

today's hotelier

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The Official Publication of AAHOA

Leading the way

Hoteliers serving their
communities

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ADVOCACY CONFERENCE

Capitol Connections

Looking back at AAHOA's
Fall National
Advocacy Conference

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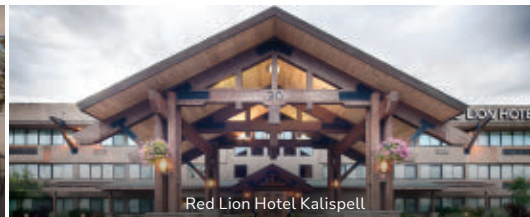


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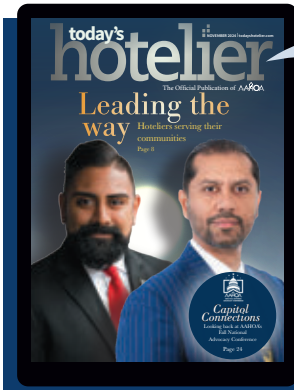
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5 Things to Know About AAHOA This Month

1 HAPPY THANKSGIVING TO THE INCREDIBLE AAHOA COMMUNITY

Thanksgiving is approaching, and AAHOA would like to thank its valued community of 20,000 members. This remarkable group comprises generations of families, independent and brand-name hotels, women hoteliers, dedicated young professionals, and a network of exceptional industry partners. The membership embodies the spirit of community, and AAHOA is immensely grateful for that.



AAHOACON MARKS ITS NEW DESTINATION IN NEW ORLEANS

The most highly anticipated event of the industry is scheduled for April 15-17, 2025, at the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center. Make plans to join AAHOA to get new ideas and connections in New Orleans! We look forward to seeing how the Big Easy lets the good times roll! Registration opens soon. AAHOACON.com



SAVE THE DATE FOR HYPE

The HYPE Conference! HYPE (Helping Young Professionals Evolve) will occur February 6-7, 2025, at the Andaz Mexico City Condesa. Building on last year's inaugural event, the conference empowers young professionals with the tools, resources, and connections needed to thrive in the evolving hospitality landscape. Make sure to mark your calendars and join us for what promises to be a transformative experience. Find more information at AAHOA.com/HYPE-Conference.



'TIS THE SEASON TO GIVE BACK

November kicks off the season of giving, and there's no better time

to contribute to the Kennesaw State University Michael Leven and Lee Dushoff AAHOA Scholarship for Compassionate Leadership. The scholarship honors the legacy of two leaders instrumental to AAHOA's founding and provides financial assistance to exceptional students in the hospitality program. Your donation is fully tax-deductible, so give today and make a difference in the lives of future hoteliers. bit.ly/KSU-AAHOA



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SHARE YOUR STORY WITH HEROWNERSHIP

Each woman has a unique journey, and the AAHOA HerOwnership program wants to share your story. Fill out our form to share what being a woman in the hospitality industry means to you, advice you would give to the next generation of women hotel owners, and your biggest challenges and how you've overcome them. Submit your story today to be featured in our HerOwnership campaign! bit.ly/3X5iW2W





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

The incentive for independence

“I’m convinced that about half of what separates successful entrepreneurs from the non-successful ones is pure perseverance.” – Steve Jobs

“
The future of hospitality will be shaped by those with a passion for entrepreneurship. Independent hoteliers, through their hard work and innovative thinking, will continue to be at the forefront of that transformation.”

ENTREPRENEURSHIP ALWAYS HAS BEEN THE HEART AND SOUL OF THE HOTEL industry. From the early days of single-family-owned motels on the nation’s interstates to the sophisticated independent properties we see today, independent hoteliers have embodied the spirit of innovation, resilience, and grit. We’re entrepreneurs who have taken risks, invested in our communities, and built businesses that reflect our own unique vision of hospitality.

For our members, as Asian American hotel owners – particularly those who started as independent hoteliers – the journey has been one of incredible determination. Our path, marked by securing financing, managing operations, and competing with major chains, is a testament to our unwavering commitment. It’s through these trials independent hoteliers have developed a strong sense of purpose and an unparalleled ability to adapt. You’ll read more about that journey in this issue of Today’s Hotelier, which features an article on a book, *Surat To San Francisco: How the Patels From Gujarat Established the Hotel Business in California 1942-1960*, written by AAHOA Member Mahendra K. Doshi on page 42.

Our nimbleness and responsiveness to changing market conditions, unencumbered by the rigidity of larger corporate structures, allow us to offer personalized guest experiences, embrace local culture, and create an atmosphere that resonates with the communities we serve. Whether it’s through innovative amenities, eco-friendly initiatives, or exceptional customer service, independent hoteliers must find ways to stand out in a crowded marketplace.

As we navigate the post-pandemic landscape, independent hoteliers have demonstrated remarkable resilience. We have had to pivot, reimagine our business models, and, in many cases, find new ways to engage guests. The entrepreneurial spirit of these hoteliers continues to shine as they develop creative solutions to meet evolving guest expectations and implement health and safety protocols.

Our association is unwavering in its commitment to supporting independent hoteliers in this ever-changing environment. We provide access to education, resources, and advocacy efforts empowering entrepreneurs to thrive. From ensuring fair regulations to offering guidance on navigating economic challenges, we stand behind the independent hotelier community as they continue to build and grow their businesses.

The future of hospitality will be shaped by those with a passion for entrepreneurship. Independent hoteliers, through their hard work and innovative thinking, will continue to be at the forefront of that transformation. ■



LAURA LEE BLAKE, ESQ.
AAHOA PRESIDENT & CEO

Building value

“It’s often said your network is your net worth, and belonging to an association like AAHOA provides countless benefits, both tangible and intangible.” – Vipul Patel, AAHOA Independent Hotelier Committee Member

“
We work tirelessly at the local, state, and national levels to ensure the interests of independent hoteliers are represented. From fighting unfair regulations to championing small business-friendly policies, AAHOA is committed to advocating for the future of independent hotel owners.”

AT AAHOA, WE RECOGNIZE THE VITAL ROLE INDEPENDENT HOTELIERS PLAY IN the hospitality industry. These entrepreneurs bring innovation, personal service, and a strong connection to their communities, all while navigating the challenges of running a small business. Independent hotels offer unique and personalized guest experiences larger chains often cannot match. Their flexibility allows them to innovate and cater to niche markets, fostering local culture and individuality. By staying in independent hotels, guests contribute to small businesses, local economies, and a more diverse and vibrant travel landscape. That is why AAHOA is dedicated to offering tailored support for independent hoteliers to help them thrive in today’s competitive landscape.

One key way we provide this support is through a monthly column in this publication, often written by members of our Independent Hoteliers Committee and delivering valuable insights on industry trends, operations, marketing, and more – specifically focused on the needs of independent hotel owners. Our goal is to arm our members with the knowledge and tools necessary to stay competitive and successful, no matter the market conditions.

At our annual AAHOACON Convention & Trade Show, we take this commitment further by offering special sessions, including a dedicated workshop, networking event, and reception created exclusively for independent hotel owners. These sessions dive into key topics such as financing, branding, and utilizing technology to enhance guest experience. They also offer a great opportunity for independent hoteliers to network with peers, share strategies, and build a community of support.

Advocacy, along with education and networking, is a core part of AAHOA’s mission. We work tirelessly at the local, state, and national levels to ensure the interests of independent hoteliers are represented. From fighting unfair regulations to championing small business-friendly policies, AAHOA is committed to advocating for the future of independent hotel owners.

And now, as part of our ongoing effort to enhance member support, we are thrilled to announce the relaunch of our **1-888-MY-AAHOA Member Call Center**. This valuable service gives AAHOA Members direct access to the resources, guidance, and solutions they need to make money, save money, and protect their investments. We are committed to ensuring independent hoteliers have the support they need to succeed.

Through our magazine, AAHOACON sessions, advocacy efforts connecting independent hoteliers, and enhanced member services, AAHOA is here to help independent hoteliers thrive and continue driving the future of hospitality. ■

Leading the way

AAHOA Members are jumping headfirst into industry leadership roles

by CARTER DAVIS

HOTELIERS ARE NOTORIOUS for being driven, goal-oriented individuals, so it should come as no surprise AAHOA is filled with passionate, results-focused leaders constantly in search of the best ways to serve their industry. Because of this shared drive, many AAHOA Members understandably are stepping up to take on additional leadership opportunities – whether that be serving inside or outside of AAHOA’s sphere. As a logical extension of AAHOA’s ongoing advocacy efforts, several members have run for, and won, public office, and some have accepted appointments to serve on various government posts.

Vimal (Ricky) Patel and Mihir (Mark) Pankaj are just two of the most recent examples of this ongoing trend, and AAHOA counts many other members among its ranks who hold public office or seats on high-profile boards of directors and committees throughout the industry.

Recently, Patel, who also serves as AAHOA Gulf Regional Director, was appointed by Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry to serve on the Louisiana Economic Corporation (LEDC) Board and AAHOA Member Pankaj was elected as mayor of Paris, TX.

We caught up with both of these industry leaders to talk about why they choose to serve, the struggles facing independent hoteliers, and much more.

Vimal (Ricky) Patel

HOW DID YOU FIRST GET INVOLVED IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY?

My journey in the hospitality industry began soon after I immigrated to the United States from India in 2000 at age 21. I worked for five years at a 64-room Super 8 in Brunswick, GA, learning our business from the ground up with wide-ranging responsibilities in housekeeping, front desk, and management. I struggled physically, financially, and emotionally, but the hands-on experience gave me a deep understanding of what it takes to run a successful hotel. In 2005, a mentor recognized my work ethic and gave me the opportunity to become a partner in renovating and reopening an abandoned independent hotel in Lafayette, LA. My wife, Rashmi, and I moved to Louisiana without even seeing the property, but we believed that’s how we could make a better life and make our own mark on the industry. I quickly discovered AAHOA and the Certificate in Hotel Ownership program, which further taught me essential basic skills, gave me lifelong friendships, and instilled a passion for the hotel business.

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE MAIN ADVANTAGES OF OPERATING AN INDEPENDENT PROPERTY IN TODAY’S ECONOMY?

The biggest advantages independent hotel owners have, especially in today’s economy, are flexibility and creativity.

They can typically adapt more quickly to changing market conditions and traveler demands than branded properties that are constrained by various standards and procedures. Independent hoteliers have freedom to make decisions easily and quickly about key operating issues like pricing and marketing. This type of flexibility can lead to more personalized and customized service, which results in better guest experiences and ultimately improved owner profitability.

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES FACING INDEPENDENT HOTELIERS TODAY?

Independent properties face several unique challenges today as they try to properly maintain their margins. Probably the biggest is the dramatic increase in operating costs, especially property insurance and labor. Another big hurdle is staying competitive with branded hotels supported by large marketing budgets. Still other issues for independents are access to financing and high revenue commissions by online travel agencies.

WHAT WAS YOUR INITIAL MOTIVATION TO GET INVOLVED WITH POLITICS, AND WHY ARE YOU STILL ENGAGED IN THE PROCESS?

My interest in politics started during my first job at the Apna Bazar in Surat, India, as I watched merchants making deals with

politicians. I got involved in American government advocacy soon after I moved to Louisiana in 2005 because I saw an important opportunity for me and my fellow hotel owners to make a difference for our businesses. Perhaps the most dramatic example of our impact was during the COVID pandemic when all of us were suffering in many ways, including financially. I wanted to find a way to reduce fixed operating costs, so I brought together a group of hotel owners in Lafayette Parish to meet with local elected officials and other key stakeholders. We successfully convinced the tax assessor to reduce property taxes by 50%, which was a huge game-changer for us. This showed me first-hand the power of advocacy and how hotel owners, by working together, can have a meaningful impact on our livelihood. It motivated me to stay involved with the people who make decisions about our hotels.

WHAT CAN HOTELIERS DO TO GET MORE INVOLVED IN POLITICS, AND WHY SHOULD THEY CONSIDER GETTING OFF THE SIDELINES?

Two things that hotel owners can do to get more involved in political advocacy are building relationships with local officials

and staying informed about the issues that might impact our properties. Being an AAHOA Member helps a lot because the association alerts us about proposed legislation and regulations, while also showing how to make our voices heard with the proper decision-makers. Sometimes government action can help us and sometimes it can hurt us. Only by staying aware and engaged can we protect our interests and guide our future. That includes voting in every eligible election – first learn about the issues and the candidates, then cast your ballot for what’s best for you, your family, and your business.

“

Sometimes government action can help us and sometimes it can hurt us. Only by staying aware and engaged can we protect our interests and guide our future.”

– Vimal (Ricky) Patel

Vimal (Ricky) Patel, AAHOA Gulf Region Director, with his family



Mihir (Mark) Pankaj

HOW DID YOU FIRST GET INVOLVED IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY?

I was actually a medical student and decided to switch gears once my father fell ill. He had been diagnosed with his third bout of oral cancer, and I decided to move back home and just make the change of career paths so I could be closer to my family and take care of my father. I came into this industry knowing very little back in 2014, and I'm still learning so much as each day passes. I've encountered many challenges along the way, but I knew the only way I'd be able to succeed is by tackling them head-on. Throughout my journey, thus far, I've had my fair share of lows and highs, but every moment has been faced with an open mind, and that's what I want to help spread to other hoteliers.

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES FACING THE INDUSTRY TODAY?

There are many challenges that are facing our industry, but the big ones at the moment are employment shortages, obtaining insurance to protect our business, interest rates, overgrowth and saturation within markets, and credit card transaction fees.

WHAT WAS YOUR INITIAL MOTIVATION TO GET INVOLVED WITH POLITICS, AND WHY ARE YOU STILL ENGAGED IN THE PROCESS?

I've always loved politics, and my strongest passion is simply to help others. There's nothing more gratifying than helping others. Every second counts, and life is too short to sit around, so I try to go 150% and make sure I tackle any challenges that come my way. I love the feeling of victory, especially when you have the opportunity to make a profound change, and that's what keeps my fire burning.

WHAT CAN HOTELIERS DO TO GET MORE INVOLVED IN POLITICS, AND WHY SHOULD THEY GET OFF THE SIDELINES?

Three words: YOUR VOICE MATTERS! We have to stand up for what is right, and let our voices be heard. We aren't in this industry to just run a business; we have to face so many challenges, and if we don't share our experiences, we'll never see any progress. Now, more than ever, we must unite as hoteliers and ensure we advocate for the changes needed for our industry. The same can be said about the local, state, and federal arenas. All political landscapes are fair game. We need more representation, and now is the time to move forward. ■

“

If we don't share our experiences, we'll never see any progress. Now, more than ever, we must unite as hoteliers and ensure we advocate for the changes needed for our industry.”

– Mihir (Mark) Pankaj



Mihir (Mark) Pankaj, Paris, TX Mayor, with his family



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Show your
true
colors

To stand out, independent hotels must master the basics and embrace creativity

by NICK FORTUNA

ARYAN PATEL DOESN'T NEED the resources of a large hotel chain to market the Smuggler's Cove Inn, his picturesque property in East Boothbay, ME. With a little outreach to wedding planners and couples seeking the perfect venue for their special day, the hotel's oceanfront views, sandy beach, and beautiful accommodations practically sell themselves.

Patel, a member of AAHOA's Independent Hoteliers Committee, said independent properties can establish unique identities in competitive markets by leveraging their location. Whether you're marketing a fisherman's paradise or the closest hotel to a theme park, location is a key selling point for independent properties, he said.

"A lot of times, a property's biggest strength is its location," Patel said. "Along the coast in the Northeast, for example, most properties aren't franchised. There's no need for franchising because of the tourism. Independent properties in other areas often can use their location to their advantage as well. Convenience is always a huge component. You just have to take advantage of your setting."

Independent properties close to major tourist attractions, stadiums, business centers, or airports should promote that proximity to guests. Hoteliers should know how far their property is from every major destination in their vicinity, and how long that trip typically takes at various times of day.

Highlighting that information online and in marketing materials can lead guests to associate your hotel with that destination, driving repeat business, Patel said.

Hoteliers can bolster that connection by seeking out partnerships with those destinations, offering discounts in exchange for promotional considerations.

In addition, embracing the signature themes of a location can help independent properties become part of the local fabric. While branded properties typically look the same regardless of location, independent properties are free to adopt the distinctive features of their communities, Patel said.

GAME ON

Independent hotels in college towns or near professional sports teams, for example, can incorporate team colors into their design to appeal to the local fan base. They also can decorate hallways with team memorabilia and offer promotions tied to the outcome of games, such as half-priced appetizers in the hotel restaurant whenever the local team wins.

By hosting viewing parties, independent hotels can become a place for fans to congregate whenever the team has a road game.

Similarly, hotel restaurants can build their menus around local flavors, giving visitors an authentic taste of the region, Patel said. Hotels in New England, for instance, could establish a reputation for having the best lobster and clam chowder in town, while properties in Texas could boast of having the best barbecue. Hotels that succeed in capturing the local flavor can win loyalty from locals and tourists alike, earning repeat business.

PROVIDING A PERSONAL TOUCH

While brands provide a standardized experience for guests, Patel said independent

properties can tailor services to individual consumer preferences.

“Personalization always is going to make the guest experience better because you’re not just renting out a room; you’re selling a guest experience,” he said. “You have more freedom in operating an independent property vs. a franchise, and you can use that to your advantage to create loyal guests who return over and over again. Since you’re not paying a franchise commission, you can use some of that money to personalize the guest experience.”

Jin Laxmidas, also a member of AAHOA’s Independent Hoteliers Committee, said independent hotels can drive customer loyalty by greeting guests in the lobby by name, marking special occasions with handwritten notes, and giving them a small gift from the restaurant. Personalized

service is common at luxury hotels, but there’s no reason midscale independents can’t follow suit, said Laxmidas, president of Houston-based Amzim Global Investments.

Even simple things like extending the checkout time at no cost can leave a lasting impression, especially among guests who have paid for those extras at branded properties, Laxmidas said.

MAKE IT PERSONAL

Employees at branded hotels may not be authorized to change policies or personalize services to satisfy guests, but at an independent hotel, the person working the front desk is often the hotelier, a family member, or a longtime employee who can be empowered to make those decisions, he said.

“Embracing the signature themes of a location can help independent properties become part of the local fabric. While branded properties typically look the same regardless of location, independent properties are free to adopt the distinctive features of their communities.”

Independent hotels also can compete on cleanliness, curb appeal, and the maintenance of their facilities, Laxmidas said. Walking around the hotel with a screwdriver to tighten door handles, promptly cleaning up spilled beverages near the hotel lobby, and replacing failing bathroom fans before guests notice them are simple ways to enhance the guest experience.

When independent hoteliers routinely display that kind of dedication and attention to detail, they’re setting the bar high for employees, further improving the guest experience, Laxmidas said.

“Service is No. 1,” he said. “Independent hotels can compete very well with brands if they do things the right way and treat their customers well. Knowing your guests, greeting them at the front desk, listening to what their requirements are, and asking what brought them to town are all little things that can make a big difference. You want to offer the flexibility that other hotels won’t give.”

PROTECT YOUR REPUTATION

Given the importance of online reviews, independent hoteliers should be especially vigilant about addressing complaints and monitoring their property’s online reputation, Laxmidas said.

Additionally, employees should be trained to ask for reviews when satisfied



customers check out. Many hotels send out automated texts or emails seeking reviews, but those methods are far less effective than a request from a smiling employee who just provided great service for a guest, he said.

Small hotels often make another unforced error by not providing branded uniforms for employees, Laxmidas said. When guests see uniformed employees, they're more likely to ask for help and to feel safe in the hotel, he said.

"No matter how small your hotel is, that's an investment that you will never regret," he said.

ELECTRICITY IN THE AIR

Laxmidas said he recently signed a contract to have high-speed electric-vehicle charging stations installed at his independent hotels, figuring they'll generate revenue and buzz within the community. He pointed to a recent NPR report detailing how many city residents who own EVs have difficulty charging them because they live in apartments and don't have garages or driveways.

These drivers spend a considerable amount of time competing for the limited number of public charging stations at grocery stores, malls, and other locations, NPR reported.

Laxmidas said his charging stations will have dual ports, so two cars can charge at once, and will be available to hotel guests and the general public. The chargers will show up on popular smartphone apps such as Waze, PlugShare, and Chargemap, raising the profile of his hotels. Under the *Inflation Reduction Act*, businesses can claim a 30% federal tax credit for the cost of installing charging stations, including building permits, hardware upgrades, and electrician services.

"It's actually highly profitable," Laxmidas said. "Independent hotels can take advantage of tax incentives right now and move quickly. They can have the first-mover advantage and put high-speed chargers on their properties to attract new customers."

For independent hotels, EV charging stations could lead to increased demand for dayrooms, especially with more

professionals working remotely, Laxmidas said.

Dayrooms represent an underutilized revenue opportunity for independent hotels, especially those near airports or major highways, he said. Flights get delayed, drivers on long trips want to nap and freshen up, and travelers with medical issues, especially seniors, need a place to shower and change clothes after an accident, he said.

If independent hoteliers have sufficient housekeeping staff, they can offer discounted rates for dayrooms, have the rooms cleaned, and then rent them out to overnight guests, maximizing daily revenue per room.

"That's another opportunity that smaller hotels should be looking at because the big hotels have started to do this already," Laxmidas said. ■



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Through flexibility and innovation, independent hotels can offset the benefits of franchise agreements

by NICK FORTUNA

WHEN RILEY HOTEL GROUP RECENTLY TOOK OVER THE MANAGEMENT of a 50-room boutique hotel in Key West, FL, the company shared some surprising news with the owner. Instead of doing battle with vacation rental sites like Airbnb and Vrbo, his property could place inventory on those sites and expand its outreach to consumers.

“We’re changing with the times and working with what’s available to us,” said Joe Moffa, president of Medina, OH-based Riley Hotel Group. “Adding Airbnb and Vrbo to independent boutique hotels wasn’t a thing three years ago, but it is now, and it has added an increased level of demand generation for our independent hotels.”

Riley Hotel Group manages a diverse portfolio of 14 independent hotels, 10 franchised, and two soft-branded. In highly competitive markets, especially downtown corporate centers, it may make sense for hoteliers to side with a proven brand, taking advantage of its reservation system, membership clubs, business relationships, and marketing expertise, Moffa said.

In other markets, however, especially tourist destinations, hoteliers often do better by retaining their independence and accentuating their individuality, he said. Independent hotels can experiment with their design and layout, add or subtract amenities and services and tailor their menus to local tastes. Through operational agility, independent hoteliers can enhance the guest experience, driving revenue and customer satisfaction simultaneously, Moffa said.

“If you have the right location in the right market, I would choose an independent

boutique hotel all day long,” Moffa said. “We could get creative with the design and with the partners that like that type of product instead of a brand. We could get creative with the food-and-beverage concept and the [furniture, fixtures, and equipment]. We could have a rooftop bar. We can do all kinds of things.”

THE NUMBERS GAME

According to CoStar Analytics, about 70% of the roughly 5.6 million hotel rooms in the United States last year were brand-affiliated, continuing a trend of expanded footprints for franchisors. Franchised rooms dominate several market segments, accounting for 71% of midscale rooms, 89% of upper-midscale, 85% of upscale, and 80% of upper-upscale, CoStar reported.

Notably, independents still have the edge in the luxury and economy segments, accounting for 62% and 51% of room inventory, according to CoStar. Luxury hotels, in particular, have opportunities to personalize the guest experience through special services, menu items, gifts, handwritten notes, and other gestures that make guests feel special, Moffa said.

Branded properties, meanwhile, succeed by providing a predictable, uniform experience that’s equally unlikely to disappoint

or wow guests. Without brand standards, independent hoteliers have more freedom in sourcing products and services, allowing them to foster relationships with local businesses and elevate their status in the community.

Independent hoteliers can also market their properties as they see fit, targeting niche groups such as environmentally conscious consumers, weekend sports enthusiasts, or foodies – without becoming misaligned with a brand’s broader corporate strategy.

“With an independent hotel, you have the flexibility to do some things for your guests that are outside the box and create memorable experiences you aren’t going to get at the branded property down the street,” Moffa said. “We’re not selling sleep; we’re selling an experience, and I think that’s the biggest difference between independent and branded.”

WEIGHING THE PROS AND CONS

In terms of finances, independent properties offer tradeoffs for hoteliers. There are

no franchise fees or royalties, which can total more than \$100,000 in upfront costs and around 10% of revenue for the life of the agreement, which can last anywhere from five to 20 years.

Independents also aren’t subject to property improvement plans that require substantial investments from hoteliers every six to 10 years to remain in compliance with brand standards. As hotels struggled through the pandemic, most brands relaxed their PIP requirements, but amid the industry’s strong recovery, franchisors have become less forgiving, Moffa said.

“With an independent hotel, I like that I’m not paying franchise fees or commissions, and I like not being forced to do a seven-year PIP when my product looks brand new,” he said.

On the other hand, it’s easier to get financing for franchised properties, so hoteliers might have to put down a larger down payment to build or purchase an independent property. In March, Reuters reported that a growing number of

independent hotels were joining brands, largely due to high interest rates.

Last year, for example, conversions accounted for 40% of organic room signings at Marriott International, up from 20% in 2022. Meantime, half of Accor’s hotel openings last year occurred through conversions, reflecting a larger industry trend, Reuters reported.

Due to inflation, construction costs and borrowing costs have risen in tandem, making it harder for independent hoteliers to access capital. Moffa said difficulty securing financing is “the one drawback” of independent hotel ownership, saying lenders today “want to see that franchise agreement.”

During a conference call with investors this spring, Marriott CEO Anthony Capuano said the company was counting on conversions to fuel its growth while construction of new hotels remains sluggish. About 1,980 new hotels opened in the United States last year, down from 2,730 in 2019, according to Lodging Econometrics.

“

Independent hotels can experiment with their design and layout, add or subtract amenities and services and tailor their menus to local tastes. Through operational agility, independent hoteliers can enhance the guest experience, driving revenue and customer satisfaction simultaneously.”

“In a climate where the debt markets for new construction are somewhat constricted, the importance of conversions is elevated,” Capuano said.

SPEAKING UP FOR BRANDS

Aman Dhillon, a member of AAHOA’s Women Hoteliers Committee, said her Elk Grove, CA-based company, Hotel Management Solutions, owns and operates eight franchised hotels in the select-service segment. She said she prefers the predictable performance that typically comes with branded properties and the ability to learn about hotel operations from brand ambassadors.

Moreover, franchised properties typically benefit from agreements between franchisors and large companies that have employees traveling for business, giving branded properties an advantage, Dhillon said.

“As an independent, you’re on your own, depending only on your reputation in the market,” she said. “With a tried-and-true brand, you’re taking advantage of the brand’s reputation and its connections with different companies.”

Dhillon said hoteliers just getting into the business might view brands’ PIP requirements as onerous and excessive, but after running hotels for a while, they typically understand renovations “breathe new life into the property, improving [average daily rates] and market penetration even for older, established hotels.”

INTO THE FUTURE

Ravi Patel, past chair of AAHOA’s Independent Hoteliers Committee, said technological advances are adding to the appeal of independent hotel ownership. A second-generation hotelier operating three independent properties, Patel said new technologies are making it easier for independent hoteliers to manage multiple properties while preserving their work/life balance.

Keyless entry systems, remote check-in, facilities management software, security cameras powered by artificial intelligence, and even automated bedbug detection systems are enabling hoteliers to work

from home and set their own schedules like never before, Patel said. Sensor-equipped trash cans can alert hoteliers when they’re full, for example, reducing the time spent maintaining a property.

Patel said independent hoteliers can’t afford to invest in every new piece of technology but, unlike franchised hotels, they’re free to implement the solutions that most appeal to them.

“These are the things independent hoteliers can look forward to,” Patel said. “I lived in a motel behind the laundry room, but now you can picture me having all these AI capabilities and being completely offsite. I can check a guest in and open the door for them. If my laundry guy comes to drop off clean sheets and towels, I can open the laundry-room door remotely to let him in. This is where the technology is going.” ■

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The tip of the iceberg

Exploring some of AAHOA's recent advocacy activity

by TEAM AAHOA

DURING THE PAST FEW years, AAHOA's leadership and members alike have made increasingly pointed efforts to become more involved, and effective, in advocating for the industry, whether that's meeting face-to-face with legislators on Capitol Hill or hosting them for a Back of the House Tour, testifying on behalf of the industry in front of legislative bodies across the country, or providing public comment national news programs regarding its stance on pertinent issues. As a result, AAHOA has been part of some key wins in passing legislation designed to spur growth in the industry and defeat

“

Int. No. 991 would impose onerous and unnecessary staffing requirements on NYC hotels, which could result in the closure of small businesses.”



VLADWEL/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



proposed bills that would likely have squashed competition.

Here, we take a look at just two – of many – recent examples of how AAHOA has boots on the ground across the nation with the goal of educating those responsible for shaping policies and laws that affect the industry enabling so many to achieve the American Dream.

AAHOA JOINED THE RALLY OPPOSING THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL’S PROPOSED SAFE HOTELS ACT

AAHOA joined numerous other industry associations and organizations in opposing the proposed *Safe Hotels Act* at a rally Thursday, September 12, at New York City Hall. If passed, this act would prohibit hotels from operating without an additional license and prohibit using subcontractors for core functions such as housekeeping, front desk, and security.

Among industry leaders, AAHOA Treasurer Rahul Patel represented AAHOA and voiced concerns on the proposed act with support from AAHOA Northeast Regional Director Preyas Patel and AAHOA

Mid Atlantic Regional Director Mahendra (MZ) Patel.

“The *Safe Hotels Act* was not created in good faith, or the City Council would have reached out to us and our members,” Rahul Patel said. “This act [the City Council] is trying to pass will destroy our livelihoods. For us, this bill not only hurts small businesses but will hurt thousands of hospitality employees in the New York City area.”

He noted that in the Manhattan area, hotels contributed over \$2.3 million in state and local taxes in 2021 and \$7.2 million to the GDP. These numbers demonstrate how vital these small hotels are to the local economy.

“I extend my deepest gratitude to Rahul Patel, our hospitality leaders, and the hundreds of supporters who rallied,” said AAHOA Chairman Miraj S. Patel. “It is my sincere hope that the City Council will listen to our voices and collaborate with us to find balanced solutions that benefit everyone. AAHOA stands ready to partner in this process.”

“The *Safe Hotels Act*, as it stands, poses a serious threat to our members’ businesses and their livelihoods and threatens to undermine that economic engine at a time when the industry is still recovering

from unprecedented challenges,” said AAHOA President & CEO Laura Lee Blake. “AAHOA is proud to stand with our industry partners in opposing this misguided proposal. We need policies that foster growth and job creation, not ones that put small business owners and their employees at risk.”

ABOUT INT. NO. 991 (SAFE HOTELS ACT):

Int. No. 991 would impose onerous and unnecessary staffing requirements on NYC hotels, which could result in the closure of small businesses. This bill mandates other rules that would needlessly disrupt hotel operations and require some hotel owners to divest their properties and exit the industry.

AAHOA MEMBER CONTRIBUTIONS RECOGNIZED BY LOS ANGELES CITY COUNCIL

The Los Angeles City Council recognized AAHOA with “AAHOA Day” on Wednesday, September 4, in acknowledgment of the association’s pivotal role as entrepreneurs, job creators, and contributors in the Greater Los Angeles Area.

More than 100 AAHOA Members attended an LA City Council meeting where



Councilmembers John Lee (CD-12) and Traci Park (CD-11) introduced AAHOA and paid tribute to the role local hoteliers have played in the city's development. Park and Lee presented AAHOA with a resolution recognizing the hoteliers' contributions.

After the presentation, LA Mayor Karen Bass made a special appearance to meet with AAHOA Members and congratulate them on their efforts, which warranted the recognition of a dedicated AAHOA Day.

Councilmember Paul Krekorian (CD-2) said it was appropriate that recognition coincided with the city's 243rd birthday.

"It's easy to say 'I love LA and be an LA booster,'" he said. "You came here, worked 12- to 14-hour days to build a business, created savings, and then invested your life savings in the soil we are on... that is how you show you love LA."

AAHOA Members own 1,165 hotels in the Greater Los Angeles Area, including about

650 hotels in Los Angeles. These properties, with 93,776 guestrooms, contribute significantly to the local economy, generating \$6.3 billion in annual hotel sales and an estimated \$17 billion overall economic impact.

"It's an honor to see our work recognized by the LA City Council," said AAHOA Chairman Miraj S. Patel. "AAHOA Members have consistently engaged in advocacy that supports the hotel industry, and we're grateful for this acknowledgment of our efforts. I commend Greater Los Angeles Area Regional Director Naresh (ND) Bhakta and Northeast Los Angeles Hotel Owners Association President Ray Patel for their hard work and dedication in leading these efforts, and all the AAHOA Members who joined for this special event."

"We appreciate the Los Angeles City Council's recognition of our efforts," said AAHOA President & CEO Laura Lee Blake, who spoke at the City Council event. "It was incredibly special they acknowledged the invaluable contributions of AAHOA and its members to the hospitality industry, the local economy, and the limited-service sector. I also personally loved that, by their resolution, the LA City Council encouraged all residents, businesses, and organizations to join in the celebration of AAHOA Day and to recognize the important role AAHOA Members play in the economic and social fabric of Los Angeles. This acknowledgment truly reflects the commitment of our members in the Greater Los Angeles Area to advocate for the hotel industry and our communities. Congrats to our local leaders for accomplishing this historic event with their diligence and the close relationships they have developed with

the elected officials. Definitely a day to be greatly celebrated by all."

The recognition highlights AAHOA's recent efforts to address the hotel industry's critical challenges. One such effort was the association's involvement in revising the proposed "Hotel Land Use and Replacement Housing Requirements." AAHOA played a role in transforming the original mandatory homeless voucher program into a voluntary one, helping balance the community's needs with the operational realities of hotel businesses. AAHOA Members also worked on the proposed minimum wage hike, advocating for a carve-out for limited-service hotels.

AAHOA has also been collaborating with the California Hotel & Lodging Association (CHLA) and the Hospitality Association of Los Angeles (HALA) to provide input on the city's police permitting process and encourage members to engage with legislative representatives regarding reforms to the *Labor Code Private Attorneys General Act* (PAGA). AAHOA remains focused on ensuring hotel owners' voices are heard in matters affecting their operations.

Prior to and following the council meeting, AAHOA Members met with Councilmembers John Lee (CD-12), Tim McOsker (CD-15), Heather Hutt (CD-10), Kevin de Leon (CD-14), and the policy director for Councilwoman Monica Rodriguez (CD-07), to discuss areas of concern for local hoteliers. These included labor shortages, the rising costs of insurance, operating expenses, and mortgages, the economic impact on limited-service hotels, and support for Asian American minority hoteliers. ■

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Capitol connections

AAHOA Members gather in D.C. to tackle critical hotel industry issues during a key election year

by TEAM AAHOA

WITH 468 SEATS IN the U.S. Congress (33 Senate seats and all 435 House seats) and the U.S. presidency up for grabs this month, the stakes have never been higher for the hotel industry. This year's AAHOA Fall National Advocacy Conference (FNAC) underscored hoteliers' critical role in shaping policies impacting their businesses and the broader hospitality sector.

On September 18 and 19, some 200 AAHOA Members and leaders came together in Washington, D.C., to spotlight the most urgent issues impacting hotel owners across the country. During nearly 200 meetings with Senate and House members and their staff, hoteliers had the chance to advocate for their key policy priorities, many of which were discussed face-to-face with U.S. senators and representatives.

"As hotel owners, we understand our businesses and the industry better than anyone," said AAHOA Chairman Miraj S. Patel. "It's crucial the voices of AAHOA Members are heard and their realities are taken into account when policymakers are making decisions that affect their livelihoods and businesses."

DAY 1 - ADVOCACY EDUCATION, KEYNOTE SPEAKER, CONGRESSIONAL RECEPTION

This year's event featured keynote speaker U.S. Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX), who hails from the same state as AAHOA Chairman Patel. "It was an honor to have Senator Cruz as the keynote speaker at this year's event," AAHOA Chairman Patel said. "As a fellow Texan, I'm proud to see strong leadership from our state. His insights on



the challenges facing our industry and the broader economy are invaluable, and his commitment to advocating for small businesses like ours is something all AAHOA Members can appreciate."

Sen. Cruz shared the story of his father, who fled Cuba, and how he started a small business in the oil and gas industry, likening his experience to many in the audience. He also discussed the 2024 presidential election and the need for job

creation, border security, tax cuts, and a reduction in government regulations.

"My priority every day is fighting for you, fighting for your small businesses to grow and prosper," Sen. Cruz said.

He also praised the extraordinary impact of AAHOA Members, who own nearly 90% of the hotels in Texas, and added, "I am proud of everyone in this room. You're driving jobs; you're driving security."



AAHOA also hosted a Congressional Reception for its members and legislators so they had the opportunity to further connect on issues. Those attending included:

- Rep. Judy Chu (D-CA)
- Rep. Jim Costa (D-CA)
- Rep. John Duarte (R-CA)
- Rep. Chuck Edwards (R-NC)
- Rep. Mike Ezell (R-MS)
- Rep. Bill Foster (D-IL)
- Rep. Russell Fry (R-SC)
- Rep. Josh Gottheimer (D-NJ)
- Rep. Glenn Grothman (R-WI)
- Rep. Michael Guest (R-MS)
- Rep. Andy Harris (R-MD)
- Rep. Dusty Johnson (R-SD)
- Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-IL)
- Rep. Ralph Norman (R-SC)
- Rep. Greg Stanton (D-AZ)
- Rep. Michelle Steel (R-CA)
- Rep. Marilyn Strickland (D-WA)
- Rep. Shri Thanedar (D-MI)
- Rep. Lori Trahan (D-MA)
- Rep. Tim Walberg (R-MI)

DAY 2 - ADVOCACY IN ACTION

AAHOA’s advocacy efforts support its members and their hotels while positively impacting the communities they serve. FNAC allows AAHOA Members to continue building relationships with members of Congress and discuss solutions to ongoing challenges faced by hoteliers, many of whom are small business owners.



In talking to legislators, AAHOA Members focused on three key legislative priorities to ensure the sustainability of hotels and the broader American travel industry. AAHOA

Members urged Congress to support the following issues:

- **Expanding access to capital** by supporting the *Loans In Our Neighborhoods (LIONS) Act of 2024* (H.R. 9176), which seeks to increase the maximum loan amount for Small Business Administration 7(a) loans from \$5 million to \$10 million.
- **Introducing more competition in credit card processing** via the *Credit Card Competition Act* (S. 1838/H.R. 3881). This legislation aims to introduce more competition in credit card processing, potentially saving businesses billions annually by reducing transaction fees.
- **Defending hotel owners from regulations that could impose significant financial burdens.** A prime example is the Department of Labor’s new Overtime Rule, which has substantially raised the salary threshold for overtime exemptions. To address this, AAHOA is supporting the *Congressional Review Act* (S.J. Res. 97/H.J. Res. 166), which seeks to repeal the new rule.

“Engaging directly with lawmakers is how we turn passion into policy,” said AAHOA President & CEO Laura Lee Blake. “Representing more than 60% of U.S. hotel owners, it is essential AAHOA leaders collaborate with legislators to drive positive changes that will support the industry in these challenging times. By sharing their experiences and addressing key issues, AAHOA Members are building meaningful relationships with the nation’s top policymakers. The long-term benefits will be substantial, allowing AAHOA to continue supporting the industry for generations to come.”

DAY 2 - PAC RECEPTION

AAHOA hosted a special reception for those members who donated \$1,001 or more to its Political Action Committee (PAC). The AAHOA PAC gives AAHOA the opportunity to advocate on behalf of its members on Capitol Hill and in state capitals across the country.

“Our Political Action Committee is the cornerstone of AAHOA’s advocacy efforts, giving us a powerful voice on Capitol Hill and in state capitals nationwide,” Patel said. “I’m deeply grateful to our members who have generously contributed to our PAC. Their commitment ensures we can continue to fight for policies that protect and empower hotel owners across the country. Together, we are making a lasting impact on our industry and our communities.” ■



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Facing the GIANTS

Hurricane readiness for hoteliers

by STEFAN BURKEY



WITH THE 2024 Atlantic hurricane season concluding at the end of this month, and several recent storms still very fresh in our memories, it's a great time to take stock of this annual event while it's still fresh in our minds. Hurricanes bring a host of dangers, including storm surges, wind damage, heavy rainfall and inland flooding, which can severely impact tall coastal buildings like hotels, dotting the Florida coast. Despite the common myth that certain areas are immune to hurricanes, the reality is quite different. For example, since 1850, every part of Florida's coastline has been struck by at least one hurricane.

Given the unpredictable nature of these storms, having a thorough hurricane preparedness plan is vital for hotel owners along the Atlantic coastline. This plan should focus on ensuring guest safety, protecting property, and minimizing financial losses.

CREATING A CALM BEFORE THE STORM

Adopting a comprehensive emergency response and communication plan is crucial. Preparedness should follow this timeline:

- **Send a company-wide email alert.** Have your designated business continuity manager (BCM) initiate the first communication to company employees, alerting them of a potential hurricane or storm. The email should include hurricane tracking coordinates, the storm name and category ranking, employee home preparation tips, the company's emergency check-in line, and links to relevant emergency information sites. Supervisors should also reach out to any workers who do not have email access, conveying the same information shared in the email alert.
- **Confirm staff calling tree is accurate.** All management and supervisory personnel responsible for employee communication should start verifying home and/or cell phone numbers on their call trees.
- **Confirm shut-down procedures.** The local senior management team should meet to discuss specific actions for hotel preparation and shut-down procedures. Include the building manager to determine a plan for securing the property, including security services, boarding up windows and testing backup power generators.
- **Make sure all insurance documents are saved electronically and easily accessed.** This will be crucial if a claim needs to be filed.

Dear AAHOA Members:

AAHOA's strategic partner, Gauthier Murphy & Houghtaling (GMH), offers a claim hotline where AAHOA Members can call any claims in for a complimentary policy and claim review.

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**3
DAYS
BEFORE THE
STORM**

- **Send a 3-day out reminder email.** Have the local BCM send a storm update email/phone call to employees three days prior to the anticipated hurricane with updated storm details and a reminder to call the emergency check-in line if they're unable to report to work due to the storm.
- **Identify those that need special assistance.** Managers should meet with the human resources team to identify employees or guests who may need special assistance in preparing for the storm or evacuation as well as to discuss updated preparation procedures.
- **Contact your broker.** Put your insurance broker on alert if you'll need to establish appropriate claim handling procedures and obtain contact information for post-storm restoration. Update current phone lists for roofing, electrical, and restoration contractors.
- **Alert mail services.** Inform outside mail services such as UPS as well as hotel vendors of any closure plans, and ensure that any critical mailings or deliveries are sent by the end of the business day.
- **Secure spaces.** Begin securing spaces by clearing desktops and moving fragile equipment away from windows.

- **Prepare the building.** Inspect, repair and clean drains, gutters and flashings. Remove all loose objects from the roof and strap or anchor all roof-mounted equipment, such as HVAC units and exhaust vents. Relocate hazardous materials and equipment and brace windows and doors, without blocking emergency exits.
- **Ensure emergency equipment is ready.** Check and test emergency generators, boilers, batteries, and communication devices. Ensure fuel supplies are topped off as necessary and basic emergency supplies are adequately stocked. This should include batteries, portable radios and lanterns, first aid supplies, bottled water, and tarps.
- **Begin IT shutdown procedures.** Ensure all necessary information is backed up. In addition, update phone recordings for the hotel main lines to inform callers of your status and provide alternate numbers for specific information.

**DURING
THE STORM**

- **Activate your emergency response plan** and stay indoors in a secure location.
- **Keep open lines of communication** with staff and guests, and follow evacuation orders promptly.
- **Stay updated** on the hurricane's progress by monitoring weather forecasts and emergency alerts.
- If conditions allow, **inspect your property** for structural damage, pipe breaks or fire hazards.

**AFTER
THE STORM**

**HOW TO SWIFTLY
RESUME OPERATIONS**

Every hotel should establish comprehensive plans for restoring IT systems and facilities after a storm to streamline the recovery process and reduce downtime.

It's also necessary to document and photograph all extraordinary expenses incurred during and after the storm. Proper documentation and imagery will expedite the claims process and help you secure appropriate coverage for your losses. Consult with insurance professionals before hiring outside agencies or signing contracts to confirm that costs are covered by your policy.

By taking a proactive approach, hoteliers can ensure they weather the storm with minimal stress. ■



Stefan Burkey is the hospitality practice leader for global insurance brokerage HUB International Florida. In this role, he oversees insurance

placement solutions for owners, developers, and operators from limited-service hotels to full-scale resorts. Stefan and his team clearly understand the financial needs and exposures associated with the hospitality industry, and their singular focus has generated profound market knowledge and significant buying power for HUB clients throughout Florida and the U.S. He won Risk & Insurance's 2023 Hospitality Power Broker of the Year.

STRATEGIZE ORGANIZE MOBILIZE

Creating a plan to tackle hospitality's leading cybersecurity risks

by TREVOR DOWSWELL

CYBERSECURITY IS A VITAL concern for any business in today's digitalized and IoT (internet of things)-driven world. However, for hotels handling sensitive business data and personal guest information the risks can seem especially great. With up to 31% of hospitality organizations stating they've previously experienced an attack, hotels undoubtedly are a favorite target of hackers who often aim to steal data and disrupt operations either for financial gain or to simply be malicious.

Regardless of the hacker's intent, the effect of these cyberattacks is the same for all hoteliers, resulting in loss of revenue, damage to the property's reputation, and exposure to legal liability. With the threat of data breaches on the rise, the good news is hotels have effective means at their disposal to fight back and minimize the risks. The first and most important step for hotel properties and their employees is to familiarize themselves with the most prevalent cyberattack tactics and to understand the steps they need to take to prevent an attack from occurring – or at least to minimize the damage if one does.

Avoid getting hooked by phishing scams

One of the easiest tricks hackers use to access systems and data is to pass themselves off as a legitimate contact. This tactic is known as phishing and usually comes in the form of fraudulent emails or messages that initially appear to be from trusted banks, vendors, work colleagues, or guests. Phishing attacks may use malicious links, infected attachments, or simply can request the sharing of sensitive information. Hotels can minimize their exposure to risks by adopting the following steps:

- 1** **Train employees** on how to spot email phishing scams, such as verifying a sender's address, analyzing the tone and language of a message, and by confirming the validity of links and attachments before proceeding to open them.
- 2** **Avoid disclosing sensitive data** to unfamiliar sources and verify the identity and authenticity of any requests for information or payments.
- 3** **Maintain a backup of business data**, such as guest records, reservations, invoices, and payroll in case of data loss.
- 4** **Maintain the updated hardware and software** able to identify, isolate, and delete phishing emails (spam filters, antivirus programs, firewalls, etc.)

Diffusing denial of service attacks



Denial of service (DoS) is a type of cyberattack that's becoming an all-too-common threat for hospitality organizations. The general goal of DoS is to disrupt or disable a property's website or network by overwhelming it with a large amount of traffic or requests. Examples can include freezing a hotel's booking engine or locking guests and staff out of rooms, often until a ransom is paid.

To prevent their business operations and guests from becoming victims, hoteliers often can sidestep DoS with techniques that include:

- **Installing software** that can identify spikes in network traffic that can differentiate between legitimate and malicious sources to block unwanted activity.
- **Configure firewalls and routers** appropriately to prevent suspicious traffic from accessing property networks to limit the number and size of packets that can be processed.
- **Deploy load balancing** abilities to distribute traffic across multiple servers or locations, redirecting traffic to alternative or backup servers in case of overload or failure.
- **Implement rate limiting** to restrict network traffic volume over a specific period of time, throttling or rejecting any excessive or abusive network bandwidth requests.

Remaining vigilant in the face of evolving online threats

Cyber-attackers no doubt will continue to adapt and become more ingenious as new technologies such as AI become widespread. Hotels always must attempt to stay a step ahead by maintaining awareness of the latest and most-commonly utilized tactics while understanding which best practices are the most effective to put in place. Those seeking expert advice should look to trusted professionals, including their operational systems and network solution providers. Doing so can only aid industry businesses in maximizing their ability to protect business and guest data from any type of from cybersecurity risk. ■

Addressing malware in all its shapes and sizes



Although all malware is designed to infect a computer system or network, the software can take various forms depending on a cyberattacker's goals. This can include viruses, worms, ransomware, spyware, and adware – each capable of inflicting damage while exposing a hotelier to a range of vulnerabilities, including crashed systems and data theft. Yet hoteliers can drastically reduce their chances of being targeted by any type of malware threat when keeping these best practices in mind:

- **Maintain updated malware protection software** on all devices and networks, with scans performed regularly to swiftly remove any detected threats.
- **Ensure staff use only up-to-date browsers** with ad-blocking software when accessing the internet while implementing rules to avoid visiting suspicious or unsecured websites.
- **Require external drives such as USB thumb drives to be scanned** prior to being used on any hotel devices or networks.
- **Implement rules requiring all operating systems** to be up-to-date and routinely patched to eliminate any security loopholes or vulnerabilities that malware can exploit.
- **Restrict administrative permissions** only to trusted personnel and limit access privileges of other users or guests to the minimum necessary.



Trevor Dowsell is Chief Technology Officer at Hotel Internet Services and is a specialist in the architecture and configuration of converged, large-enterprise wired and wireless networks. He is a Cisco certified engineer who has personally directed the installation of hundreds of public access WiFi networks, as well as large-scale VOD and IPTV systems.

Localize your hotel

Do independent hoteliers have the advantage? *by* STEPHEN OVERCASH

I**NDEPENDENT HOTELS OFFER A** unique experience that's often difficult to replicate with a branded hotel. While there are many advantages to national brands, guests often are drawn to the unique experience of staying at local, boutique properties. When envisioning a new property, hoteliers must consider the best strategies to embody their vision for the hotel. How can independent hotels be sustainable and compete with the national brands?

Before analyzing the advantages of both independent and branded hotels, let's explore the evolution of hotel brands. For centuries, hotels were all independent and reflected the culture of the local community. The hotel's location and offerings often were depicted in the naming, with monikers such as The Mountainview Lodge, The Downtowner, or The Sand Dollar Inn. In 1939, seven southern motel owners formed Quality Courts to take advantage of mass marketing and business referrals. Quality Courts United became the first hotel chain in the United States. By mid-century, other chains were being established including Hilton, Holiday Inn, and Sheraton. In the past 25 years, corporate hospitality groups have offered hundreds of different brands to American travelers. Currently, 70% of the 166,000 hotels and motels operating in the United States are branded.

Branded hotels come ready with a built-in customer base, allowing them the advantage of reaching a much larger audience. Hotel brands also have more support and resources for technology, marketing campaigns, and employee benefits. These advantages can lead to more competitive room rates for the customers.

“

Without the demands of a 'brand big brother,' independent hotels can be much more nimble and tap into local energy. This freedom allows the hoteliers more creativity in differentiating their properties with authentic and memorable experiences.”

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

Without the demands of a “brand big brother,” independent hotels can be much more nimble and tap into local energy. This freedom allows the hoteliers more creativity in differentiating their properties with authentic and memorable experiences. The national brands recognized the value of independent hotels when they began losing market share.

To combat the popularity of these local boutique hotels, the national chains established less prescriptive “soft brands,” allowing their franchisees the same creativity and flexibility typically associated exclusively with independent hotels. Soft brands have characteristics of boutique properties without advertising the

(hidden) brand in the hotel's name and signage.

Historically, the top priority for hotel selection was based around location and convenience. Later, guest preferences skewed toward branded hotels, as they were seeking the comfort and security in consistency from location to location. Guests also were attracted to the coveted hotel rewards programs associated with the larger, more established brands.

THE TRENDS OF TODAY

Younger generational hotel guests have shifted their priorities and often gravitate toward hotels with unique, local experiences. This paradigm shift puts less emphasis on location, convenience, and cost. The ability for independent hotels to tell an authentic story has worked to their advantage.

To be relevant in the shadow of the national brands, the independent hotel can partner with other local businesses to offer packages for corporate events, romantic getaways, and staycations. Keeping all partnerships local is paramount. These local collaborations include restaurants, specialized retailers, breweries, distilleries, and outdoor adventure amenities that cater to customer birthdays, anniversaries, and even their pets' needs. These collaborations, in tandem with specialized rewards programs with other likeminded independent properties, help them remain interesting and relevant alongside the larger brands.

Being an independent hotelier is a daunting task. It requires hard work, creativity, and entrepreneurship. Studies have proven that independent hotels obtain significantly

higher average daily rates (ADR), with lower occupancy rates. While this is especially true during times of economic expansion, branded properties have the advantage of higher ADR during economic recessions.

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

If the advantages of a branded hotel become critical to the economics of an independent hotel, there is a viable alternative, reflecting the best of both worlds. National hotel brands often seek unique properties to acquire and include in their portfolio of soft brands. If your independent hotel has stabilized, has a proven track record and has curated a loyal customer base, it may be appropriate to seek a soft-brand opportunity with a national chain. As part of a larger national collection, your hotel can go through a fluid transition and continue the virtues and amenities expected and respected in local hotels.

Independent hotels have been important to their communities for centuries. In addition to providing places to stay, the hotel is often enjoyed as a local destination to socialize, eat, and drink. They're managed by local ownership groups and offer guests access to many community amenities. These hotels tell the story of local culture and history. They offer authentic experiences.

Whether a soft brand or a truly independent boutique hotel, they should be treasured as a landmark in the community. If designed and marketed to celebrate the locale, independent hotels have the potential to be sustainable and have the longevity

necessary to create lasting core memories for generations to come. ■



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1984, has provided architectural expertise to clients for more than 38 years in Charlotte, NC, and throughout the eastern United States. ODA's foundation is built on a collaborative and entrepreneurial environment that puts the client first to produce an outstanding experience and FUNomenal Design.



Business in the front, party in the back

How hoteliers can navigate the future of blended travel

by SUZANNE NEUFANG

WITH THE PANDEMIC's impacts finally tapering off, people's desire to travel has returned with a vengeance. This so-called "revenge travel" continues to play a pivotal role in the recovery and growth of travel overall – and related to the return of business travel has been an increased interest and desire for blended business and leisure travel, sometimes referred to as "bleisure."

While the trend of combining travel for work with play can take many forms, some of the major identifiers include adding a few leisure days before or after a work trip, bringing family members along on a business trip, or even working while on vacation.

The concept of blended travel has been around for a number of years – at least since the first business traveler decided to add a weekend stay after attending a conference. But, post-pandemic, the industry has seen an acceleration in the number of business travelers taking advantage of new opportunities opening to them.

At Global Business Travel Association (GBTA), the industry outlook is for an

overall robust path ahead for the business travel sector which also bodes well for blended travel opportunities. The latest GBTA Business Travel Index Report (GBTA BTI™) revealed a forecast for global business travel spending to reach a high of \$1.48 trillion by the end of 2024, an increase on the previous record of \$1.43 trillion recorded in 2019. By 2028, GBTA expects the sector will exceed \$2 trillion in value.

Further growth for blended travel is ahead and will be enabled by work and life factors of travelers including the increased flexibility in work locations, work-from-home fatigue, and a wider rethinking of priorities – including the desire to travel – following years of disruption.

With sustainable travel also a growing consideration, this trend allows corporate travelers to potentially reduce their

environmental impact. If I'm able to take a single flight for multiple purposes, both business and for pleasure, I may reduce the overall number of trips I take and thus the number of flights I book.

HOW BIG IS THIS MARKET?

GBTA recently looked at this trend as part of a study of business travel's economic impact, revealing blended travel made up over a third of all travel in the U.S. (33.8%) in 2022.

Additionally, the GBTA BTI report found 62% of business travelers were more frequently blending business and personal travel than they did in 2019. At the same time, 42% were adding additional leisure days to their business trips, while 79% of these travelers were staying at the same accommodation for the business and vacation portions of a trip.

WHO IS A BLENDED TRAVELER?

There is no single persona for a blended traveler, but it usually represents a point where time, desire, ability, and opportunity intersect. Interestingly, according to GBTA research, although men were more likely to travel for business overall,



proportionally, women added a leisure component at a much higher rate than men. Women comprised 42.1% of conference and convention travelers and 36.6% of other business travel but made up 48% of total blended travel trip volume.

At the same time, data shows travelers stay 4.4 days on average during blended trips.

When it comes to motivation, some business travelers see it as an opportunity to go solo and take a few days for themselves, while others bring along their partner or meet up with family and friends at their destination. In general, people are leaning into blended travel and taking advantage of its benefits.

INDUSTRY RESPONSE

Growing interest in blended travel offers hoteliers an opportunity; how might they take advantage? One idea might be to offer discounts for guests who extend their stays beyond business commitments, perhaps to enjoy some leisure time during the weekend, take advantage of the hotel’s amenities, and check out some local attractions.

In terms of design, hotels might focus on in-room facilities, including maintaining office desks, which had previously been slowly falling out of fashion. Properties must also ensure Wi-Fi is fast and reliable, while also creating comfortable work-spaces or business centers that meet the needs of remote workers. Hotel lobbies also can become multipurpose spaces, with opportunities to work and socialize in a shared area.

Concierge services may also play a part, offering blended travelers personalized

recommendations and itineraries for activities during what might be a relatively short stay.

For those that get the mixture right, travelers are likely willing to spend more on additional room nights, as well as dining, laundry, spa and poolside/cabana services and sightseeing.

As the blended travel trend continues to bloom, the hospitality industry will be expected to tailor its offering to meet the intricate expectations of business explorers and capitalize on the potential of the segment. ■



Suzanne Neufang was named CEO of Global Business Travel Association in February 2021, where she leads the association’s mission, strategy, and programs to

benefit stakeholders across the global business travel industry. She’s a transformation-focused executive who has led product, service, and organizational innovation through times of great change – “connecting dots” across geographies, functions, people, and results. She’s held leadership roles within the travel industry for the past 20 years, including at HRS, GetThere, Travelocity, and Sabre.



Further growth for blended travel is ahead and will be enabled by work and life factors of travelers including the increased flexibility in work locations, work-from-home fatigue, and a wider rethinking of priorities – including the desire to travel – following years of disruption.”



LEVEL UP

What an independent hotelier should consider when exploring the possibility of implementing a PIP

by AMANDA GERTSEN, KATIE PASS-BRINKER, and KAREN PELZER

IN AN INDUSTRY DOMINATED BY large hotel chains, independent hoteliers face many challenges when it comes to maintaining guest satisfaction and staying competitive. To combat these challenges, a well-crafted property improvement plan (PIP) is one of the most effective strategies for ensuring long-term success. By aligning properties with guest expectations and brand standards, PIPs help hotels adapt to the ever-evolving needs of customers. For independent brands, strategically developing a PIP is essential for enhancing their properties while preserving their own identity.

When it comes to actually implementing a PIP, the concept can be daunting for independent hoteliers, especially with limited resources compared to larger, branded hotels. However, in a market where guest expectations constantly evolve, a PIP provides a roadmap for maintaining and upgrading a property to meet and exceed industry standards, ensuring the hotel remains competitive, appealing, and profitable.

In the world of independent hotels, PIPs must be tailored to each hotel's needs, with design and architecture playing a crucial role in enhancing the guest experience. A successful PIP emerges from collaboration between the hotelier and a multidisciplinary team of experts, including designers, architects, and strategists. By aligning the PIP with the hotel's vision, constraints, and goals, it supports the overall business strategy and drives success in independent properties.

TAILORING PIPs IN INDEPENDENT HOTELS

Independent hotels aren't a one-size-fits-all scenario; circumstances and objectives can vary widely from one property, owner, or operator to another. Each hotel has its own story, character, location, and clientele. Therefore, a successful PIP must be tailored to reflect these attributes.

Unlike the standardized upgrades typical of chain hotels, improvements in independent properties should enhance the brand's distinctiveness while also addressing essential updates in infrastructure, technology, and design. Analyzing guest demographics, infrastructure needs, expansion plans, and current market trends is crucial. By leveraging data-driven insights, hoteliers can pinpoint areas where improvements will yield the highest return on investment (ROI). Whether it's revamping public spaces, modernizing guest rooms, or integrating more sustainable practices, each enhancement should

align with the independent hotel's business objectives and entire brand narrative.

STRATEGIC DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE

From the moment a guest arrives at a property to the time they check out, every aspect of their experience matters. By implementing this holistic approach, hoteliers focus on not just aesthetics but also functionality, sustainability, and future-proofing. Examples of strategic design changes include:

- **Technology changes:** Seamless integration of technology into guest rooms and public areas is now a necessity in today's hospitality landscape. These upgrades must be implemented thoughtfully to ensure they enhance, rather than detract from, the guest experience.
- **Wayfinding and branded environments:** Effective wayfinding and signage, along with branded environments, are crucial for creating a seamless and memorable guest journey. They guide guests through spaces with ease while reinforcing the hotel's identity.
- **Sustainability:** Implementing sustainable practices, such as energy-efficient lighting, smart mechanical systems, water-saving fixtures, and responsible material selections, reduces operational costs and attracts eco-conscious travelers. When integrated into the overall design and architecture, these considerations contribute to a more engaging and responsible hospitality experience.

COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS TO DRIVE HOTEL SUCCESS

By adopting a proactive, strategic approach to property improvements, independent hoteliers can exceed guest expectations and transform their properties into sought-after destinations. In a rapidly changing industry, it's crucial for independent hoteliers to evolve strategically to remain relevant. A well-executed

PIP goes beyond keeping up with trends; it sets and maintains a standard.

Strategic investments in interior design, architecture, and branded environments will enhance the guest experience, ensuring long-term success and a lasting guest impression. With the right planning, development, and execution, independent hotels can thrive, offering guests one-of-a-kind experiences that stand out in a crowded marketplace. ■



As a licensed architect specializing in hospitality with NELSON Worldwide, Amanda Gertsen has extensive experience working with most major hospitality brands and

boutiques. An extremely passionate and detailed professional, she leads project teams using an open and collaborative approach with scopes ranging from renovations and PIPs to reflagging and new ground-up builds.



Katie Pass-Brinker works with the NELSON Worldwide hospitality team to create and produce high quality design through all phases of project development, ensuring the

client's expectations and design vision is exceeded, and achieve the firm's goal of design excellence.



Karen Pelzer brings a unique expertise to the NELSON Worldwide team, having worked for both a hotel owner and various design firms throughout her career. She

understands the delicate balance between design and operations in the world of hospitality, recognizing that these two domains are unique yet interconnected, and when not in sync, can create economic, environmental, and social consequences.

Learning to fly

The next generation of industry leaders is focused on the future

by CARTER DAVIS

THE HARD REALITY OF today's world is many trade and professional associations across North America struggle mightily to attract younger members. Operating in direct opposition to this trend, however, AAHOA counts impressive numbers of young hoteliers among its ranks and continues to invest in this growing and important demographic in countless avenues, not the least of which is a still-evolving, but vital, program – Helping

Young Professionals Evolve (HYPE) – which focuses on building up the next generation of hoteliers by leveraging the invaluable expertise within AAHOA's ranks.

Featured here is just one of AAHOA's young talents, Dhrushil Patel, a young man committed to making the industry better tomorrow than it is today. Read on to learn more about him and why he feels it's crucial to support AAHOA, regardless of whether one is just starting out or has been a hotelier for decades.

CAN YOU TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOURSELF?

Like many AAHOA Members, I'm following in my family's footsteps as a second-generation hotelier. As a 24-year-old from Klamath Falls, OR, I'm serving my first year as a Young Professionals Committee member and my second year as a Northwest Ambassador.

I graduated from Oregon State University in 2023, after serving as the first elected Asian Indian Associated Students of Oregon State University (ASOSU) President and completing an international program at Vienna University of Economics and Business. Since completing my undergraduate degree, I have taken an active role in my family's business and investment portfolio in Southern Oregon and Northern California, focusing on asset management and development.

WHAT TYPES OF PROJECTS ARE YOU WORKING ON RIGHT NOW?

My recent projects have included the completion of a \$700,000 renovation across three portfolio hotels, the reposition of an independent economy hotel to a limited-service boutique hotel, conducting brand due diligence for franchise renewals and opportunities, and working to finalize the sale of one of our smaller portfolio hotels. I also serve as a committee member on the Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association (ORLA) Government Affairs Committee.

ENCOURAGING FELLOW YOUNG LEADERS SEEMS TO BE VERY IMPORTANT TO YOU. CAN YOU TALK A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THAT?

In the past year, I've been invited by Oregon State University's College of Business on a few different occasions to speak to students and staff. I delivered a keynote presentation – Strategic Leadership: The Art of Authenticity – at their 2024 Student Leadership Conference; participated as a panelist in their Understanding the Essence of True Leadership: Insights and Reflections from True Leaders Panel; and was asked to join their annual, end-of-the-year Career Conversations event to speak with students about emerging career pathways available in the hospitality industry and lodging sector. I also was recently selected as the first alumni to be featured in the first edition of the Oregon State University Business GOLD (Graduates of the Last Decade) newsletter.



AAHOA Member Dhrushil Patel

HOW ARE YOU USING YOUR EXPERIENCE TO HELP CREATE A BETTER INDUSTRY?

I'm now using my experience to empower business owners and operators by developing industry-related events and delivering lectures and workshops at various business conferences. This past June, I had the pleasure of hosting the 2024 AAHOA Northwest Region Town Hall meeting in Klamath Falls, OR. This town hall was the first AAHOA event brought to Klamath County in 35 years and brought together more than 85 hospitality industry professionals in attendance. In September, I was invited Klamath County Chamber of Commerce to deliver a lecture on artificial intelligence at the 2024 Rural Business Expo. This lecture was a polytechnic workshop called "Algorithms to Action: Leveraging AI for Success" and educated 80-plus business owners from Southern Oregon on utilizing various AI tools to streamline business processes and boost productivity across various industries. From ideating social media content to drafting contracts, I demonstrated practical strategies and real-world examples of how AI can save business owners time and money.

DO YOU HAVE PLANS TO USE YOUR INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE IN DIFFERENT WAYS?

I love the work I do and am appreciative of the leadership opportunities that allow me to mentor students and business owners across Oregon. In this spirit, I'm in the process of launching my own company aimed at providing business coaching and consulting services to empower the emerging generation of business owners and entrepreneurs. I also aim to begin a joint JD/MBA program in fall 2025 to complete my dream of earning graduate degrees in law and business administration. ■



Comparison shopping

by RUSHI SHAH

The main differences between debt and equity risk and how it affects capital negotiations

WE’VE ALL HEARD the term capital stack, which refers to the layering of different types of debt and equity to build the financing structure for a project. When designing the capital stack, developers and property owners often misunderstand that each of its components has its own characteristics and unrelated risk return profile. As a result, when structuring their overall financing solution, they can’t expect the positive or negative aspects of each type of capital will dilute or improve the positive or negative aspects of another type. Instead, a project and how it will be funded must be understood and evaluated while keeping the proper level of risk segregation of each building block in mind.

RISK VS. REWARD

There are multiple types of debt that can be included within a project’s capital stack – from senior to junior to mezzanine debt. The main differentiator among the flavors typically is the order in which the debt is paid back. Regardless of type, all debt is a promise to pay back the funds within a determined timeframe. For capital providers, therefore, the most important goal in every transaction is capital preservation. In other words, a debt lender’s primary motivation is to get that capital back along with a fixed amount of interest as profit. Developers evaluating their projects from a potential upside perspective often forget to take the lender’s motivation into account. This is a mistake, as it’s unreasonable to expect debt providers to be willing to take on the risk of any speculative component of a real estate transaction as would an owner or equity partner, because the return on the debt is not commensurate to that unknown risk.

Let’s look at an example of this debt provider risk-reward disconnect. If a hotel owner wants to reflag a Comfort Suites hotel to a Hampton Inn & Suites, for example, conventional wisdom suggests the overall revenue or RevPAR will be higher under the new brand. Debt providers, however, calculate revenue projections by evaluating the RevPAR of similar hotels to



When developers and owners understand the role debt plays in the capital stack and the motivations behind how lenders make their decisions, they become better equipped to analyze real estate transactions and are perceived as more seasoned and sophisticated.”

the Hampton Inn in the market’s competitive set and assuming 100% penetration.

Hoping for a larger loan to cost, a seasoned developer may ask the lender to consider a 120% RevPAR penetration to the market competitive set by arguing that the converted hotel will do 20% better than its peers in that area. This may be true, but while the developer may net a higher return after conversion and stabilization, he or she doesn’t turn around and share that upside with the lender. This is why the additional 20% RevPAR penetration is considered equity risk and not debt risk. Unlike equity investors, lenders aren’t willing to write a bigger check despite the expected future revenue bump, because they can only charge a certain defined rate such as SOFR + 400 basis points or 9% interest (example rate at the time of writing) on debt capital. Since a debt provider isn’t party to the equity’s returns, developers can’t expect lenders to be party to the equity’s risk.

Another nuanced example of this same concept is if a new factory is moving into a market and expectations are it will lead to more room nights for a nearby hotel, an increase in tenants for an area apartment building, or a new retail shopping center.

Although those forecasted gains may actualize in the future, the additional expected growth or upside may not directly result in higher leverage loan today.

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF FUTURE UPSIDE

When developers and owners understand the role debt plays in the capital stack and the motivations behind how lenders make their decisions, they become better equipped to analyze real estate transactions and are perceived as more seasoned and sophisticated. Although debt providers can’t take part in an owner’s or developer’s lofty projections, in the event there’s an expected lucrative upside for the project, borrowers can use creative options such as mezzanine debt or preferred equity to build out their capital stacks. These types of instruments can take on an equity type of risk in exchange for higher return expectations – currently 12% to 15% for mezzanine capital and 13% to 18% for preferred equity. Final pricing will depend on the lender’s appetite for risk, the current market, and the supply of similar, competing assets in the area.

To ensure the most optimized capital stack, it’s important developers and owners work with an expert who structures a transaction not just from a loan placement perspective or brokering a deal standpoint, but who has the experience and knowledge to be able to convince the capital source of what is the right risk return profile of each layer of capital. ■



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

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

The Patel founding fathers

The accidental hoteliers who revolutionized the American hospitality industry

by MAHENDRA K. DOSHI

THEASTOUNDING SUCCESS of the Patels from Gujarat in the American hospitality enterprise is a unique phenomenon. They control a massive share of the industry's assets, employ millions, and contribute tremendously to the U.S. economy, enabling them to dominate and wield influence to prosper. For them, the hospitality business has become the most coveted. Their impact on the American hospitality industry is extraordinary.

Much is written about the Patels' success, but more exploration is needed to learn how and when such a colossal business enterprise originated. However, South Asian scholars long considered the Patel narrative sketchy because it lacked archival depth. Hitherto, no efforts were made to tell the founders' tale.

SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT

My book, *Surat To San Francisco: How the Patels from Gujarat Established the Hotel Business in California 1942-1960*, drew on

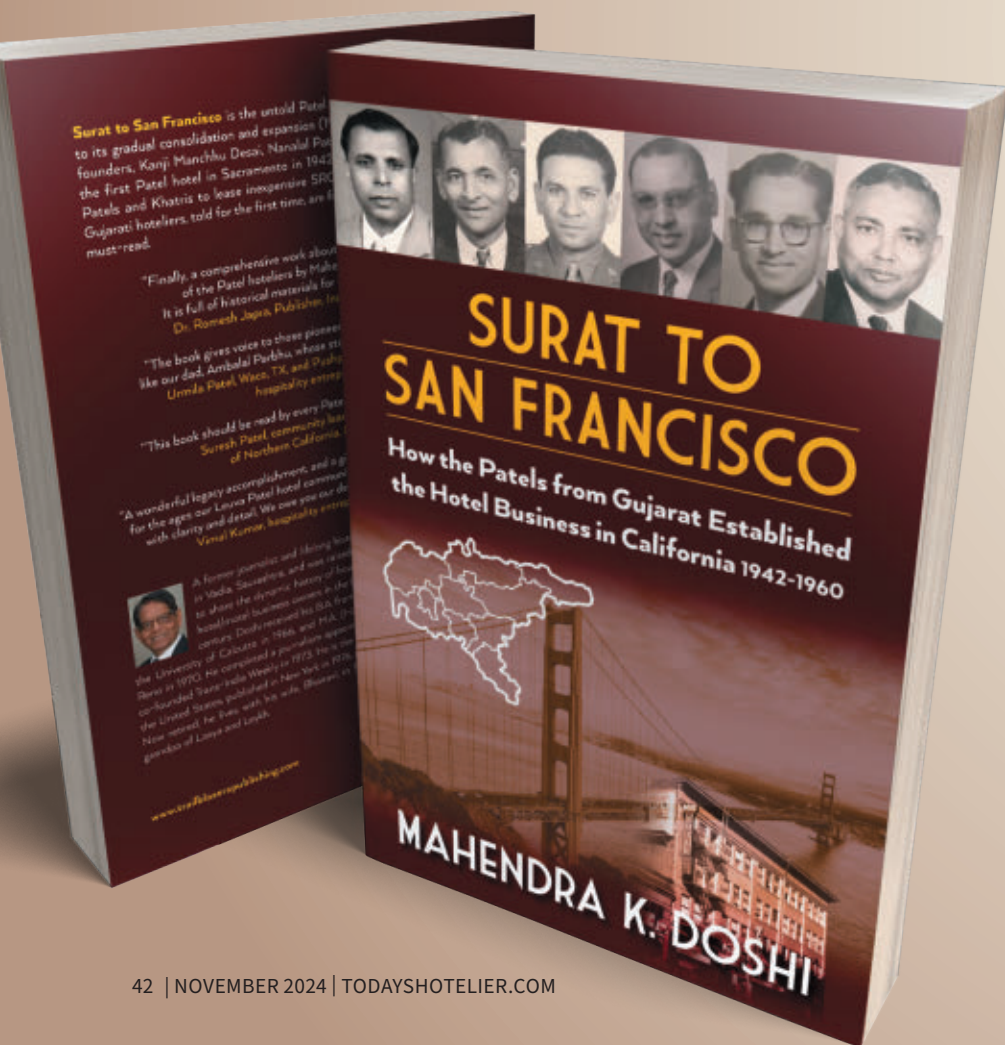
undiscovered diaries, memoirs, and oral interviews of their descendants to compile their historical narration and perhaps lift them from the unforgotten corners of history to their rightful place in our chronicle. The book details how three Patels from Surat surreptitiously arrived in America to help their farming families escape economic misery. Unbeknownst to them, they would lay the foundation of the hotel business and change how the Patels would make a living in America.

The Patel founding fathers' success wasn't only their own; it paved the way for many future generations of Patels, a large majority of whom are AAHOA Members, to become successful hoteliers. The founders' journey is an immigrant success story that epitomizes America as the land of opportunity. They blazed trails in the hospitality industry, and their influence can be seen in the tens of thousands of Patels who followed in their footsteps, metamorphosing the business.

KNOW YOUR ROOTS

Nanalal Patel of Khara Butwada, Kanji Manchhu Desai of Digas, and D. Lal, aka Bhikhu Bhakta of Orna, never considered settling in America when they left Surat. Nanalal went to Panama in 1922, and Kanjibhai and D. Lal went to Trinidad in 1930 but needed to earn more to remit money home. The three were inspired by the prevalent talk of America being the land of plenty and those who went there earned big. However, America had shuttered its doors with anti-immigrant laws of 1917 and 1924, barring Asians, including Indians, from entering.

Undaunted, they entered America illegally, found farming jobs in Yuba City, CA, and worked for 10 cents an hour while facing frequent immigration raids, racial discrimination, and harassment. Their resilience and





The Patell Founding Fathers. [L-R] Kanji Manchhu Deai, Nanalal Patel, and D. Lal



Patell properties in San Francisco: The Perramont Hotel (top), the Hotel Alder (bottom left), and The Henry Hotel in San Francisco

determination to succeed in the face of such adversity are truly inspiring. They survived because they were tenacious, determined, stoic, and unwilling to return empty-handed.

From 1937 to 1942, they continued to work on the farms for an itinerant living and penury wages, but an opportunity came during World War II, when the American government – shamefully, in hindsight – relocated Japanese-Americans to internment camps. The Nisei owner of a 32-room single-room occupancy (SRO) hotel who needed to report to the camp offered Kanji Manchhu her hotel as caretaker, and the lease terms were highly generous: a \$350 down payment and \$75 a month rent for five years.

This watershed event marked the serendipitous beginning of the first Patell hotel in America – the Ford Hotel, on 6th and K streets in downtown Sacramento, CA, on October 15, 1942. Room rates were 50 cents a day or \$3.50 a week. Kanji Manchhu was the first Patell hotelier in America. He’d discovered something better than toiling in the San Joaquin sun. He sheltered and fed his now famous khichdi to his acolytes, who worked gratis and performed hotel chores. He barely earned \$100 a month but had transformed from a farmhand to a businessman, an achievement his friends and family lauded.

AS THE STORY GROWS

Kanji Manchhu moved to San Francisco in 1947 and leased Hotel Goldfield at 157 4th Street. Here, he began to preach his now famous “Patell Manifesto” to those who had arrived legally under the *Luce-Celler Act* of 1946, which allowed the immigration of 100 Indians per year. The

newcomers found it hard to find jobs as San Francisco wasn’t yet a mecca of liberalism, and racial discrimination was still rampant. The visionary Kanji Manchhu thought the hotel business concept was the answer to the Patells’ job conundrum and aggressively preached, “Here in America, there is nothing better for a Patell than to run a hotel.”

He initially encouraged newcomers to work on the farm until they gained language proficiency and saved about \$1,500 – enough to lease an inexpensive SRO. He also arranged handshake loans for those a few hundred short with no contract, repayment schedule, or interest, allowing them to pay back by drib and drab. By 1955, Kanji Manchhu was the catalyst for creating 30 new Patell hoteliers in the South of Market. His vision and leadership transformed the lives of many Patells, providing them with a path to success in America.

THE SHADOW LOOMS LARGE

Kanji Manchhu left an indelible legacy behind. Within a few decades, his disciples consolidated and expanded the business, first in the Bay Area and then nationwide, helping grow his small innovation into a massive entity that has yet to reach its peak. The late Stanley Turkel, an early supporter of AAHOA, called Kanji Manchhu Desai one of the great American hoteliers and put him on the pedestal along with Conrad Hilton, J. Willard Marriott, Howard Johnson, John Bowman, Henry Flagler, John Hammons, and Kemmons Wilson – all contemporaries of Kanjibhai who contributed

enormously to the development of the hotel industry. It’s a fitting honor for the man from Surat, though he has yet to achieve the recognition he rightly deserves among our diaspora.

The hotelier wives arrived in 1957 to ease their workload and admirably performed household and business duties. The *Immigration and Nationality Act* of 1965 helped hoteliers sponsor their blood relatives, giving rise to chain migration. Many obtained green cards by investing \$10,000 in hotels and motels. By 1965, the business registered steady growth, with some Patells moving to the North of Market, and a trend to own rather than lease began with Bhula Vanmali Patell purchasing William Penn Hotel. Kalyanji Patell was the first Patell to own a motel – Mart Motel, on 9th Street. Following their mentor’s manifesto, Dahya Ratanji, Bhula Vanmali, and Dhanji Vakil assumed leadership in the 1960s and created more than 1,000 new hoteliers. The rush to own a piece of the vast American hospitality landscape was on, and that juggernaut continues unabated to this day. ■



Mahendra K. Doshi is a member and supporter of AAHOA. As a former journalist, researcher, and historian in San Jose, CA, he writes about the experiences of Indian immigrants and is uniquely qualified to share the dynamic history of the Patell hoteliers. His website is patellhotelhistory.com, and he can be reached at mahendra.kumar.doshi@gmail.com.

AAHOA MEMBERS IN ACTION



Georgia was on the minds of many folks at the Georgia Hotel Owners Conference & Trade Show, which featured more than 500 attendees, raised \$32,173 for PAC, gained 28 new members, and saw a 21% increase in the size of its trade show vs. last year.



AAHOA North Pacific Ambassador and Lifetime Member Arun Ray Patel of Stockton, CA, represented AAHOA at a high-profile fundraiser for Stockton Mayor Kevin Lincoln, who is running for California's 9th District seat in Congress. The event also was attended by House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA).



AAHOA HerOwnership hosted its inaugural Sunrise Soiree to honor and celebrate its women hoteliers. The event took place at the Columbia Gorge Hotel & Spa.



The Northwest Region hosted AAHOA's first Charity Golf Tournament of 2024. The event had 144 players and more than 30 sponsors, and raised \$105,000 for local charities, including the Autism Society of Oregon, Businesses Ending Slavery & Trafficking (BEST), Make-A-Wish Oregon, and the Washington Hospitality Association Education Foundation.



Ambassador Aman Patel recently oversaw a Town Hall in Pensacola, FL, in the North Florida Region. The high level of engagement and meaningful discussions highlighted the strength and dedication of the AAHOA community in Northwest Florida.



North Texas Regional Director Dhiren Masters, along with Lifetime Member Ketan Masters and Sanjay Patel of Arlington, recently met with House Small Business Committee Chairman Roger Williams (R-TX) to tackle some of the most pressing challenges facing the hotel industry.



The Northwest Hotel Owners Conference & Trade Show welcomed 230 attendees, gained 10 new annual members, and raised \$24,500 for PAC.



The Southwest Region held a successful Hotel Owners Conference & Trade Show, with 120 attendees, four new members, and \$33,212 raised for PAC.

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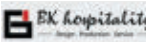









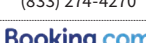










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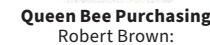
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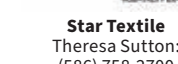
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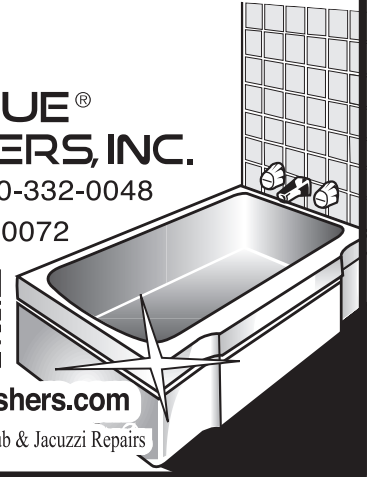
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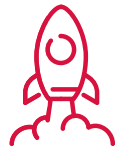
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