

## AAHOA Leaders Wrap Up Diversity Conference, Strengthen Industry Ties

PHILADELPHIA -- Senior leaders from the Asian American Hotel Owners Association (AAHOA) played a prominent role this week in Philadelphia at the annual Diversity & Inclusion Conference on April 27-28.

The event drew more than 100 key professionals from business, academia, advocacy, associations and other groups to the Philadelphia Ritz-Carlton to debate how to use diversity to shape the hospitality industry.

The AAHOA delegation comprised President and CEO Chip Rogers, Chairman Bruce Patel and Vice Chairman Bhavesh Patel. They served on a combined total of five panels on topics like increasing minority ownership and cooperation in advocacy efforts.

Bhavesh Patel said it was about finding common ground and interests and then following through.

Rogers noted that as opportunity increases, so too does diversity. He condemned government regulations that make entrepreneurship harder and more costly, and also noted that in less than 30 years, AAHOA has gone from immigrant group to industry powerhouse, with members owning nearly half the hotels in the United States.

"The opportunity is there," Rogers said. "It can happen."

Bruce Patel recounted how first-generation Indian immigrants banded together to combat discrimination. He said his predecessors smashed the glass ceiling limiting their progress by "building their own."

Stephen Joyce, CEO and president of Choice Hotels International, shared that AAHOA members now own more than 60 percent of the hotels in his company's vast portfolio.

Patel told an audience on Thursday that that number was achieved only through hard work and struggle. He added that AAHOA and the industry have prospered by cooperating with other advocacy groups like the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AH&LA).

"We found the greatest thing we could do was work together," Patel said. "I don't know what happened in the past. We set all that aside to move forward."

Other key leaders in attendance were the president and CEO of the National Association of Black Hotel Owners, Operators and Developers (NABHOOD), Andy Ingraham, and AH&LA Senior Vice President of Member Relations Matt MacLaren.

AAHOA is the largest hotel owner's association in the United States. The more than 15,000 AAHOA members own almost 50% of all U.S. based hotels. Each year AAHOA members donate hundreds of thousands of dollars to their local communities.

CONTACT: Kate Viana 404-419-8983 kate@aahoa.com