

today's hotelier

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The Official Publication of AAHOA

Improve efficiencies and overcome workforce shortages

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THE WOMEN HOTELIERS ISSUE

TODAY'S HOTELIER

CLIMBING HIGHER

Encouraging women hoteliers

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AAHOA'S OFFICIAL PUBLICATION



Revisiting

HER OWNERSHIP

AAHOA Opening Doors for Women in Hospitality

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5 Things to Know About AAHOA This Month

1 REGISTER FOR AAHOA CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENTS

Participating in AAHOA’s charity golf tournaments is more than having fun on the greens. It’s about advancing AAHOA’s mission through the community. This year’s remaining AAHOA Charity Golf Tournaments are scheduled on October 14, North Texas Region, Cowboys Golf Club, Grapevine, TX; and November 6, Florida Regions, PGA International, Daytona, FL. Register at AAHOA.com/Golf.



2 AAHOA ANNOUNCES NEW EDUCATION OFFERINGS

New educational offerings, including a Certification in Hotel Industry Analytics (CHIA) program, are available from AAHOA. Offered in partnership with CoStar, the CHIA is the leading certification for industry professionals focused on analytics. Additionally, AAHOA’s partnership with the American Hotel & Lodging Educational Institute offers exclusive discounts and access to comprehensive training and development programs intended for owners and their staff. Educate yourself at AAHOA.com/Certificate.



3 AAHOA OXFORD DATA CONTINUES TO HIGHLIGHT FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF MEMBERS

Three years ago, AAHOA announced the state-by-state economic impact results of the study conducted in partnership with Oxford Economics, an international leader in global forecasting and quantitative analysis. These state-level economic impact reports show just how significant the contributions of the hospitality industry and, specifically, AAHOA Members are to their local economies. Get your state’s data at AAHOA.com/Oxford.



OXFORD ECONOMICS

4 VISIT AAHOA’S ADVOCACY ALERT ACTION CENTER

To make keeping up with AAHOA Advocacy Alerts easier, AAHOA has created an online Advocacy Alert Action Center at AAHOA.com/Alerts. This one-stop shop houses all active Advocacy Alerts – federal, state, and local – sent to members requesting action.



5 AAHOA LAUNCHES 2024 ELECTIONS SUPPORT SITE

The 2024 election could significantly impact our industry, with a heated presidential race, and 435 House and 34 Senate seats up for election. A new resource from AAHOA – Vote.AAHOA.com – provides information on congressional candidates in your district, voter registration, early voting, and answers to frequently asked questions about voting. ■





MIRAJ S. PATEL,
MBA, CHO, CHIA
AAHOA CHAIRMAN (2024-2025)

“
Supporting women means creating opportunities for them to excel through mentorship programs, work-life balance resources, and equal access to leadership roles. Recognizing these challenges is the first step toward making real progress.”

Shattering the glass ceiling

“I believe empowering women is the key to unlocking the potential of entire communities.” – *Richard Branson*

THIS ISSUE'S FOCUS ON WOMEN IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY HITS HOME FOR ME. Growing up, I watched my mother juggle countless roles in our family-owned hotel – front-desk manager, concierge, housekeeper, you name it. Her dedication and versatility were the heart of our family and our business.

I'm sure many of you have similar stories. Our parents, especially the women among them, inspired us to enter this industry and strive for more. For many of our women members, their mothers' tireless work fueled their drive to aim higher and achieve even greater things.

The hospitality industry stands out because women comprise most of the workforce. They are not only the backbone of our families but also our industry. Today, they represent 51.2% of the industry – quite a leap from 1980 when women held a minority of management roles. This progress is a testament to women's hard work and resilience in our industry and should give us all a reason to feel proud and hopeful about the future.

That said, there remains much to be done. Studies show hotels with women in ownership roles outperform the brand average RevPAR index by 5%. This data highlights the positive impact of female leadership on business performance and should drive us to continue supporting and promoting women into leadership positions.

Women's contributions to AAHOA have been nothing short of transformative. From the founding Women in AAHOA group to the Women Hoteliers Committee to the launch of HerOwnership, women have played a critical role in our association's growth and success. Today, women comprise about 40% of our membership – a significant and growing presence shaping our organization's future.

As we celebrate the achievements of women in our field, we must also tackle their challenges. Supporting women means creating opportunities for them to excel through mentorship programs, work-life balance resources, and equal access to leadership roles. Recognizing these challenges is the first step toward making real progress.

Let's take a moment to honor the remarkable women who have driven our industry forward. Their dedication, innovation, and leadership are vital to our continued success. As an association, we must continue supporting and empowering these women, ensuring they have a seat at the table, as well as the tools and opportunities to lead and succeed. The future of our industry depends on it.

As Past Chairwoman Jagruti Panwala said earlier this year, “When I became the first and only AAHOA Chairwoman in its 35-year history, I did not believe for one second that I happened to be the only qualified woman in three-and-a-half decades. Quite the contrary. It is my belief and experience that in many cases, women take the lead in running the family hotel business and are more than qualified to take leadership positions in associations to better our industry.”

As we look to the future, it's our collective responsibility to ensure Jagruti Panwala won't be the last woman to lead our association. ■



LAURA LEE BLAKE, ESQ.
AAHOA PRESIDENT & CEO

A rising tide lifts all

“Women belong in all places where decisions are being made. It should not be that women are the exception.” –
Ruth Bader Ginsburg

“AAHOA has cultivated something unique within its community of women – a genuine sense of camaraderie and mutual upliftment. Witnessing this firsthand has been inspiring and a source of motivation for all of us.”

THIS SUMMER, I HAD THE PLEASURE OF SERVING ON A PANEL AT THE NATIONAL Association of Black Hotel Owners, Operators, and Developers’ (NABHOOD) 28th Annual International African American Hotel Ownership & Investment Summit & Trade Show. The panel, “Women Creating Their Own Spaces – Building a Seat at the Table,” focused on women’s crucial roles in transforming the hospitality and lodging industry.

Our discussion highlighted women’s strides and underscored the urgent need for further progress. Despite women making up 51.2% of the hospitality workforce, only 30% hold leadership positions, emphasizing the necessity for immediate and significant change.

Women face numerous challenges in leadership across all industries, including battling stereotypes, limited connections, bias and discrimination, and lack of flexibility in balancing work and family. AAHOA’s HerOwnership program, launched in 2022, is actively addressing these issues. This initiative equips women in hospitality with the tools, knowledge, and networks needed for success in hotel ownership. Designed by women hoteliers for women hoteliers, HerOwnership is making a significant impact, offering a beacon of hope for a more inclusive industry where women can truly thrive.

Last month, we held our third annual HerOwnership Conference, a two-day event that featured keynote speakers, workshops, and networking opportunities. Like the first two installments, attendees left feeling renewed, empowered, and ready to advance their careers in the industry. However, this empowerment must continue throughout the year, with opportunities to elevate and support women leaders so their impact can continue to be magnified. This is why initiatives like Women in Hospitality Leadership Alliance, Wyndham Hotels’ Women Own the Room, and Red Roof’s She Leads and RIDE programs are vital to the industry’s progress.

I am consistently impressed by the women involved in these initiatives. Their talents, intelligence, mutual support, and dedication are truly remarkable. AAHOA has cultivated something unique within its community of women – a genuine sense of camaraderie and mutual upliftment. Witnessing this firsthand has been inspiring and a source of motivation for all of us.

Women in hospitality are making a significant impact. Their vision, empowerment, leadership, and trailblazing efforts are ushering in a new era for the industry. These women strive to provide exceptional service to their guests, make meaningful community impacts, serve as outstanding role models for future generations, expand their portfolios, and shatter barriers.

The HerOwnership initiative holds immense potential. While we are just beginning, we are excited to watch it evolve and continue benefiting AAHOA women, showcasing how their vision, wisdom, and resilience can profoundly shape the industry for the long term. ■

Igniting empowerment

HerOwnership unites women hoteliers for leadership and growth

by TEAM AAHOA

IN MID-SEPTEMBER, WOMEN HOTELIERS from across the nation converged at AAHOA's annual HerOwnership Conference, a dynamic two-day event crafted by women for women in the hospitality industry. Centered around the empowering themes of executive presence, hotel ownership, and mental health and wellness, the conference inspired attendees to connect, lead, and thrive in an industry where their voices and leadership are more important than ever.

With approximately 300 in attendance, the event marked the third annual HerOwnership Conference for AAHOA.

MAKE IT COUNT

"The hospitality industry stands out because women comprise most of the workforce," said AAHOA Chairman Miraj S. Patel. "They are not only the backbone of our families but also our industry and association. Women make up about 40% of our membership today – a significant and growing presence shaping our organization's future. As we celebrate our 35th anniversary and reflect on the work and growth, we see how women members have played a crucial role in our association's development and success."

This exciting event featured two keynote speakers.

- Neeti Dewan, author, speaker, and CEO, spoke on "Mindset Makeover: Personal and Business Growth Strategies of Top Women Hoteliers."
- Raji Brar, co-founder of The Bakersfield Sikh Womens Association and chief operating officer of Countryside, spoke on "Building Bridges: The Power of Women in Political Engagement."

"Women in hospitality are making a significant impact, and nowhere is that more



evident than here at HerOwnership," said AAHOA President & CEO Laura Lee Blake. "Their vision, empowerment, leadership, and trailblazing efforts are ushering in a new era for the industry. These women strive to provide exceptional service to their guests, make meaningful community impacts, serve as outstanding role models for future generations, expand their portfolios, and shatter barriers."

The event featured breakout sessions covering each of this year's conference's pillars. There were also two pre-conference masterclasses: one by Kalibri Labs on commercial strategy and the second by Gauthier, Murphy & Houghtaling on insurance-purchasing essentials.

"The energy and unity of women hoteliers from across the country was truly inspiring," said Shetal Zina Patel, Women Hoteliers Director, Western Division. "HerOwnership isn't just about breaking barriers, but about creating lasting change – ensuring future generations of women in our industry are equipped to lead with confidence and vision."

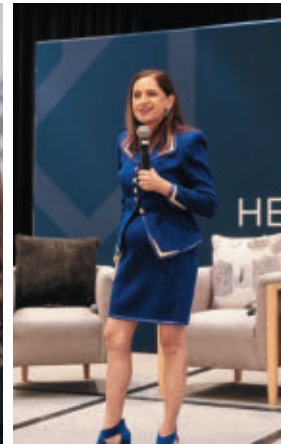


BREAK OUT

Networking breaks, ownership conversations, and panel discussions also took place along with the La Dolce Vita Festa Reception. The reception reminded attendees to embrace la dolce vita, or "the sweet life," with the Redondo Beach sunset as the backdrop. The Sonesta Redondo Beach & Marina on-site team went above and beyond to provide exceptional decor, service, and special touches that made the evening unforgettable, such as a custom perfume bar and an ice sculpture.

"Being surrounded by remarkable women in hospitality, all eager to learn and support each other, is truly empowering," said Purnima Patel, **Women Hoteliers Director, Eastern Division**. "The HerOwnership Conference is not just an event but a movement. We are creating





spaces for women to thrive, grow, and own their success in an industry where their leadership redefines the future.”

The enthusiasm from this year’s HerOwnership conference was palpable, with attendees already asking about next year’s event. While the date and location are still to be announced, we are excited to reveal that plans are underway for regional HerOwnership events across the U.S. These initiatives will build on the momentum of the conference and continue empowering women in hospitality nationwide. ■





To learn more about AAHOA's HerOwnership initiative, visit AAHOA.com/HerOwnership.com.



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On the

RISE

Report shows progress for women in hotel industry, though challenges remain

by NICK FORTUNA

AS THE FIRST EMPLOYEE HIRED BY MY Place Hotels in 2012, Sarah Dinger never felt out of place rising through the ranks of her own company, but at industry events, she couldn't help but notice men held the vast majority of leadership positions.

Lately, however, Dinger has observed a change as the industry's commitment to career development, diversity, and inclusion has taken root.

"You're seeing the gap close between the number of men and women at these industry events, but we've still got some work to do," said Dinger, executive vice president of franchise operations at My Place Hotels. "It's not really about prioritizing one gender over another but rather just ensuring equal opportunities and recognition for individuals in the industry."

Women are playing key roles in the growth of Aberdeen, SD-based My Place Hotels, which recently opened its 72nd property and plans to add dozens

WOMEN

in the hotel industry by the numbers

The 2023 Women in Hospitality Report from Penn State's School of Hospitality Management shows women are making strides in the hotel industry. Here are some key findings:

At the director level, women now occupy an equal number of positions as men, but as one moves up the organizational hierarchy, women become increasingly underrepresented.

At the CEO level, there were **16.1 men for every woman in 2022, down from 17.7 men in 2019**, reflecting "steady but slow" progress for women.

Similarly, at the partner/principal level, there were **11.4 men for every woman in 2022, down from 15.3 men in 2019**.

At hotel investment conferences in 2022, there were **4.2 male chief-level officers for every 1 female** in an equivalent role.

Women made up **58%** of the U.S. lodging and accommodation workforce in 2022, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Hospitality programs at colleges and universities also are skewed toward women, who account for about **69%** of recent graduates with a hospitality management degree.

more, Dinger said. Women hold almost half of the managerial and executive positions at the company, which has hotels in 30 states, she said.

In recent years, companies and industry groups have stepped up their support of women hoteliers and hospitality professionals, and those efforts are bearing fruit, Dinger said. Groups such as DEI Advisors, the Women in Hospitality Leadership Alliance, and the ForWard annual conference, presented by the AHLA Foundation, have helped women make meaningful gains, she said. Additionally, AAHOA launched its HerOwnership program in 2022 to give the women among its ranks greater education, networking, and skill-building opportunities.

Industry events geared toward women are providing valuable networking opportunities and "safe spaces" where those new to the industry can ask basic questions without fear of being judged, Dinger said. Through mentorship and educational opportunities, women are gaining exposure to the full range of career opportunities in the industry, and they're giving voice to their career aspirations.

"I think companies are doing a better job of fostering a culture that empowers women to advocate for themselves and supports their career growth," Dinger said. "By creating that environment, companies can bridge the gap between men and women."

'STEADY BUT SLOW' PROGRESS

Indeed, more women are taking leadership positions in the hotel industry than ever before, according to the 2023 *Women in Hospitality Report* from Penn State's School of Hospitality Management. The growth of female representation in executive roles has been "steady but slow, and still lags the overall representation of women in the hospitality workforce to a significant degree," according to the report. Still, women's recent progress is undeniable.

The report found women held 24% of the podium spots at hotel investment conferences in 2022, up from 16% in 2017. In addition, women had 37% of the prime speaking spots on the main stage, up sharply from 22% in 2021. To reach their conclusions, researchers reviewed publicly available data spanning more than 6,000 individuals from 701 companies and more than 7,000 attendees of hotel investment conferences.

The research shows gender diversity is increasing at lower levels of hotel leadership, creating a pipeline of executives who, in the years ahead, likely will continue to diversify C suites, according to Dr. Phillip Jolly, an associate professor and lead author of the report.

At times, however, the industry's progress can feel painfully slow, according to Katak Patel, vice president of operations at Exceptional Hospitality, a second-generation family business based in Stone Mountain, GA. She runs the company with her husband, Vipul Patel, and they own three branded properties, with plans to build a fourth.

Though she has two decades of experience, Katak Patel said at industry events people often direct questions about their business to her husband, assuming he's the one making all the decisions. Likewise, she said her feedback sometimes is dismissed, while her husband's suggestions typically are taken seriously.

"It's very subtle, but it's there," Patel said. "It's gotten better during the past 20 years but not by a lot. The stereotype is women are great for roles such as interior design, customer service and marketing – the softer roles, is what I call them – but not roles that involve capital expenditures, numbers, or technology."

Penn State's research supports those observations. In 2019, there were 10 men in leadership positions dealing with hotel investment and development for every one woman in those roles, according to the report. That figure dipped to 7.9 men in 2022, showing women are making headway. Women now hold one-quarter of all chief-level positions at hotel companies,



In 2019, there were 10 men in leadership positions dealing with hotel investment and development for every one woman in those roles, according to the report. That figure dipped to 7.9 men in 2022, showing women are making headway."

although those roles are skewed heavily toward human resources, sales, and marketing, researchers found.

'WHY AREN'T YOU MARRIED?'

Like Patel, Sarah Gulati said she sometimes experiences different treatment as a woman in a male-dominated industry. An Orlando, FL-based attorney representing hoteliers in negotiations and lawsuits, Gulati said one client recently asked her why she needed to charge so much money for her services given she wasn't married with children.

An older client even joked about calling her father to tell him his daughter should have been married off by now, Gulati said.

"Especially in the first few years of my practice, some people would talk down to me and assume that I knew less because I'm a woman," she said. "I get comments like that all the time, but I don't let them affect me."

Gulati said hotel brands are playing an important role in women's advancement

in the industry. In 2021, Wyndham Hotels and Resorts launched its Women Own the Room program, designed to help women overcome barriers they face in hotel development. Choice Hotels, IHG, Marriott, and Red Roof Inn are among the hotel companies offering similar resources.

"I know women who have utilized the brands' incentive programs to build and develop hotels, and they're doing it by themselves, without a partner," Gulati said. "They may not have had those opportunities without those programs. It's a slow-growth trend, but it is happening."

Gulati and Patel credited AAHOA for establishing the HerOwnership program, which has offered networking and educational opportunities for women hoteliers and hospitality professionals since its launch in 2022. The third annual HerOwnership Conference took place in mid-September in Redondo Beach, CA. Both women also serve on AAHOA's Women Hoteliers Committee.

"There are so many successful women entrepreneurs in the industry who are mentoring younger women in leadership positions, and I love that," Gulati said. "AAHOA definitely is helping so much in that regard."

Gulati said men in the industry can do their part by mentoring women who want to advance in their careers and by encouraging their wives, sisters, and daughters to take active roles in the family business.

Women still face obstacles in some workplaces, but success in the hospitality industry is achievable for those who remain focused on their goals and consistently aim high, Dinger said.

"I would encourage women to be proactive, take the initiative and show enthusiasm in your role," she said. "But probably the most important piece of advice is to be an advocate for yourself. Don't assume anybody knows what you want. Work hard and make your voice heard when it comes to your career goals, and we'll all see better results." ■

Climbing higher

Women Hoteliers
Directors Shetal
Zina Patel and
Purnima Patel
encourage women
hoteliers to
dream big

by NICK FORTUNA

LOOKING BACK, THERE WERE PROS and cons to growing up at her family's property – the El Rancho Motel, in Los Angeles – according to Shetal Zina Patel, AAHOA Women Hoteliers Director, Western Division.

On the one hand, her immigrant parents didn't have to purchase and maintain a house in one of America's priciest cities, which made success seem more attainable. On the flipside, however, someone had to be on duty in the office 24/7, so there was always an empty chair at family gatherings.





Purnima Patel,
AAHOA Women
Hoteliers Director,
Eastern Division



Most of the women who are AAHOA Members are the ones actually running the hotels, so they already have the knowledge. We just need to get them more involved and empower them to build their own empires.”



Shetal Zina Patel,
AAHOA Women Hoteliers
Director, Western Division

The demands of the hospitality industry spurred Patel to look elsewhere for a career, so after graduating from college with a degree in finance, she went to work for a bank, then moved to a law firm, eventually becoming its chief financial officer. But all the while, the entrepreneur inside her was growing restless.

“I realized I wanted my own business,” Patel said. “Working a 9-to-5 job can get tiresome, especially when it turns into 9-to-7 or 9-to-8. After a big deadline, there’s often no reward for all that hard work – just your regular paycheck. So, I thought, ‘What if I go out on my own and reap the rewards for myself?’”

With her savings and a little help from her family, Patel did just that, purchasing her first property and establishing Anaya Hospitality, Inc. in Bakersfield, CA. Today, Patel and her husband, Jatin, are co-owners of five hotels, most of them in the Los Angeles area, and are looking to expand.

“The hotel industry can be very lucrative if done correctly,” she said. “I’m always looking to buy, but right now, I feel like everything is overpriced, so I’m being very methodical with my next purchase. It has to be the right fit.”

THE POWER OF POSITIVE THINKING

Having bet on herself, Patel has a message for women in the hotel industry who are apprehensive about buying their own properties: You can do it too. In fact, many women in AAHOA already are running their

families’ hotels or climbing the corporate ladder at hospitality companies. With a little guidance, success as an owner is well within reach, she said.

At AAHOA’s third annual HerOwnership Conference this past September, the hundreds of women in attendance received equal doses of inspiration and education. The event, held in Redondo Beach, CA, featured interactive workshops and industry experts sharing best practices. The goal for this annual event is to build a stronger, more inclusive industry in which women thrive, Patel said.

“The purpose of the conference is to empower women and help them to reach their full potential,” she said. “We had some wonderful inspirational speakers, and attendees heard from colleagues who are doing great things in our industry, which is really important.

“These sessions are designed to teach women they can do this for themselves,” Shetal Zina Patel added. “Most of the women who are AAHOA Members are the ones actually running the hotels, so they already have the knowledge. We just need to get them more involved and empower them to build their own empires.”

HerOwnership is just one way AAHOA is working to best prepare the women in its ranks to feel empowered, confident, and knowledgeable enough to embark upon – or continue – the journey of hotel ownership, and the connections women will find in AAHOA are invaluable in helping them take their careers to the next level.

EQUIPPING THE NEXT GENERATION

Patel joined AAHOA’s Board of Directors this year as the Women’s Hotelier Director, Western Division, joining Purnima Patel, who’s in her second year as the Women’s Hotelier Director, Eastern Division. Both are serving three-year terms and currently are the only women on AAHOA’s 32-member Board.

As co-chairs of the Women Hoteliers Committee, Shetal Zina Patel and Purnima Patel were instrumental in organizing this year’s HerOwnership Conference. Launched in 2022, HerOwnership remains

steadfastly dedicated to providing women in hospitality with the tools, knowledge, and connections they need to succeed in hotel ownership. The first annual conference was held in Cincinnati, followed by last year’s event in Dallas.

In addition to the annual conference, AAHOA holds regional HerOwnership events throughout the year, including a luncheon held at the Columbia Gorge Hotel & Spa in Hood River, OR, on August 18. The industry experts in attendance included Lina Patel, director of strategic franchise initiatives for Red Roof Inn, herself a former AAHOA Board Member and Women’s Hotelier Director, and a key figure in helping launch HerOwnership in 2022.

“Our main goal with these events is to get women to be more involved,” Purnima Patel said. “Almost 500 women attended the annual conference last year, and approximately 300 attended this year in Redondo Beach. The more we’ve gotten our message out there, the more this event has grown.”

THE FAMILY BUSINESS

Like her fellow board member, Purnima Patel has family ties to the hotel industry but initially declined to make it a career. Born in London, she came to the United States at age 9 with her parents, who ran a small hotel in Rochester, NY. Purnima Patel eventually would attend nursing school, while her brother would take over the family business.

Purnima Patel’s plans changed in the early 1990s, however, when she and her husband, Yogesh, bought a 17-room hotel

in Pennsylvania. The family later moved to Virginia Beach, VA, and established Virginia Beach Management.

The Patels now own 10 hotels, with Purnima handling the marketing, Yogesh the finances, and their 27-year-old son, Harshal, running the properties. While working with her family, mostly from the comfort of home, Purnima Patel said she has no regrets about switching careers.

“The three of us love working together, and we do a good job,” Patel said. “I guess it’s just in our genes.”

Purnima Patel serves on AAHOA’s Franchise and Industry Relations Committee and previously served on the Education & Professional Development Committee. She said she makes it a point to participate in AAHOA’s visits to Capitol Hill and state capitals to meet with lawmakers and advocate for the industry.

Shetal Zina Patel, meanwhile, serves on the Convention Committee, helping organize AAHOACON25 in New Orleans. She said she values the sense of community she gets from AAHOA, which is one of the reasons she’s taken on leadership roles in the association.

“I’m grateful to AAHOA for bringing together 20,000 members,” she said. “I can talk to someone from the other side of the country and ask them for advice, and they’ll share their knowledge with me. That’s really helpful in business, and people sometimes take that for granted.

“I’ve always loved being in an environment where everyone is working together toward the same goal,” she added. “I’ve always thrived on teamwork.” ■

FRANCHISE LITIGATION



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Team up time

An exciting growth investment made in partnership with AAHOA

by TEAM AAHOA

VOTED THE NO. 1 HOSPITALITY ACCOUNTING software in North America, M3, LLC, recently announced it signed a definitive agreement for a majority investment from Blackstone Growth and affiliated funds (collectively “Blackstone”). The investment will help to accelerate the company’s growth by enhancing new product expansion and supporting the adoption of M3’s software, which enables hotel operators to run more efficiently and effectively. This marks AAHOA’s first-ever strategic investment alongside Blackstone as it seeks to better serve its nearly 20,000 Members who own 60% of hotels across the United States.

Founded in 1998 by hospitality industry veteran John McKibbon to address the accounting needs of his own family’s hotel management company, M3 has grown into a leading hospitality-focused back-office accounting software platform that serves as the system-of-record for financial data for more than 1,000 hotel operators and management companies today. It currently offers technological solutions including accounting, labor management, and business intelligence to more than 8,000 properties across North America. M3 has ranked as the nation’s No. 1 hotel accounting software and financial reporting provider by HotelTech Report for the past four years.

“Blackstone’s background in hospitality made them the natural choice as our first equity partner,” said **M3 Founder John McKibbon**. “Together, we look forward to propelling our innovation and growth to best serve our customers in an era of continued technological advancement.”

“M3 has become a leading finance and accounting software platform for countless independent and family owned hotel operators, as well as some of the largest hotel management companies, that have relied on its technology to support

the professionalization and scale of their businesses,” said **Blackstone Managing Director Ramzi Ramsey**. “As M3’s first institutional capital partner, we’re excited to harness Blackstone’s deep expertise and network within the real estate and technology sectors to help enhance its product offering to better serve new and existing companies as M3 continues to grow.”

“For more than 25 years, M3 has been focused on delivering a comprehensive solution while providing world class support to our customers,” said **M3 CEO Allen Read and M3 President Casi Johnson**. “We remain steadfast in our commitment to serving our customers and are thrilled to partner with Blackstone to continue to scale our vision, team, and culture.”

“M3 has built an enviable market position thanks to its robust technology and customer-centric approach,” said **Blackstone Principal Kevin Chang**. “We are eager to build upon this strong foundation and support M3 in its next phase of growth and expansion in the broader hospitality market.”

“AAHOA is excited to make its first strategic investment alongside Blackstone, a move that will significantly benefit our members and the entire hospitality industry,” said **AAHOA Chairman Miraj S. Patel**. “This partnership with M3 will bring AAHOA Members access to advanced technology and innovative solutions that can enhance operational efficiency and drive growth. We are committed to empowering our members with the tools and resources needed to succeed in an evolving market, and this collaboration marks a pivotal step toward achieving that goal.”

Terms of the transaction were not disclosed. Carlton Fields, P.A., served as legal counsel to M3 and Houlihan Lokey has provided certain assistance to M3 in connection with the transaction. Evercore served as exclusive financial advisor to Blackstone and Kirkland & Ellis LLP served as legal counsel to Blackstone. ■

ABOUT M3

Built by hoteliers exclusively for hoteliers, M3 is a robust cloud-based financial platform and services company serving more than 8,000 properties across North America's hospitality industry helping drive cost savings, revenue enhancement, and business insight. After 25-plus years in business, M3 touts a 95% customer retention rate. Used by more than 1,000 management groups and owner-operators and hotels of all sizes, the platform works seamlessly with other key systems and tools in the hospitality industry. It offers robust accounting and financial analysis across entire portfolios with optional operations and time management features. M3's Professional Services team provides on-demand accounting and bookkeeping support for hotels and portfolios of any size by offering a full range of customized accounting solutions that can scale with a hotelier's needs. Privately held and employee-owned, M3 continues to constantly enhance products and services with regular releases and updates. **For more information, visit m3as.com.**



ABOUT BLACKSTONE

Blackstone is the world's largest alternative asset manager. We seek to deliver compelling returns for institutional and individual investors by strengthening the companies in which we invest. Our more than \$1 trillion in assets under management include global investment strategies focused on real estate, private equity, infrastructure, life sciences, growth equity, credit, real assets, secondaries, and hedge funds. **Further information is available at blackstone.com.**

The Blackstone logo, consisting of the word "Blackstone" in a white, serif font, set against a dark brown rectangular background.

Blackstone

Seasons

AS WE TRANSITION FROM one season to another, it's crucial hoteliers conduct thorough service evaluations to ensure the highest standards of guest satisfaction. However, evaluating service is only part of the equation; the real challenge lies in turning assessments into tangible improvements. One of the most common pitfalls in service evaluations is the failure to translate feedback into actionable steps. To overcome this, it's essential to analyze feedback patterns, look for recurring themes in guest feedback, and develop a concrete plan to address them. Quick, visible changes show guests their feedback is valued and acted upon. Even small adjustments can make a big difference in guest satisfaction. Regular training sessions based on feedback help staff understand the importance of their role in the guest experience and keep them aligned with the hotel's service standards.

Here are three areas on which hoteliers can focus throughout the year to ensure their properties are adequately meeting guest needs and expectations.

1

SEASONAL SURVEY REVIEWS

Guest surveys are invaluable tools, but they must be relevant and timely to be effective. To ensure your surveys remain useful throughout the year, update survey questions to reflect the current season. For instance, avoid asking about pool experiences in winter if the pool is closed. Tailor questions to focus on amenities and services available during that particular season.



“

One of the most common pitfalls in service evaluations is the failure to translate feedback into actionable steps. To overcome this, it's essential to analyze feedback patterns, look for recurring themes in guest feedback, and develop a concrete plan to address them.”



2

CHECKING SEASONAL CHANGES

Seasonal changes bring about various adjustments within the hotel. Make sure to inspect these areas carefully. Ensure restaurant menus are updated to feature seasonal ingredients and dishes. Outdated menus can lead to confusion among

Ensure questions are clear and concise to encourage more responses, as guests are more likely to complete a survey that's straightforward and easy to understand. Beyond asking if a guest enjoyed their stay, ask them to check all areas they enjoyed and have an optional field where they can write what they liked (or didn't like) the most.

change

Hotel inspection tips throughout the year

by STEPHANIE LEGER

chatbot should reflect the hotel's brand voice and style. For example, hotels with specific terms for how they refer to guests and employees should ensure the chatbot uses the correct terminology. Use guest interactions to continuously improve the chatbot's responses, regularly updating the AI's database with new information and common guest queries.

ENSURING EXCELLENCE THROUGH SEASONAL TRANSITIONS

Beyond the changing of the weather, new seasons are an opportunity to refresh and enhance your hotel's services. By focusing on actionable feedback, updating surveys, checking items that vary with seasonality, and maintaining AI chatbot quality, you can ensure a seamless and satisfying guest experience all year round. ■



Stephanie Leger is Chief Excellence Officer of First Rate Hospitality, a hospitality training consultancy. She has trained more than 20,000 hospitality employees in hotel

and restaurant operations worldwide, providing countless reviews of operational evaluations. She has 20 years of experience in the hotel industry globally, working with brands such as Ritz-Carlton, Mandarin Oriental, Forbes Travel Guide Inspector, AAA, and others. Stephanie is also the co-host of the popular WTF "Walk The Floors" hospitality training podcast. For more information, please visit www.firstratehospitality.com.

waitstaff and cooks, as well as guest dissatisfaction. Check that TVs in guest rooms are programmed with current channels and content, including the hotel's own TV channel. If your hotel has a video that loops, watch it to ensure the content is fully up to date. Verify seasonal amenities – such as fireplaces in winter or outdoor seating in warmer months – are in perfect working order and ready for guest use.

3

QUALITY CHECKING AI CHATBOT RESPONSES

If your hotel uses AI chatbots, regular quality checks are a must. Focus on ensuring the chatbot provides accurate and helpful information, as misinformation can quickly lead to guest frustration. The

Best practices for handling a property claim

by ANGEL LUIS MERCADO

Get your ducks in a row

IN THE HOSPITALITY industry, property claims can be a significant challenge for hotel owners. Whether due to natural disasters, accidents, or unforeseen incidents, managing property claims effectively is crucial to minimize financial loss and ensure timely repairs. Here are five best practices for handling a property claim to ensure your hotel is well-prepared and the claim process runs smoothly.

1 ENSURE ALL COVERAGES ARE CONSIDERED

In many cases, important coverages are overlooked in property-loss claims. It's essential to have an experienced policy handler adjust your file. While building damage usually is addressed, several other coverages often go unnoticed, such as:

- **Business interruption:** Coverage for lost income due to the disruption of normal business operations.
- **Business personal property:** Protection for movable items owned by the business, such as furniture, equipment, and inventory.
- **Code upgrades/ordinance and law:** Coverage for the increased costs of bringing the property up to current building codes during repairs.
- **Pairs and sets:** Coverage that ensures the replacement of entire sets if one part of a pair or set is damaged.

2 DOCUMENT THE LOSS TO ITS FULL EXTENT

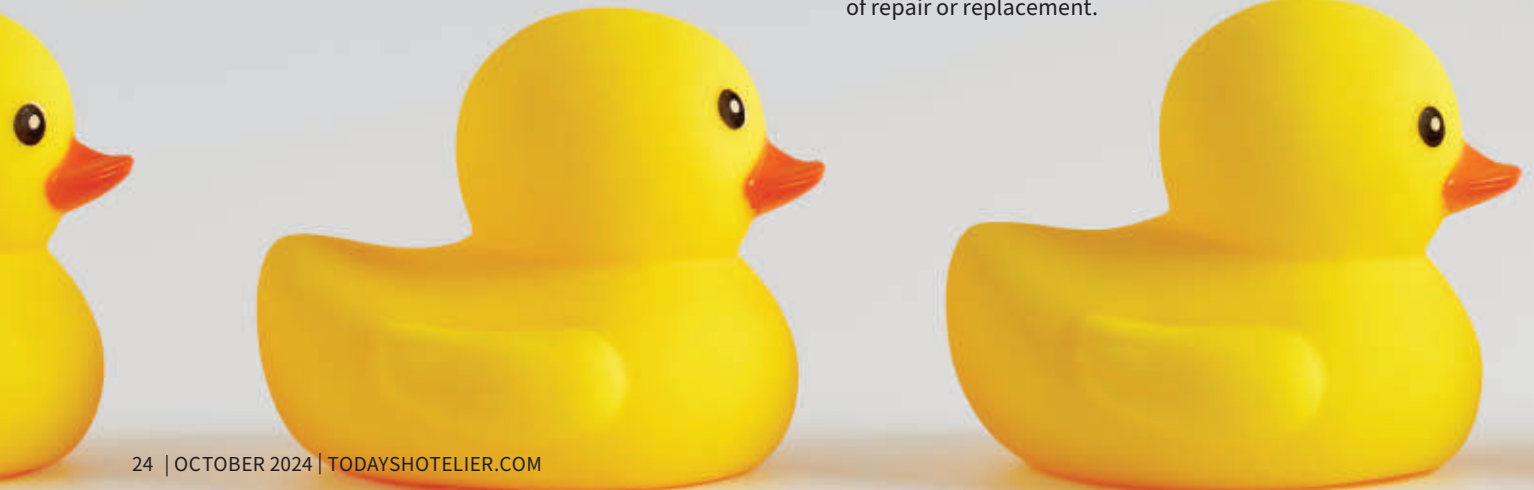
One of the most critical steps in handling a property claim is to thoroughly document the damage. This documentation should include:

- **Photographs and videos:** Capture images and videos of all visible damage from multiple angles. Ensure all affected areas – inside and outside the property – are covered.
- **Detailed descriptions:** Write detailed descriptions of the damage, including the location and extent of each issue.
- **Inventory of damaged items:** Create an inventory of all damaged items, including furniture, equipment, and other property. Note their condition before the incident and estimate the cost of repair or replacement.

3 VERIFY AND DOCUMENT HIDDEN DAMAGES

Visible damage is only part of the equation. Hidden damages, such as those behind walls or under flooring, can often be more significant and costly. To ensure these are addressed:

- **Professional inspections:** Hire professionals to inspect areas that aren't immediately visible. This might include mold inspectors, structural engineers, or HVAC specialists.
- **Use of specialized equipment:** Ensure inspections utilize equipment capable of detecting hidden damages, such as moisture meters, thermal imaging cameras, and other diagnostic tools.



4

ESCORT THE ADJUSTER DURING THE INSPECTION

When the insurance adjuster arrives to assess the damage, it's vital to have someone knowledgeable about the extent of your hotel's damages accompany them. This person should:

- **Point out all issues:** Ensure all damages – visible and hidden – are pointed out to the adjuster. This includes areas that might be easily overlooked or underestimated.
- **Provide supporting documentation:** Share all photographs, videos, and written descriptions with the adjuster. This documentation will support your claim and help ensure nothing is missed.
- **Highlight the need for specialized equipment:** If the adjuster doesn't have the necessary equipment to detect hidden damages, emphasize the importance of these tools and suggest follow-up inspections with the appropriate equipment.

5

AVOID SOLO INSPECTIONS BY THE CARRIER'S ADJUSTER

Allowing the carrier's adjuster to complete an inspection alone can lead to significant oversights. Without guidance, they may miss or undervalue critical damages. To avoid this:

- **Always have a representative present:** Ensure someone familiar with the full extent of the damages is present during every inspection. This representative should be prepared to answer questions and provide additional information as needed.
- **Communicate clearly:** Make it clear to the adjuster a comprehensive evaluation is essential for a fair settlement. Stress the importance of identifying all damages to prevent future issues and additional claims.

CONCLUSION

Handling a property claim effectively requires meticulous documentation, proactive communication, and thorough inspections. By following these best practices, hotel owners can ensure all damages are accurately assessed and appropriately compensated, leading to timely repairs and minimal disruption to operations.

The initial adjuster inspection is crucial; once the adjuster forms an opinion regarding the loss and sets reserves, it's challenging to change their mind, especially if the oversights are substantial. For example, covered water damage to wallpaper in a corridor where the wallpaper is no longer available would necessitate replacing all continuous wallpaper to ensure uniformity. The same applies to the carpet. If the adjuster is unaware of this from the start, it will be difficult to rectify later.

An experienced public adjuster can handle all aspects detailed above, ensuring the claim process is managed efficiently and effectively, allowing hotel owners to focus on their core business operations. ■

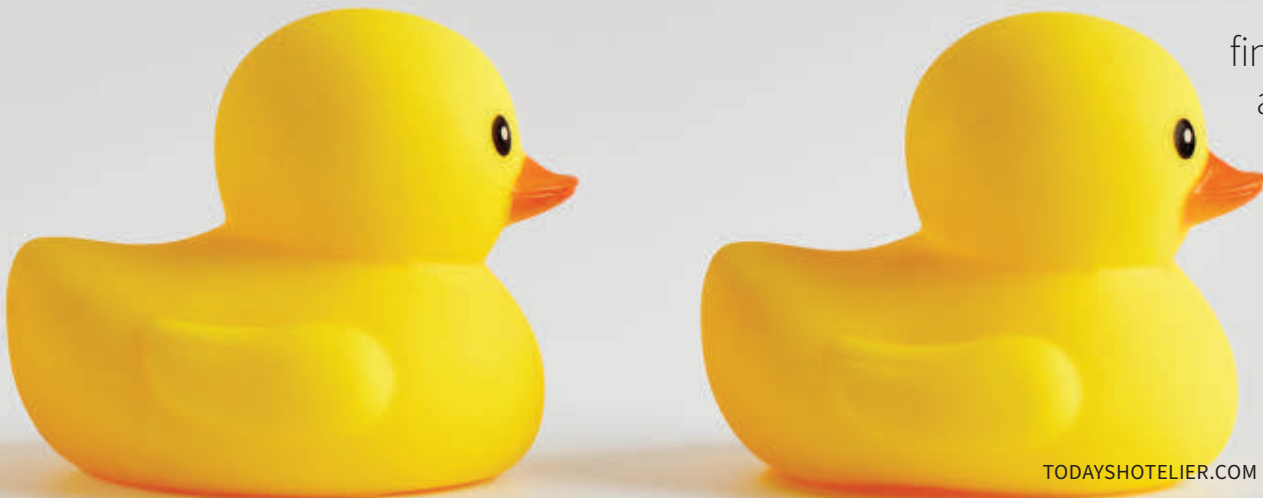


Angel Luis Mercado is President and CEO of MBC Public Adjusters, a company

featuring a group of public adjusters and estimators who formerly worked for insurance companies and whose combined experience exceeds 40 years of working for insurance companies. This translates into expert knowledge of policy interpretation and claims handling. All of MBC's public adjusters and estimators have hands-on construction experience and are OSHA 10 certified.



Whether due to natural disasters, accidents, or unforeseen incidents, managing property claims effectively is crucial to minimize financial loss and ensure timely repairs.”



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Trailblazing

Women hoteliers navigating
the independent path

by SHETAL ZINA PATEL

IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY, independent hoteliers often face a unique set of challenges and opportunities. Within this niche, women hoteliers bring distinct perspectives and strengths, yet they also encounter specific roadblocks that can make their journey both rewarding and challenging. As the industry continues to evolve, the representation of women in the independent hotel segment is an important topic to explore.

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN INDEPENDENT HOTELS

Women are making significant strides in the hospitality sector, yet their representation in independent hotels remains an area requiring attention. While the independent segment offers a degree of flexibility and creativity that can be appealing to women, it also lacks some of the structural support found in franchised operations. This duality can both empower and hinder women hoteliers.

UNIQUE CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN IN THE INDEPENDENT SEGMENT

Operating outside the brand sphere presents unique challenges. One significant issue is the perception and recognition of authority. Past AAHOA Chairwoman Jagruti Panwala (2019-2020), a prominent figure in the industry, has often highlighted the struggle to be recognized as the head of the business, with many industry peers defaulting to assuming her husband holds the leadership role. This problem is particularly pronounced in the independent segment, where individual recognition and personal brand are crucial.

In franchised operations, there's a structured framework and brand recognition that can lend credibility and authority to women in leadership roles. Independent operators, however, must establish their legitimacy without the backing of a well-known brand. This can be a double-edged sword: While it allows for greater personal branding and innovation, it also means



By building strong networks, asserting their authority, and leveraging their unique strengths, women hoteliers can navigate the independent path successfully and make a lasting impact on the industry.”

women must work harder to assert their authority and leadership.

ADVANTAGES OF INDEPENDENCE

Despite these challenges, the independent segment offers numerous advantages that can be particularly beneficial for women. Independence allows for greater creativity and flexibility in hotel management. Women hoteliers can implement unique concepts, tailor their services to specific markets, and create a brand that reflects their values and vision. This level of control and personalization can be empowering and fulfilling.

Moreover, independent hotels often can be more agile in responding to market trends and guest preferences. Women, who often excel in understanding and anticipating customer needs, can leverage this agility to create exceptional guest experiences. This ability to quickly adapt and innovate is a significant advantage in the competitive hospitality landscape.

NAVIGATING THE INDEPENDENT PATH

For women considering a career in independent hotel management, several strategies can help navigate the unique

challenges of the segment. Building a strong network within the industry is crucial. Mentorship and peer support can provide valuable guidance and help women overcome the obstacles they may face.

Additionally, women hoteliers should focus on developing a robust personal brand. By establishing themselves as leaders in the industry, they can gain the recognition and respect needed to succeed. This involves not only demonstrating expertise and competence but also actively engaging with the broader hospitality community through speaking engagements, social media, and industry events.

THE FUTURE OF WOMEN IN INDEPENDENT HOTELS

As the hospitality industry continues to evolve, the role of women in independent hotels is likely to grow. By addressing the unique challenges they face and leveraging the advantages of independence, women can carve out a significant and influential space in the industry. It's essential for the industry to support this growth by fostering an inclusive environment that recognizes and values the contributions of women hoteliers.

In conclusion, while women in the independent hotel segment face distinct challenges, the opportunities for creativity, innovation, and personal branding are immense. By building strong networks, asserting their authority, and leveraging their unique strengths, women hoteliers can navigate the independent path successfully and make a lasting impact on the industry. ■



Shetal Zina Patel, AAHOA Women Hoteliers Director, is a passionate advocate for women in the hospitality industry and an experienced hotelier. With a deep

understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities in hotel management, Zina works to empower and support women hoteliers through mentorship and industry engagement.



Fact vs. fiction

Which types of market moves most affect hotel and commercial real estate loan rates, and how quickly will any changes occur?

by RUSHI SHAH

WE LIVE IN AN INTERESTING time, where capital markets are ultra-sensitive to even the smallest market event – even when it happens on the other side of the world. U.S. hotel owners may not expect a quarter point move by the Japanese Central Bank would affect a secondary market hotel in the middle of the state of Kansas. The truth is it can.

Because information travels so fast today, community and regional banks, as well as debt funds, and CMBS investors and lenders, always are monitoring local, national, and global activity, and can price risk and subsequent loan rates in real time. This approach is in sharp contrast to the early '90s, when pricing for a conventional loan on a hotel or other commercial real estate asset from a community bank in a secondary or tertiary market wouldn't change for three to six months. At that time, community bankers relied on guideline pricing set by senior management who priced loans based on the risk profile of the bank's own loan book and the desired loan premium they wanted to receive.

Today, those same community banks can adjust their loan pricing based on multiple market factors, such as the federal home loan bank rate, the Treasury rate,

“When there's a major shock to the system, prices can correct by as much as 50 basis points in a single day. Real estate investors may start rejoicing when this happens, until they find out the drop in Treasury yields doesn't mean loan interest rates will also decrease by 50 basis points.”

the swap spread, the U.S. corporate AA bond spread, the high yield bond spread, the AAA CMBS spread, and the BBB-CMBS spread to name a few. Because today's fixed income market is more mature and developed when compared to 30 years ago, bankers and their boards can now update loan pricing guidelines on a weekly or even daily basis.

WHAT REALLY DETERMINES LOAN PRICING?

Let's dive into how a loan is priced within the capital markets. Most people believe when Treasury yields go down, loan interest rates should follow, and lower Treasuries are good news for the market. It's important to understand, however, Treasury fluctuations don't occur within a vacuum. Treasuries move in conjunction with movement within equities, volatility indexes, options, futures, foreign exchange, and the expectation in the movement in the Fed's funds rate.

When there's a major shock to the system, prices can correct by as much as 50 basis points in a single day. Real estate investors may start rejoicing when this happens, until they find out the drop in Treasury yields doesn't mean loan interest rates will also decrease by 50 basis points. Unfortunately, that same unexpected shift in the market that caused Treasuries to decrease will also cause the spread or cost of every dollar of risk above the risk-free rate on the loan to increase. This is because the market distress or expectation of distress prompts investors to ask for higher risk premium on real estate loans. As a result, when the Japanese yen carry trade (another word for investors borrowing in Japanese yen to buy U.S. stocks) reversed due to the Japanese Central Bank abruptly

raising interest rates, the event triggered deleveraging within the U.S. economy. This move brought the risk of a U.S. recession to the surface and, in response, spreads on hotel and commercial real estate loans increased.

HOW DO CAPITAL MARKETS DEAL WITH UNCERTAINTY?

The pending U.S. elections continue to fuel major uncertainty in the market. Increased

market uncertainty leads to market volatility, and more market volatility means increased risk. This situation translates into higher risk premium expectations from the bond investors as fixed income investors expect to be paid for taking on even the slightest amount of risk. As a result, more volatility also sparks increased spreads. As we discussed earlier, lower Treasury yields don't necessarily mean all-in interest rates for loans are also lower. The real interest

rates driving loan pricing are propelled by a combination of lower spreads and lower index rates.

When both the risk premium and index rates are low, we see what is called the Goldilocks phenomenon. This typically happens when the markets find an equilibrium point or balance between supply and demand (aka conditions are "just right"), and there's real GDP growth and strong liquidity in the markets. In this environment, there's less uncertainty about the economic outcomes, more optimism about growth, and fewer inflation fears. It's at this point we also can expect to see lower loan interest rates for hotels and other asset classes, and the return of healthy purchase and sale activities in the broader commercial real estate market.

HOW CAN HOTEL OWNERS OPTIMIZE LOAN PRICING?

There are many nuanced factors affecting loan spread, making it difficult to compare spreads on two different loans side by side. For example, one loan may have mezzanine debt baked within the pricing unbeknownst to the borrower, while the other is being made at lower leverage. One of the properties may be in a primary market and the other in a tertiary location. Or one hotel may be in the oil and gas market and the other in an urban core area. To navigate the nuances and obtain the financing needed to succeed, hotel owners should work with an expert who has a complete handle on the capital markets and is constantly communicating with the key participants to understand the current environment. ■



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.

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by ERIC BRAUN

ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, there's an 85% chance the 2024 hurricane season will bring above-average activity.

As we enter the final stretch of this volatile weather season, that prediction looks to be holding steady. The early predictions showed anywhere from eight to 13 hurricanes with four to seven of those classified as a category three or higher.

These storms will bring in high winds and heavy rain, leading to an increased risk of floods, property damage and pest introductions. Yes, pests. While pest infestations aren't the first thing that comes to mind when thinking of hurricanes, the warm and damp weather conditions that come with these natural disasters often lead to increased pest activity.

Pests such as mosquitoes, rodents, and ants are just a few of the unwelcome guests hotel owners and operators may find "checking in" after a major storm has passed. To help mitigate the risk of pest disruptions, hotel owners and operators need to understand key vulnerabilities and what can be done to better protect the property, employees, and guests.

Storms and pests

How hotels can protect against post-hurricane invaders

“

While pest infestations aren't the first thing that comes to mind when thinking of hurricanes, the warm and damp weather conditions that come with these natural disasters often lead to increased pest activity.”

WHY ARE PESTS AN ISSUE DURING A STORM?

Travelers aren't the only ones who may turn to hotel and lodging facilities to seek shelter from a severe storm or hurricane. While there's a wide range of potential pests that could seek shelter inside a hotel, these are some common pests to look for:

- 1 **Rodents** are good swimmers and only need an opening around a quarter of an inch to enter a structure.
- 2 **Mosquitoes** breed in standing water and thrive in warm, humid, post-storm conditions.
- 3 **Crawling insects** like fire ants can link bodies to form a “raft” and float across flood waters to safety. Other insects can make their way into small cracks or across dispersed debris close to the building.

Equally as important as understanding some of the common pest invaders is understanding some of the vulnerabilities that can attract these pests. Flooded areas, areas with standing water, or any saturated space is a dream destination for many pests. In fact, mosquitoes can breed in as little as a teaspoon of water.

Another way hotels are vulnerable after a storm is through structural damage. Even a small exterior crack or opening can serve as a new pathway for pests to enter the facility. Trash and debris also are a major concern for hotels after a severe storm or hurricane. Garbage that's blown over or fallen limbs within four feet of the building structure are a haven for creatures to enter hotels.

Heavy storms and hurricanes can create a gateway for pests, so it is important to know what to look for to reduce the risk of infestation.

WHAT TO DO IF DISASTER STRIKES?

Dealing with storms and natural disasters is inevitable for many hotels and businesses. One of the best things hotel owners can do to protect their business, employees and guests is to plan ahead. Having a plan in place before disaster strikes will reassure employees and guests that their safety is a number one priority. Knowing what action items are important and which inspections are recommended post-storm is vital to stopping the pest invasion.

Some of the key considerations to have in that plan include:

- 1. **Drain all standing water**
- 2. **Clean up excess trash**
- 3. **Ensure debris, broken limbs, and shrubs are pulled away from the building**
- 4. **Inspect the exterior of the building for structural damage**
- 5. **Work with a trusted, local pest professional for an added layer of protection**

When traveling, consumers expect a home away from home – clean, comfortable, and safe. These expectations are often heightened when the stay is interrupted by the uneasiness of severe storm weather. One way to reassure guests that their safety and comfort is a number one priority is to have a proactive plan in place. Simple steps such as understanding what pests to look out for, inspecting the right areas, and connecting with a trusted, local pest expert can help provide peace of mind that guests, employees, and the hotel's reputation are safe from pests. ■



Eric Braun is a Board-Certified Entomologist and experienced Technical Service Manager at Terminix. Eric specializes in integrated pest management, training and solutions for the hotel, lodging and consumer service industries.

Game-changer

Embracing automation for unmatched OTA reconciliation efficiency

by VIMAL PATEL

IN THE BUSTLING WORLD OF HOSPITALITY, the interplay between hotels and online travel agencies (OTAs) is pivotal in generating bookings and driving revenue. Yet, the task of reconciling data between OTAs and hotel management systems often is arduous and time-intensive, particularly when handled manually. Here, we'll delve into the hurdles of manual OTA reconciliation and explore how automation is revolutionizing this essential process.

Handling multiple OTAs presents a maze of data that requires meticulous management. Hotels engage with numerous OTAs – each with distinct systems and formats, making manual data reconciliation a formidable challenge. This complexity is one of the foremost issues faced during manual OTA reconciliation.

A significant risk associated with manual reconciliation is revenue leakage. Errors in

the reconciliation process can lead to billing inaccuracies, causing potential revenue loss. Misalignments in data – such as guest names, stay dates, and rates – easily can go unnoticed, negatively impacting a hotel's financial standing. Detecting these errors in a vast sea of data can be like finding a needle in a haystack, often resulting in overlooked and unresolved mistakes.

The repercussions on profitability are substantial. Inefficiencies and errors in reconciliation can erode a hotel's profits. Each misstep contributes to a deteriorating bottom line, undermining the financial health of the business. Additionally, the manual reconciliation process (see sidebar) is labor-intensive.

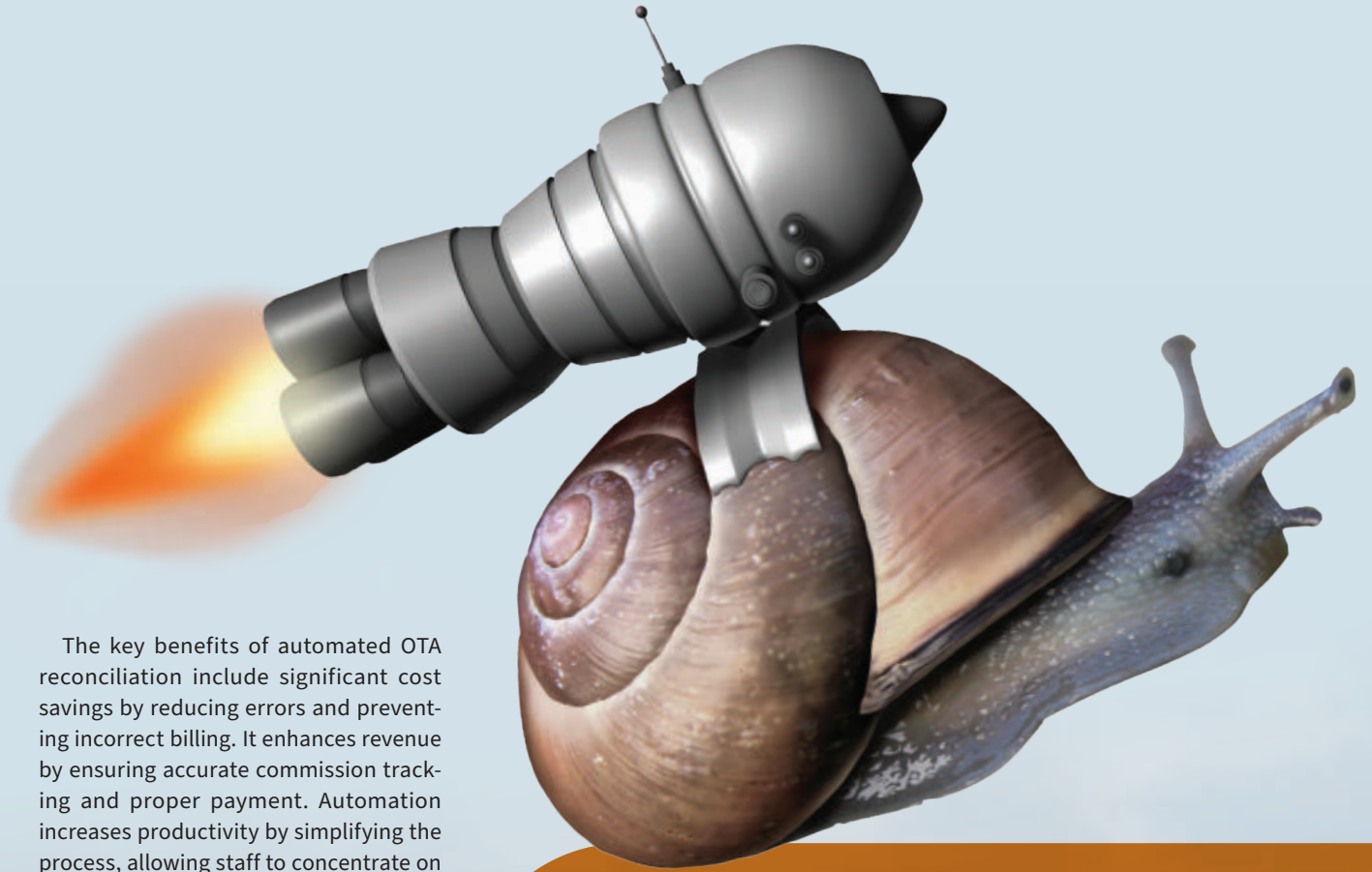
However, this manual approach is riddled with challenges. The lack of uniformity often leads to errors, making the process inconsistent. It's also time-consuming, causing delays in other

essential tasks. The repetitive nature of manual checks is tedious and exhausting for staff. Additionally, some OTAs and PMS platforms provide narrow timeframes for raising disputes, further complicating the process.

AUTOMATION: THE GAME CHANGER

Automation directly tackles these issues, offering a comprehensive solution that transforms the reconciliation process. Automated systems drastically reduce errors, ensuring accurate billing and significant cost savings. Accurate commission tracking guarantees hotels receive the correct payments from OTAs, enhancing revenue. Moreover, automation streamlines the entire process, allowing staff to focus on more strategic, guest-oriented tasks. Automated reconciliation systems can process data within minutes, providing precision and efficiency while significantly lessening the workload on staff and virtually eliminating errors.





The key benefits of automated OTA reconciliation include significant cost savings by reducing errors and preventing incorrect billing. It enhances revenue by ensuring accurate commission tracking and proper payment. Automation increases productivity by simplifying the process, allowing staff to concentrate on critical tasks. It offers speed and accuracy, quickly and precisely reconciling data. Additionally, it reduces the staff burden by cutting down on manual labor and eliminating errors.

Transitioning from manual to automated OTA reconciliation is more than a convenience; it's a strategic decision that can vastly improve a hotel's operational efficiency and financial performance. By adopting automation, hotels can ensure accurate and efficient reconciliation, save substantial amounts of money, and enhance overall productivity and profitability. The future of OTA reconciliation lies in automation, transforming a once laborious task into a seamless, efficient operation. ■



Vimal Patel is a prominent figure in the hospitality industry and the Founder of INNRLY, a company that offers innovative software solutions to streamline hotel

management. Patel is also the President and CEO of QHotels Management, overseeing several hotel properties in Louisiana and Texas.

The manual reconciliation workflow

1. Extract hotel data:

- Access the property management system (PMS) to generate reports on guest details, stay dates, and room rates.
- Export this data for comparison.

3. Cross-reference information:

- Manually align guest names, stay dates, and rates between the PMS and OTA spreadsheets to ensure consistency.

2. Retrieve OTA data:

- Log into the OTA extranet to collect reservation data corresponding to the hotel records.
- Export this data for cross-referencing.

4. Resolve discrepancies:

- If inconsistencies are detected, initiate disputes via the OTA extranet to correct billing issues.

Adjust your approach

Improve the guest and staff experience with three connectivity and technology shifts

by JADY WEST

RAPID CHANGES ARE TAKING place in the hospitality technology industry, particularly as guests and businesses continue to demand the fastest, most reliable internet connectivity. According to the *2024 Lodging Technology Study: Digital Transformation & ROI* report, seven out of 10 hotel operators say guest-specific technologies are empowering, such as platforms enabling them to check in and out, use digital keys, in-room tablets, contactless payments, and much more.

WHY IT MATTERS

One in five hotel operators say guest-facing technology is a potential source of friction. This insinuates hoteliers and their technology providers must continuously focus on improving challenges that include connectivity issues, seamless app usage, and human interactions.

Further, the *2023 Lodging Technology: Embracing Mobility & Self-Service* study revealed that travelers consider Wi-Fi the top amenity for a positive guest stay, with most saying they wouldn't rebook at a destination after a subpar Wi-Fi experience.

Hoteliers must be aware and work to stay ahead of top-of-mind hotel connectivity shifts that are changing the game for guest experience, staff satisfaction, and overall facility operability.

1

THE RISING NEED FOR MANAGED WI-FI

Today’s guests expect a seamless experience connecting their devices to the property’s Wi-Fi, as it’s often one of the first things they do when they get to their room. For them, high-speed Wi-Fi is not a “nice to have” but a necessity.

Dig deeper: Beyond traditional guest connectivity needs, hoteliers require sufficient Wi-Fi solutions to install and run IoT technology solutions that ultimately drive cost savings and guest retention, like smart locks and keyless entry, contactless check-in, and streamlined maintenance processes.

Original equipment manufacturer (OEM)-provided gateways are being standardized across national brands while there’s limited patience for longer installation cycles from OEM partners, making it more important than ever for managed Wi-Fi to run seamlessly without interruption to the guest experience or business team.

Of note: Integrated, managed Wi-Fi networks support both guest and enterprise needs. Further, hoteliers are looking for fewer providers to handle more services for less expense.

2

PRIVATE WIRELESS NETWORK SOLUTIONS

As the hospitality industry continues to grow and expand its suite of technology solutions, we likely will see an uptick in private wireless network adoption. Private wireless networks help hotels increase security and control because a tech provider manages it, unlike a public network.

Market impact: These solutions are designed to streamline network reliability and mobility within hotels. With the ability to separate and prioritize critical business operations, guests can still use public bandwidth to enjoy uninterrupted services, thus enhancing the guest experience and business benefit. Private wireless networks also improve guest and staff safety, for example, by enabling panic buttons and enhanced indoor cellular coverage to contact help during an emergency.

Another benefit of private wireless networks is their scalability and modular ability. They allow hotel staff to change gaming floors or site layouts in real-time, without re-cabling, or provide coverage for temporary events like concerts, weddings and conferences.

3

ALL-IN-ONE CONNECTIVITY SOLUTION PROVIDERS

With the changing tides of hotel connectivity requirements and the technology priorities to drive business growth, hoteliers should seek experienced vendor partners to support their new and unmet tech needs.

The bottom line: A single tech provider can offer reliable internet connectivity, managed Wi-Fi, private networks and managed services platforms to help hoteliers optimize operations while staying connected to guests inside and outside the property.

A vendor with a full suite of solutions to innovate guest experience at scale should evolve with hotels as they modernize their connectivity platforms and be ready with a tailored solution for each unique situation.

MAKING TECH WORK FOR YOUR HOTEL

Technology is constantly evolving and redefining the way the world works, communicates, lives, and travels. While it can feel overwhelming to stay ahead of the curve, it’s critical today’s hoteliers don’t

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One in five hotel operators say guest-facing technology is a potential source of friction. This insinuates hoteliers and their technology providers must continuously focus on improving challenges that include connectivity issues, seamless app usage, and human interactions.”

fall behind the wave of technology that will drive greater results for their business. Regularly communicating with their teams about the latest technology and finding ways to use these innovations to improve the guest experience will set one facility apart from the rest. ■



Jady West is Vice President of Cox Hospitality Network and leads Cox Business’ Hospitality Sector, including brands Hospitality Network and Blueprint RF. Under his stewardship, Hospitality Network has become a national brand serving even more luxury hotels, casinos, venues, and stadiums throughout the United States.

Defeat your deficiencies



Six ways technology can improve housekeeping efficiency and overcome workforce shortages

by MIKE GRAY

WITH TRAVEL NOW back to pre-COVID levels or higher in many locations, hoteliers are struggling to keep pace with guest demands. Achieving rapid room turnover while maintaining standards for cleanliness and guest satisfaction has become increasingly difficult as staff shortages continue to plague the industry.

With more than three out of four hotels facing staffing challenges, housekeeping consistently is the most common and critical shortfall. Yet, despite offering higher wages and better benefits to attract more staff, having adequate housekeeping personnel remains a pain point across every property classification.

While better wages may be one part of the solution, housekeeping is just a difficult job. Not only can the work be somewhat unpleasant – dealing with harsh sanitation chemicals, trash, and soiled linens – it’s also repetitive and physically taxing.

Some properties are experimenting with AI to streamline day-to-day housekeeping operations. But until there’s a robot that can disinfect a shower or change out linens effectively, we remain dependent on humans for most of the heavy lifting. The good news is there are several technologies that can help ease this burden.

Here are six ways hoteliers can use technology to make housekeeping operations more efficient, less laborious, and a more attractive employment option to mitigate staffing shortfalls.

1

Autonomous shift scheduling. One of the biggest challenges for property managers is making sure they have all available shifts covered. Meanwhile, many in the housekeeping industry need flexible scheduling. With the high cost of childcare and the need for a second job in many cases, staff may need to juggle around other work, school, or family members’ schedules. Online shift scheduling tools allow property managers to post available shifts for staff to pick up, making it much simpler and faster to ensure adequate coverage and allowing staff to work around other obligations.

2

Housekeeping applications. Every hotel has a unique protocol for room turnover – a standard operating procedure staff must follow to deliver the experience guests expect. Employee-facing tablet or smartphone applications can provide a checklist of tasks the staff can mark completed as they go. This not only ensures nothing is overlooked; it also helps track the time it takes to perform each step to help identify roadblocks or ways to simplify or accelerate processes. Brands also can

use these apps to allow guests to request special accommodations, like extra pillows. Housekeeping staff will receive an alert for that room and check it off when it’s cleaned. These also can be tied into inventory management solutions, allowing employees to reorder supplies with just a few taps.

3

Guest loyalty apps. Hotel loyalty applications allow hotel brands to build stronger relationships with frequent guests, but these also can integrate with housekeeping platforms, making it easy for hoteliers to provide a custom experience. Guests can use these apps to request service, extra towels, or even customize their service schedule (every three days, for example). This can ease the burden on staff and eliminate the hassle of the front desk having to field guest calls, log requests and then pass messages to housekeeping.

4

In-room voice assistants. Many travelers are used to using an Amazon Alexa or Google Home device at home, providing a convenient and handsfree way to perform routine tasks like adding to the grocery list or ordering takeout from their favorite local restaurant. Similarly, bedside voice assistant consoles built for hospitality work the same way, allowing guests to speak requests to the device. Because these can be integrated directly with housekeeping task-management applications, requests for extra towels or a refill of toiletries can go directly into the app, eliminating phone calls and messages that sometimes can get lost in the shuffle.

5

Smart energy management platforms. Leaving the lights and HVAC on when rooms are unoccupied is a huge waste of energy and adds unnecessary extra wear-and-tear on equipment. While housekeeping staff should turn off lights, close the drapes, and reset the thermostat per the

unoccupied protocol, it can be easy to forget when rushing to get rooms turned over for the next guest. Automated control solutions can be used to adjust lighting and HVAC once service is complete. When they’re linked into housekeeping software, the adjustments are made instantly via Wi-Fi once the room is marked “done.” This not only saves energy but eliminates the need for housekeeping to manually make those adjustments. That’s one less chore they need to perform in each room, and the minutes saved can quickly add up over thousands of rooms.

6

Safety buttons. It’s quite common for housekeeping staff to work alone and sometimes in remote areas. In the event of an incident – a run-in with a guest, or even a fall or other accident – they may not be able to call for help. Deploying Bluetooth-enabled safety lanyards allows staff to summon help at the push of a button and some can even automatically detect a fall. Built-in geolocation capabilities alert staff to the exact location of the affected individual, which accelerates response time.

Ensuring a satisfying work environment where staff doesn’t feel overwhelmed and overburdened is key to attracting and retaining talent, especially in the already labor-intensive housekeeping function. Using technology to help housekeeping staff work smarter, safer, and more efficiently can aid hoteliers in improving overall room turnover efficiency, guest satisfaction, employee loyalty, and revenue. ■



Mike Gray is Global Vice President – Strategic Partnerships at AAHOA Allied Member company Nomadix, an ASSA ABLOY company, and is recognized as a global technology leader in the AHLA Global Technology 100 (T100).

Creating unforgettable experiences

The essential qualities of top-tier bedding and towels in hospitality

by HEIDI LUBER

IN THE WORLD OF HOSPITALITY, the little things matter a lot. Among these, towels and bedding play a crucial role in elevating a guest's experience from satisfactory to extraordinary.

Seemingly minor comforts – being enveloped in a soft, luxurious towel after a long journey or sinking into the embrace of high-quality bedding at the end of the day – are what often make a hotel stay unforgettable. These items aren't merely functional; they're truly pivotal elements in crafting memorable guest experiences. Here's a closer look at the essential qualities that make towels and bedding exceptional.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEDDING MATERIALS

The foundation of any great bedding set is the material. Cotton and linen are the two main contenders. Both have their unique qualities, but they cater to different preferences and needs.

Cotton, particularly high-thread-count cotton, is renowned for its softness and comfort. It's a classic choice that remains soft wash after wash, providing a smooth, clean feel that many guests find irresistible.

Cotton's natural properties also make it suitable for both warm and cool climates, ensuring a comfortable sleep environment year-round.

The best bedding often is a blend of personal preference and aesthetic appeal. Some people prefer the crispness of cotton sheets, while others enjoy the laid-back feel of linen. A popular trend is to mix materials – using cotton sheets for their softness and a linen duvet cover for its decorative qualities. This combination can provide the best of both worlds, offering both comfort and style.

TOWELS: VARIETY AND QUALITY

Just as with bedding, the quality and variety of towels can significantly enhance a guest's experience. Different types of towels serve different purposes, and understanding these distinctions is key to selecting the right ones.

Size and purpose: Pool towels, for instance, are typically larger than standard bath towels and are designed to be more decorative. However, they're often less plush because they need to withstand exposure to chlorine, sun, and saltwater,

and endure frequent washing. Bath towels, in contrast, are heavier and more luxurious, designed to absorb moisture efficiently and provide a comforting experience after a bath or shower.

Weight and thickness: The weight of a towel, measured in grams per square meter (GSM), affects its thickness and absorbency. Heavier towels (higher GSM) are generally more absorbent and plush, making them ideal for creating a sense of luxury. In a hospitality setting, balancing the weight of towels is crucial because heavier towels can increase laundering costs and time.

Material and performance: Cotton remains the gold standard for towel materials. However, there are significant differences within cotton varieties. Egyptian cotton, known for its long fibers, offers exceptional durability and softness. Pima and supima cottons, grown in the United States, have similar qualities and also are highly regarded for their performance and longevity. When choosing towels, it's important to consider the origin and quality of the cotton, as well as the specific needs of your guests.

CREATING MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES

The right towels and bedding can transform a guest's stay from ordinary to extraordinary. High-quality materials, thoughtful selection, and attention to detail in these areas show guests their comfort and satisfaction are priorities. In hospitality, these small touches can make a big difference, turning one-time visitors into loyal guests who remember and return for the exceptional experience they enjoyed. ■



Heidi Luber is the CEO and fourth-generation owner of Lubertex International, a textile firm with a rich legacy dating back to 1937 in Montreal, Canada.

“The right towels and bedding can transform a guest's stay from ordinary to extraordinary. High-quality materials, thoughtful selection, and attention to detail in these areas show guests their comfort and satisfaction are priorities.”



Making waves

AAHOA women hoteliers featured in Women in Hospitality Alliance Speaker Directory

THE WOMEN IN HOSPITALITY LEADERSHIP ALLIANCE HAS LAUNCHED AN INTERACTIVE SPEAKER DIRECTORY to amplify diverse voices within the hospitality industry. This comprehensive resource features more than 700 accomplished senior-level women with expertise across all facets of the hospitality sector. AAHOA is proud to share that more than 20 AAHOA Members and two AAHOA staff have been included in this directory, underscoring the association's commitment to elevating the influence of its diverse membership on the global stage. They are:

- **Michele Allen**, Chief Financial Officer, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts
- **Laura Lee Blake**, President & CEO, AAHOA
- **Wendy Blissett**, Senior Vice President - Hotel Team, Hilco Real Estate Co.
- **Heather Carnes**, Vice President, Communications, and Chief Strategy Officer, AAHOA
- **Natalie Castillo**, Managing Director, Berkadia Hotels & Hospitality
- **Krishna Deva**, Vice President, Maya Hotels
- **Monica Melancon**, Chief Human Resources Officer, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts
- **Jagruti Panwala**, Chief Executive Officer, Wealth Protection Strategies, Past AAHOA Chairwoman (2019-20)
- **Purvi Panwala**, President & Chief Executive Officer, Purvi LLC
- **Lina Patel**, Director, Strategic Franchise Initiatives, Red Roof
- **Maya Patel**, Vice President
- **Nimisha Patel**, Partner, Vue Hotels
- **Rita Patel**, Owner, Hotel Trundle
- **Sima Patel**, Co-Founder & Chief Executive Officer, Ridgmont Hospitality
- **Tejal Patel**, President & Chief Executive Officer, Neem Tree Hospitality
- **Tina Patel**, Owner & Chief Financial Officer, Promise Hotels
- **Trusha Patel**, Chief Executive Officer & Founder, Platinum Holdings
- **Manjila Saraf**, Assistant Vice President, Baywood Hotels
- **Jyoti Sarolia**, Chief Executive Officer, Ellis Hospitality
- **Mili Shah**, Founder, Shah Firm LLC
- **Mabelle Perez**, Managing Director, Berkadia
- **Sarita Vora**, Senior Vice President, National SBA and USDA Lending, First Women's Bank
- **Helen Zaver**, Senior Vice President, Colliers

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Every event benefits from having greater diversity of thought and balance across its speaker lineup.”

According to The Penn State School of Hospitality Management’s 2023 *Women in Hospitality* research report, funded by the AHLA Foundation (a member of the Alliance), women held only 24% of the podium spots at hotel investment conferences and 37% of main stage speaking spots last year. However, women make up 58% of the hospitality industry workforce.

“Representation matters and visibility is a key component to career advancement,” said Rachel Vandenberg, who chairs the Alliance’s Podium Committee and is the founder of Accelerate Women Leaders in Travel, an Alliance member. “Despite there being many women with significant expertise within the hospitality industry, there are still fewer women on stage.”

In collaboration with conference organizers, the Alliance Podium Committee identified several recurring challenges to sourcing more diverse voices for conference stages and immediately set out to overcome those barriers and provide solutions. One key initiative was helping identify as many thought leaders as possible, overcoming any perception there aren’t enough women speakers to source, and providing a tool the entire industry could use.

By allowing conference organizers to filter the list of 700-plus speakers (and growing) by career background, title, company type, home base, and other data points, the directory quickly yields a shortlist of speakers for any topic and stage. Conference organizers immediately have recognized the value.

“Every event benefits from having greater diversity of thought and balance across its speaker lineup,” said Rachel Humphrey, Founder of the Alliance. “Showcasing speakers with a wide range of perspectives on the stage is a benefit for attendees while simultaneously ensuring greater visibility for these leaders, which will move the needle further on overall representation in the hospitality industry. The Women in Hospitality Leadership Alliance Speaker Directory, powered by RaizUp, means no conference should ever be lacking in representation of women speakers, no matter the topic, stage, or location.” ■

We need you!

Interested in being listed as a speaker in the Women in Hospitality Leadership alliance Speaker Directory? Submit your information at whlalliance.org/contact or scan the QR code below.



AAHOA MEMBERS IN ACTION



AAHOA Northeast Region Member Aryan Patel recently met with Massachusetts Rep. Carlos Gonzalez (D-10th Hampton) to discuss ongoing issues facing hotel owners. Patel is a member of AAHOA's Independent Hoteliers Committee.



The Mid Atlantic Region held a successful Town Hall in Dover, DE, with more than 50 people in attendance. Three new members were recruited, and \$12,500 was collected for PAC.



The Arkansas Region Hotel Owners Conference & Trade Show garnered some 300 attendees, six new members, and \$30,000 raised for PAC. AAHOA's advocacy was in the spotlight, featuring congratulatory messages from Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders, video welcomes from Little Rock Mayor Scott Frank, Jr., and North Little Rock Mayor Terry Hartwick, and special appearances from two staff members from Attorney General Tim Griffin's office. Immediate Past Chairman Bharat Patel hosted a fireside chat with Arkansas Hospitality Association CEO Katie Beck.



The Upper Midwest Hotel Owners Conference & Trade Show had 160 attendees, two new members, and raised \$8,600 for PAC. Speakers included Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-IL), Consul General of India in Chicago Somnath Ghosh, and CBRE Hotels Advisory Consultant Richard Mandigo. Additionally, video messages were provided by Waterloo, IA, Mayor Quentin Hart and Illinois Hotel Lodging Association President/CEO Michael Jacobson.



The Mid Atlantic Region held a Town Hall in Fords, NJ, with more than 100 people and six vendors in attendance. AAHOA holds some 60 Town Halls a year.



Congressman Ronny Jackson (R-TX) attended a Town Hall held in Amarillo by the North Texas Region. Some 85 people attended, and Jackson discussed the role AAHOA plays in the community as hoteliers and small business owners.



The Alabama Hotel Owners Conference & Trade Show attracted 220 attendees, 28 new members and raised \$28,000 for PAC. Guest speakers included Alabama Rep. Mike Shaw (R-47), Rep. Leigh Hulsey (R-15), Hoover Mayor Frank Brocato, and Alabama Restaurant & Hospitality Association President & CEO Mindy Hanan.



The South Florida Region held a Town Hall in conjunction with the National Association of Black Hotel Owners, Operators, and Developers (NABHOOD) Conference. Speakers included AAHOA Vice Chairman Kamalsh (KP) Patel, Treasurer Rahul Patel, South Florida Regional Director Chetan (Chris) Patel, AAHOA Past Chairs Naresh (Nash) Patel (2004-05), Hemant Patel (2011-12), Hitesh (HP) Patel (2018-19), and Bharat Patel (2023-24), and AAHOA President & CEO Laura Lee Blake.



AAHOA Member Nilay (Niel) Patel hosted a Back-of-the-House Tour with Rep. Aaron Bean (R-FL) at the Microtel Inn and Suites at the Jacksonville, FL, airport. Patel, Bean, and others discussed critical issues impacting small businesses. Niel hosted a roundtable to discuss the proposed *Loans in Our Neighborhoods (LION) Act*.



At a recent South Pacific Region Town Hall in San Bernardino, CA, speakers included Mayor Helen Tran, who spoke about the hospitality industry, and Gaurav B. Kalra, attorney at law at Jackson Lewis, and AAHOA Member Pooja Metha, managing partner at DPA Attorneys at Law, who spoke on complying with city and OSHA regulations and employment claims.



The Mid South Regional Hotel Owners Conference & Trade Show drew 650 attendees and \$75,000 was raised for PAC. Speakers included Freddie O'Connell of the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County, Sarah Beth Urban, president & CEO of the Tennessee Hospitality & Tourism Association, John DeBerry, senior advisor to Governor Bill Lee, and Roshan Patel, president of the Gujarat Cultural Association of Nashville with Tennessee State Senator Heidi Campbell sharing her insights via video remarks.

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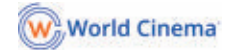
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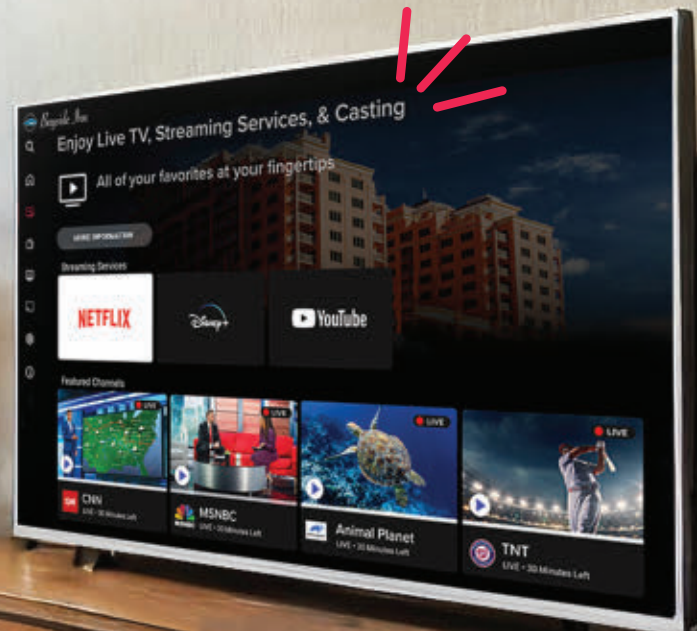
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