

**CONTACT**

MELISSA STERN  
770-274-7980  
MELISSA@AAHOA.COM

## **AAHOA's Inaugural HerOwnership Conference & Retreat Empowers Hundreds of Women Hoteliers**

ATLANTA, Ga., Nov. 7 – AAHOA, the nation's largest hotel owners association, held its inaugural HerOwnership Conference & Retreat at the Radisson Hotel Cincinnati Riverfront on October 26 and 27.

The HerOwnership Conference & Retreat was far from your typical women's event. While this event was women-centric, it focused specifically on women who are interested in owning their first hotel, or learning about owning hotels in general.

This conference and retreat was designed to educate women about how to own a property or business, and promote women who are interested in exploring hotel ownership.

"Seeing all of these dynamic women in all areas of hospitality come together for a few days of education and relaxation was extremely powerful," said AAHOA Female Director Eastern Division Lina Patel, CHO. "I'm proud to have worked alongside the entire AAHOA Team in launching the HerOwnership program. This conference and retreat gave women hoteliers an opportunity of a lifetime."

On the first day of the HerOwnership Conference & Retreat, there was a panel discussion that took a closer look at industry trends and uncovered why the time is now for women to get more involved in ownership opportunities in our industry.

"Our industry is relationship-focused. Cultivating your relationships outside of your usual norm is important. Cultivate relationships with franchisors and cultivate your relationships with local lenders. When I went for my first commercial loan, I got rejected. I was feeling so good about it, but I realized I went to a bank I didn't have a relationship with," said Tejal N. Patel, one of the panelists, and AAHOA Female Director Western Division. "My family had a relationship with a local lender for many years. So, when I went through that door and let them know I was a part of the family, I saw the door open a little bit."

Following this panel discussion, attendees heard directly from top brands. G6 Hospitality, Choice Hotels, Red Roof, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts, and Marriott International championed women toward hotel development and investment, and illuminated initiatives to increase ownership among historically underrepresented groups.

AAHOA was honored to have the support of these brands, in addition to My Place and Sonesta at the HerOwnership Conference.

“This is an important message AAHOA is sending to the industry,” said AAHOA Chairman Neal Patel, CHO, CHIA. “These women are trailblazers and finally getting the support and education they need to take their businesses to the next level, and support their families.”

Before rejoining AAHOA this past summer, President & CEO Laura Lee Blake spent many years dealing with complex litigation lawsuits involving big companies and millions of dollars. Thanks to her professional experience over the years, Blake shared advice on improving negotiation skills.

Blake recommended that women should consider the art of negotiation as an opportunity to open new doors in their ownership experience. She discussed the concept of listening closely to understand the perspective of the other party and using strategic empathy to assist in influencing change. Blake also identified focused questions and phrases that can assist in obtaining favorable responses to ensure the negotiations do not come to a standstill.

“Taking time to get to know the other party and build rapport can help hoteliers navigate the negotiation process more effectively,” Blake added, “When you step into the other party’s shoes, trust and collaboration increase, giving you an advantage in the negotiation process.”

The first day was packed with insightful content, two wellness sessions, and an unforgettable Riverboat Cruise & Reception.

The second day of the HerOwnership Conference & Retreat kicked off with a wellness session that included Zumba and yoga. Health and wellness were a significant component of the conference agenda, allowing attendees to slow down and relax over the course of the two-day event.

In addition to wellness, other themes throughout the second day included leadership communication skills, personal branding, technology, lending, and finances.

Executive Coach and Communications Expert Diane Ripstein was featured as the keynote speaker and shared four building blocks to create a strong executive presence.

Immediately following the keynote presentation, Heather Carnes, AAHOA's EVP, Communications, and Chief Strategy Officer, moderated a panel on personal branding and carving out your niche in the industry.

The panel discussion included great insight into building credibility in the industry, developing your brand in the midst of the global pandemic, and drawing inspiration from other brands.

"When I started this business two years ago, I had to sit there, in the middle of the pandemic, and think, who am I, what does my company represent, and what kind of brand do I want to be," said Seema Jain, one of the panelists, and Founder and CEO of Seva Global. "The brand that resonated with me was Ritz Carlton because they anticipate the needs of their guests and always go above and beyond. That is who I am for my clients."

The event included special sessions focused on wellness, which focused on techniques to relieve stress, drive more energy, balance the demands of everyday life, and more.

Hundreds of women hoteliers left AAHOA's first-ever HerOwnership Conference & Retreat renewed, empowered, and elevated to take the next steps in their careers and advance in the industry.

"This event has definitely surpassed our expectations and we are so grateful for the opportunity to sponsor. From both a logistics and a content perspective, you conducted a world-class event," said Kim Twiggs, Assistant Vice President of Market Development at DIRECTV. "You should be so proud of what you have created, and these women are very lucky to have you at the helm. We have enjoyed our partnership with AAHOA very much over these past 10 years, and this event feels like we are taking things to the next level and creating even more meaning in the work we are doing."

To learn more about AAHOA's HerOwnership initiative, visit [www.aahoa.com/herownership](http://www.aahoa.com/herownership).

Tell us your story to get involved with the initiative [here](#). To see the professional photo archive, click [here](#).

Stay tuned! AAHOA will be announcing another HerOwnership event in 2023.

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**About AAHOA**

*AAHOA is the largest hotel owners association in the nation, with Member-owned properties representing a significant part of the U.S. economy. AAHOA's 20,000 members own 60% of the hotels in the United States and are responsible for 1.7% of the nation's GDP. More than one million employees work at AAHOA member-owned hotels, earning \$47 billion annually, and member-owned hotels support 4.2 million U.S. jobs across all sectors of the hospitality industry. AAHOA's mission is to advance and protect the business interests of hotel owners through advocacy, industry leadership, professional development, member benefits, and community engagement.*