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## **AAHOA Expands Executive Leadership Team**

ATLANTA, Ga., Feb. 22 – AAHOA, the nation’s largest hotel owners association, is pleased to welcome Michael Forrest, MBA, CFE, as its new Vice President of Franchise Relations and Ashli Johnson MS, CHT, as its new Vice President of Education. Both will lead their respective departments and join AAHOA’s Executive Leadership Team.

“This is an exciting time for AAHOA, and we are pleased to welcome Michael and Ashli to the association. AAHOA is committed to being the foremost resource and advocate for America’s hotel owners, and that has never been more important than right now when hotel owners across the country are struggling,” said AAHOA President & CEO Cecil P. Staton. “Strong relationships and open dialogue between owners and brands will be imperative to a smooth recovery, and I am confident that Michael’s experience as a franchisee and franchisor will help us strengthen our relationships in the industry. Ensuring owners have the resources and information they need to stay ahead of the curve as our economy and our industry ramp back up is equally as important, and that is why I am pleased that Ashli will be heading up our education team, one of the fastest-growing areas in AAHOA. Her two decades of experience with top hospitality brands will be an asset to AAHOA members’ professional development.”

Michael Forrest will serve the interests of AAHOA’s franchisees with their brands, enhance communications to strengthen these relationships and AAHOA’s role in the industry. Having been both a franchisee and franchisor, Forrest has spent nearly his entire career working in franchise operations and consulting. Working with companies such as Burger King, Dippin' Dots, Gloria Jean’s Coffees, and Wing Zone, he brings a unique perspective of franchise owners’ needs in the hospitality space. Forrest has an MBA in Business Management and BS in Business Management from Purdue University Global.

“What motivates me the most is helping business owners and franchisees connect to their brands,” said Forrest. “It’s an important time for the hospitality industry, something that no franchisee could plan for, and I’m excited to advocate for the interests of franchisees, ensuring they have the tools and resources to survive and stay afloat during these challenging times.”

Ashli Johnson brings nearly 20 years of leadership, consulting, and academic experience with top hospitality brands to her new role. Johnson will help continue to develop industry-leading educational opportunities for AAHOA Members, regardless of where they are in their business ownership journey.

“I’m thrilled to join the AAHOA team and leverage my professional expertise and design-thinking approach to continue advancing AAHOA’s focus of becoming the foremost resource for hotel industry education and information,” said Johnson. “As an organization that I’ve looked up

to for quite some time, I'm excited to contribute, develop, and deliver member-centric and innovative programming to take AAHOA to the next level of educational offerings."

Johnson is a hospitality graduate of the University of West Florida and holds a MA in Hospitality and Tourism Management with a focus in Hotel Investments from Florida International University. Johnson also served on several industry boards and led committees for industry organizations such as the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AHLA), the National Association of Black Hotel Owners, Operators & Developers (NABHOOD), and the Latino Hotel Association (LHA).

Johnson has taught and served in leadership roles for recognized programs including Virginia State University, Georgetown University, University of Central Florida, and most recently as the Assistant Dean of the University of Houston's Hilton College of Hotel & Restaurant Management.

AAHOA COO Rachel Humphrey, who had also been serving as the association's Vice President of Franchise Relations, will now serve as AAHOA's Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer.

"Rachel's new role is a direct reflection of where AAHOA is today, the unique challenges that our organization and industry face, and is foundational to preparing AAHOA to achieve the ambitious goals set forth in our new Strategic Plan," said Staton.

"AAHOA is a complex entity with many moving parts, and the development and addition of these roles are a direct commitment to our aspirations set forth in the Strategic Plan and to structure AAHOA in a way to achieve optimal success," added Staton. "With AAHOA now in its thirty-second year, nearly 20,000 hotelier members strong, and challenging and ambitious goals ahead, I know we will be set up for long-term success on behalf of America's hotel owners."

**About AAHOA:**

*AAHOA is the largest hotel owners association in the world. The over 19,500 AAHOA members represent almost one in every two hotels in the United States. With billions of dollars in property assets and hundreds of thousands of employees, AAHOA members are core economic contributors in virtually every community. AAHOA is a proud defender of free enterprise and the foremost current-day example of realizing the American dream.*

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