that reduce transmission.** People spend roughly 90 percent of their time in enclosed spaces.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, indoor air and water quality control are critical to identifying and mitigating transmission risks for COVID-19 and other illnesses. Adequate air treatment, filtration and ventilation, and proper management of mold and moisture are key aspects of maintenance that prioritizes health and wellness.<sup>4</sup>

**3 Develop straightforward, decisive emergency plans to safeguard customers and staff in the event of an emergency such as an outbreak.** Intelligent planning will involve enabling guests and staff to respond effectively to diverse emergency situations, as well as creating plans that will allow for business continuity and a healthier re-entry.<sup>5</sup>

**4 Most importantly, educate customers and staff about the protocols put in place to help support their health and well-being.** If previous SARS outbreaks are any indication, COVID-19 may likely have lasting physical and mental health effects.<sup>6</sup> In addition to providing clear, timely communication, hotel operators must make educational resources accessible to all guests and empower them with strategies to cultivate and maintain healthy habits long into the future.<sup>7</sup>

**THE WELL HEALTH-SAFETY RATING**

Of course, implementing all of this can be challenging. Without visitors, many hotels have been forced to cut pay and lay off employees. At the same time, the remaining staff are preparing to take on the increased responsibilities that come



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with guests' evolving expectations, including the need to communicate new commitments and initiatives.

To help, we've developed the WELL Health-Safety Rating. This new rating will give hotel operators the tools to prioritize the health and safety of staff and guests, adopt evidence-based best-practices, and inspire confidence in consumers from the moment they enter the building.

The WELL Health-Safety Rating focuses on interventions that require little to no capital expenditure, allowing businesses to validate and scale their current health and safety efforts without major disruptions to their spaces. Meanwhile, its third-party review process provides the integrity and consistency that today's travelers demand. Based on this review, eligible properties will be awarded the WELL Health-Safety seal, which visibly illustrates a building's commitment to safeguarding health for all guests to see.

#### CONTINUED GROWTH

Just as the current public health situation is constantly evolving, the WELL Health-Safety Rating is designed to evolve and incorporate new evidence and strategies over time. Now owners and operators have the flexibility to apply evidenced backed strategies as the world changes while demonstrating their commitment to health and safety all year round.

Already, the best hotels have begun to adapt to the needs of their guests. As health and safety become paramount, the WELL Health-Safety seal is one way to help guests feel secure from check-in to check-out. AAHOA Members who enroll get 25 percent off when you use your AAHOA Member ID/code. ■

- <https://www.pwc.com/us/en/industries/consumer-markets/library/how-to-restore-confidence-in-travel-during-covid-19.html>
- <https://v2.wellcertified.com/health-safety/en/cleaning%20and%20sanitization%20procedures>
- <https://indoor.lbl.gov/sites/all/files/lbnl-47713.pdf>
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- <https://www.cureus.com/articles/29485-focus-on-mental-health-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic-applying-learnings-from-the-past-outbreaks>
- <https://v2.wellcertified.com/health-safety/en/stakeholder%20engagement%20and%20communication>



Tori Shepherd serves as Senior Associate at the International WELL Building Institute (IWBI), the organization leading the global movement to transform our buildings and communities in ways that help people thrive. Tori has provided technical support to project teams across the U.S., Europe, Australia, and New Zealand as they've created healthier spaces, buildings, and communities through WELL Certification and the WELL Health-Safety Rating. Tori coaches various APAC and global WELL Portfolios as they seek to advance their ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) goals, to enhance building performance, and to improve human well-being at scale. Tori also leads WELL's sector development for coworking and hospitality, providing high-touch support to meet the needs of these space types, organizations, and occupants.

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## How hoteliers can capitalize on negotiating a discount or purchasing a note

by RUSHI SHAH

**A**S THE INDUSTRY MANEUVERS through the pandemic's aftershocks, one of the most discussed questions is what lenders do with all of the hotel loans on their books? For hotel owners, the real question is whether mass asset foreclosures represent value destruction or pose a moral hazard if lenders don't foreclose. This debate has opportunistic hotel loan borrowers anxiously trying to figure out how to best salvage their situations. The most viable solution for borrowers facing this dilemma is to either convince the lender to reduce the loan principal, or purchase or find someone else to purchase their note from the lender.

### NEGOTIATING A DISCOUNT

Borrowers hoping to negotiate a discount on their existing loan balance should ask the lender to run the asset through a new loan-to-value (LTV) test. If the test shows that the asset's actual value has fallen below the existing loan amount, there may be opportunity for a discount.

However, lender motivation to right-size the loan varies widely depending on the lender type. For example, a regulated bank lender is required by law to reflect accurate LTVs on their loans. If there is a degradation in the loan, banks have a fiduciary duty to their depositors and investors to immediately reduce the loan to its accurate value. This is accomplished by either selling the

loan to a third party or reducing the principal balance and restructuring the loan with the current borrower. It is extremely rare for a bank to provide a discount on the loan and still keep the loan on its balance sheet. As a result, bank lenders will typically use discounting as a negotiating tool to have the loan paid or sold off.

Private debt lenders are not subject to these same regulations that motivate them to take a loss, but usually only offer up a discount if they believe the asset is going to take longer to recover value than their accepted investment horizon. Some CMBS special servicers have explored restructuring the loan into an A- and B-note, which also ultimately provides the borrowers with a discount.

**NOTE BUYING**

As the hotel industry continues to reel from the economic shutdown, the tug-of-war between borrowers and lenders has intensified. Lenders expect to be paid in full and borrowers are desperate for relief. In response to this conflict and in anticipation of expected subsequent note-buying opportunities, many hotel owners, investors, family offices, and private equity shops have raised significant capital. If this friction is prolonged, more and more lenders will sell their positions to private groups that have the means to litigate to either be paid off in full, or to transfer the deed to their name.

Right now, the spread between what note sellers are asking and what buyers are willing to bid is wide. Note buyers expect to be able to buy at a discount to the principal value, but sellers have yet to reach their pain threshold. Most note buyers require a 20-percent internal rate of return (a time weighted rate of return on invested dollars). This type of time-weighted return is a function of the risk the investors take by purchasing a loan for a potentially non-performing asset and is only feasible if paying roughly 50 cents on the dollar (with all other things held constant).

According to the latest economic outlooks from major valuation firms, next year most hotel properties are expected to correct in value by only 35 percent, making hotel loan notes ripe for discounts. This means most hotel values are either the same or lower than its corresponding loan amounts. The note owner then has to factor in cost of collection or cost of foreclosure and any negative carry cost of the asset. This results in the hotel loans trading at deep discounts to the principal balance.

Unlike a fee-simple asset purchase, note purchases have short lead times. Those in the market to buy must therefore have cash ready to be deployed almost immediately. Note buyers must also have sufficient legal and asset management infrastructure in case they need to litigate to get their hands on the deed. Well-connected financing intermediaries and investment bankers can be valuable sources for both note buyers and sellers, as well as borrowers hoping to restructure their existing loans. ■

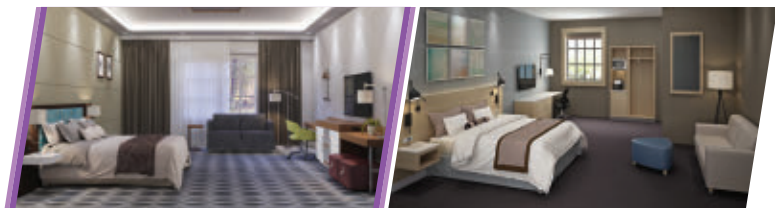


Rushi Shah is principal and CEO of the commercial mortgage and real estate investment banking firm and AAHOA Club Blue Member Mag Mile Capital. As a leader in hospitality financing, Shah specializes in structuring and placing high-leverage, non-recourse bridge and permanent debt with cash out for full – 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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# Hidden hotel fees are not the solution for economic resurgence

by ALFREDO ORTIZ

**H**OTEL GUESTS ARE OFTEN confused by the total of their final bill. And unless they ordered room service or treated themselves to items in the mini fridge, the answer is probably hidden taxes. Just as products like alcohol, tobacco, gas, and even candy are a source of hidden taxes, so are hotels. Additional hotel fees are tacked on the bill to cover federal, state, and local tax requirements.

## STATE-TO-STATE DIFFERENCES

Lodging tax and sales tax depends on the locality of the hotel. For example, in Hawaii the sales tax is 4 percent and the lodging tax is 10.25 percent. Even for a weekend stay, these fees increase the cost of a hotel room significantly.

As we all know, the pandemic hit the travel industry especially hard, leaving many hotels holding on by a thread. Americans with planned summer vacations placed them on the backburner until COVID-19 cases declined or financial stability returned. But now, as society begins to re-open, the travel industry is awaiting a boom in domestic travel.

## TRENDING TOWARD RECOVERY

In July, American Airlines announced they would be flying 55 percent of their domestic schedule, compared to the same time last year. This decision was a direct result of a 243-percent increase in passengers from the start of April to the end of May. The news is welcomed as air travel declined by 96 percent earlier this year.

“

For hotels, the spike in hotel occupancy occurred from April to July. While still lower than in years past, the upward trend is a positive sign of recovery.”

For hotels, the spike in hotel occupancy occurred from April to July. While still lower than in years past, the upward trend is a positive sign of recovery. But some cities are seeing an increase they couldn't have anticipated this season. For example, many individuals and families were hitting the



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great outdoors of Colorado Springs and other nature-oriented destinations. On the weekends, hotels saw occupancy rates above 80 percent.

Business travel especially was placed on hold as companies turned to technology to fill their void. But, according to a survey conducted by McKinsey & Company, businesses plan to lift travel restrictions in phases, with domestic travel expected to increase quicker than international travel.

**THE URGE TO GET AWAY**

As Americans begin to safely re-engage with society, many will be anxious for an out-of-town trip. The pent-up demand will give hotel and travel industries the boost they desperately need. According to a report<sup>1</sup>, 50 percent of Americans said they would be comfortable staying at a hotel 60 days after restrictions are lifted (which varies by location). While international travel will see a gradual increase in traffic, domestic travel is expected to bounce back significantly in the months ahead.

Some hotels are considering adding a COVID-19 fee to help cover costs

and boost revenue growth. But adding another fee will not illuminate the “no vacancy” signs any quicker. Instead, hotels should raise base prices if needed, not tack-on additional hidden expenses. Transparency is key.

As more people venture out and are reminded of the simple joys of traveling and relaxing at a hotel, let’s not let hidden taxes and fees keep them from

taking a trip. Encouraging economic growth with transparency will be most effective as the hospitality industry rebuilds. ■

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

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/1-in-4-americans-want-to-travel-immediately-after-covid-19-restrictions-lift/>



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# The sales imperative: What hotels need to do to survive after COVID-19

by TAMMY GILLIS

**WHEN THE ECONOMY IS** good and hotels are making money, sales is something that flies under the radar and is not closely inspected or even fully understood by people in operations who oversee this function.

To successfully recover post-COVID-19, hotels, brands, and management companies will need to look at how the sales function is structured in their organization. They will need to determine if they have the right people with the right skills, and the right tools and training to compete in an environment that will be scarce with new opportunities and largely dependent on stealing business from the competition.

Hospitality organizations will need to consider three fundamental shifts if they are going to survive:

## 1 Everybody is in sales (or at least they should be).

- Hotel teams can no longer operate in a silo. Sales, revenue management, and operations all need to come together, develop a strategy, and communicate vs. having competing priorities.
- The front desk plays a critical role in the success of a hotel's sales strategy. Too many front desk associates see their role as "checking people in and checking people out." They can be great lead catchers for the sales department to further qualify and close.
- The battleground for converting incoming inquiries into reservations will be the dialogue front desk agents have with the potential customers. Could they communicate, with confidence and clarity, the

cleaning and social distancing protocols of the hotel and what is being done to keep guests safe? Train your front desk teams and do not leave these important policies open for interpretation.

## 2 What worked before will not work in the future.

- Pre-COVID, many sales departments kept busy managing existing accounts and incoming inquiries (aka "Farming") as our industry enjoyed 10 straight years of REVPAR growth. With many demand generators – such as large conventions, sports tournaments, and corporate trips – not travelling until 2021 and beyond, the pie has shrunk and there are not enough incoming inquiries to provide hotels with base business.
- Sales people who only know how to farm need to learn how to hunt. This requires a different mindset and a different skillset.
- Prospects are not waiting for sales people to call and these modern buyers will not have the time or patience to engage with sales people who have not done their homework and are simply "smiling and dialing."
- Hotels will need to consider business from market segments they have not considered in the past to replace business from segments not travelling right now.

## 3 Sales is not a tactic deployed when the chips are down.

- It is an imperative business strategy that requires a seat at the same table as operations and everyone in the organization needs to own a piece of it.
- Sales is proactive and consistent, not reactive and only thought about when there is an economic downturn, an increase in competition, or a pandemic.
- Sales is a marathon, not a race. There is no instant gratification in this sport.

Now is the time to recalibrate and ensure that sales has a seat at the executive table to drive the desired results hotels will need to recover from this pandemic. Organizations have an incredible opportunity to hit the reset button and build a high performing sales team with the right strategy, the most qualified people, and effective processes and tools in place to support the execution. ■



*Tammy Gillis is the CEO and Founder of Gillis Sales, who has more than 25 years in hospitality sales. Tammy's entrepreneurial drive led her to develop a Sales For Hire program for hotels operating without a sales team. She has trained thousands of sales professionals, hotel owners, General Managers, and front-line associates. Believing that sales is the life blood for all organizations, her mission is to make sales accessible and achievable for all hotel owners.*



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A completely virtual experience, AAHOA's Regionals Series will bring together attendees, vendors, and AAHOA leadership for a day of region-specific education, networking, and an interactive trade show.

Our 2020 Regionals Series, which features events taking place from late October through early December, will combine two-to-three regions into one event for a total of eight virtual conferences that will look and feel similar to in-person Regionals.

Whether you own a hotel in one region or many, AAHOA encourages you to register for the Regional Conference in every region in which you own properties. Everyone in the industry is invited to attend for learning opportunities, networking, and the latest updates for hoteliers that you won't get anywhere else.

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- **December 2:** AAHOA North Texas, South Central Texas, and Southeast Texas Regional: A Virtual Experience
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# DENVER

by ASIF LAKHANI

## COLORADO BY THE NUMBERS IN 2019

**\$24.2**  
billion visitor  
spend

**\$1.5**  
billion in tax  
revenue from  
overnights

**1.8 M**  
jobs in tourism

**39**  
million  
overnight  
stays

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**D**ENVER IS GREAT FOR AS MANY reasons as it is high above sea level, which is exactly 5,280 feet – or colloquially, a Mile High. Really, it depends on who you ask what they like about the town, but whether it’s for one reason or literally thousands of other things, the decision is unanimous: It’s a great place to be! As a matter of fact, the capital city of Colorado has been one of the best places to live in the country for a few consecutive years (currently No. 2), according to a U.S. News & World report. With more than 300 days of sunshine per year, it’s a great destination for travelers, too.

**MARKETING TO VISITORS**

Visit Denver strategically focuses its efforts on “marketable visitors” – people who choose where they want to spend their time off and respond to marketing messaging on the topic(s). So far, the approach has generated more average daily spending from leisure visitors than it has business travelers for three consecutive years.

Conventions have still managed to thrive in Denver during that timeframe as well. As of early 2019, the city had three hotels in the Top 100 Meeting Hotels list, and there were more than 10,000 hotel rooms within walking distance to the Colorado Convention Center, according to Visit Denver. It also is a top-tier meeting destination nationally, according to a Cvent study from 2018 and another one from MeetingSource.com.

**WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR DENVER HOTELIERS?**

In 2019 alone, visitors to the state of Colorado spent \$24.2 billion. Of its 86.9 million visitors that year, only 39 million stayed overnight, which helped contribute to \$1.5 billion in tax revenue for the state saving every household within \$707 annually. Tourism also helped support more than 180,000 jobs throughout the state in 2019, according to the report by Visit Denver.

In Denver specifically, the numbers were just as strong. The city had 17.7 million overnight visitors in 2019, which was a record high and 2 percent more than the year previous. Travelers accounted for \$7 billion in spending in town, supporting more than 64,000 jobs, and saving households \$620 in annual taxes. Denver hotels were the recipients of \$1.9 billion in visitor spending in 2019 in addition to \$1.2 billion on food and beverage. Attractions in Denver are a plenty, and so is the money they rake in: \$537 million for sightseeing and recreational activities, to be exact.

**THE COVID-19 CONCERN**

In response to COVID-19, the city and state have adopted many of the safety protocols recommended by health experts: wearing masks, adding an abundance of hand sanitizer stations to the airport, limiting capacity at venues and gatherings, prioritizing outdoor seating at restaurants when possible, and more. The Colorado Convention Center has been converted to an alternative care facility (different from a field hospital) for the time being. A social distancing calculator for venues also was made available online. Visit Denver, along with a handful of other commerce and community organizations in town, launched ToGoDenver.com earlier this year to help drive business to restaurants and breweries via takeout and delivery orders. The group also added a virtual events section to its online calendar to allow people to experience the city’s top-notch cultural arts scene from the comfort of their own homes.

Colorado’s plan to address the economic impact of COVID-19 includes relief, restart, and recovery. Specifically, the Governor’s Council on Economic Stabilization and Growth will review budget stabilization, revenue adjustments, supply chain disruptions, and more. Regular COVID-19 communications, easing of restrictions, and ongoing business support all are part of the solution to help the Denver rebound from the pandemic. ■

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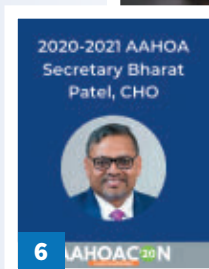
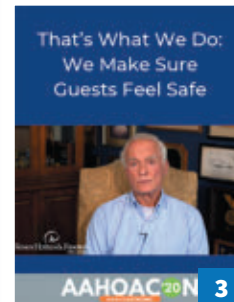
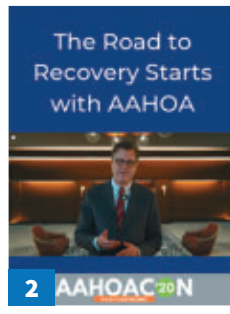
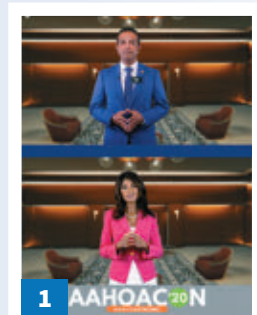
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# AAHOA Members in Action

1. Chairman Biran Patel and Past Chair Jagruti Panwala opened the 2020 AAHOA Virtual Convention & Trade Show by welcoming all attendees to the historic event.
2. President & CEO Cecil P. Staton made his first official appearance at AAHOA's 2020 virtual convention.
3. Industry titan Harris Rosen, who founded the Rosen College of Hospitality Management at the University of Central Florida (UCF) that opened in 2004, shared his wealth of knowledge and experience with AAHOA Members on how they can best recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and make guests feel safe and welcomed once again. "Make sure the guest experience is a very positive one and that they understand how much we care for them," Rosen said.
4. Horst Schulze, one of the founding members of The Ritz Carlton Hotel Company, sat down for a one-on-one interview with Noble Investment Group CEO Mit Shah to share his take on the current state of the industry. Schulze said standards of excellence for guest service and satisfaction are more important now than ever before.
5. Vice Chair Vinay Patel and his wife, Tina, joined thousands of hotel owners each day in tuning into the virtual convention.
6. Former Florida Regional Director Bharat Patel was voted in as Secretary in AAHOA's first virtual election.





Philanthropy was the big winner at the 2020 AAHOA Charlotte Charity Golf Tournament, held at the Golf Club at Ballantyne. AAHOA raised more than \$67,000 to benefit 11 charities, including the USO of North Carolina and the Jamie Kimble Foundation for Courage.





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