

Asian Hospitality



More cracks in the glass ceiling

New and revived programs promote women in hospitality

Hotel TVs remain in vogue

Streaming services also remain popular, but inflation is having an impact

Providing a smoking gun

Sensors help hotels detect smoking in guestrooms

More cracks in the glass ceiling

New and revived programs promote women in hospitality

Women have struggled for equality in the hospitality industry just as they have fought for it in society as a whole. They've made progress, and one sign of that is the recent appointment of Laura Lee Blake as the first female full-time president and CEO of AAHOA.

At the same time, new programs have arisen, and old ones been revived, to promote their cause. The new ventures include a new diversity consulting agency founded by retired Best Western Hotel Group CEO David Kong, part of an alliance of various organizations supporting women in hospitality, and Wyndham Hotels & Resorts' "Women Own the Room" program that paves the way for women to own hotels.

Also, Red Roof held its 4th Annual Forum on Leadership for Women Entrepreneurs in May after a two-year lapse caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In March, the Castell Project, a not-for-profit that provides mentorship and networking for women in the industry, formed an alliance with the American Hotel & Lodging Association Foundation to expand those efforts.

"Women are achieving positions and recognition in the travel industry. AAHOA celebrates the important work that women are doing at every level of hospitality," Blake said. "While there is still more to be done to achieve full gender equality, AAHOA recognizes the significant strides women have made by taking leadership seats in the boardroom, owning and operating hotels, offering advice and perspectives



Laura Lee Blake was appointed in May as the first female full-time president and CEO of AAHOA.

at industry events, and excelling in the workplace."

AAHOA appoints first female president

Blake, appointed to her new position with AAHOA in May to succeed Ken Greene, previously was a partner with Connor, Fletcher, and Hedenkamp LLP in Irvine, California. She appreciates the importance of her new positions.

"With my appointment to serve as the president and CEO of AAHOA, I have been given not only a voice, but also a big responsibility, to champion the work of the women of AAHOA. I do not take this lightly," Blake said. "Over the many years that I had previously

worked with AAHOA, I saw the hard work of many women who were operating the hotels, and also raising their families, supporting their local communities and serving AAHOA in volunteer leadership roles. They were not looking for recognition. They just did it because it was the right thing to do."

The first few weeks of the new job were exhilarating, Blake said. Her plans for AAHOA include changing the operational structure of the organization, a process that already is under way. Heather Carnes, previously AAHOA's vice president of marketing and communications, has been promoted to executive vice president

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Laura Lee Blake, president and CEO of AAHOA

for communications and chief strategy officer, and Phelps Hope has been hired as executive vice president for operations and chief development officer.

The association also has promoted several managers to more senior positions and provided bonuses to recognize all team members' work.

"These advancements further underscore our aggressive and ambitious plans for the future, which include identifying and securing key leaders to carry out our strategic plans. We need a top team of executive leaders to guide and promote the team members, as well as to initiate and establish the methods and framework to ensure success," Blake said.

Also, Blake said AAHOA is looking into new ways to provide new opportunities for women to network and learn from and inspire other women in the industry. The overall effort aims to encourage more women to become hotel owners or take leadership positions with hotel companies.

"We are looking to create additional programs and resources that female hoteliers can use to take their careers to the next level including pursuing ownership opportunities, stepping into new leadership roles, and more,"

Blake said. "Since each path is unique, I would encourage the women who are looking to make such changes to embrace the opportunities and build



Rachel Humphrey, former executive vice president and COO for AAHOA who temporarily served as interim president and CEO for the association, organized the Women in Hospitality Leadership Alliance, a collaboration of 17 organizations dedicated to diversifying the hospitality industry.

lasting relationships along the way."

Those same goals and methods are shared by several other organizations dedicated to promoting women's equality in the industry. It always has been the core tenet and specific mission for The Castell Project, founded by longtime leader in the industry Peggy Berg to help her fellow female executives.



Chip Rogers, president and CEO of the American Hotel & Lodging Association, left, with Peggy Berg, founder and chair of the Castell Project, far right, and Rosanna Maietta, president and CEO of the AHLA Foundation, announced the merger of the foundation and the Castell Project during the Hunter Hotel Conference in March in Atlanta.

New alliances in the fight

The Castell Project began as a training and mentorship program for women who are nominated by their employers or another sponsor. It has since expanded to provide research on the industry's progress in diversification, as well as the Castell at College speakers program and the annual Castell Award.

Berg said she has certainly seen an increase in interest by the industry in increasing diversity.

"What's happened over the last few years is that these programs have gotten more and more robust," Berg said. "The development programs that are available to corporations are to improve their cultures, make their cultures more open to diversity. Those are now available through the foundation."

Blake's appointment at AAHOA also is encouraging, Berg said.

"AAHOA is such an enormous and important part of the industry, I think, for that organization to bring women into their leadership, not just full time but permanently," she said. "I thought Rachel Humphrey, [former executive vice president and COO for AAHOA] did a great job of establishing the groundwork and showing how a woman could do so much for AAHOA as the head of the organization. And now to have a permanent woman in that role, I think is a great step forward, not just for AAHOA but for the companies that are members and of course, the women who work in those companies."

Castell Project's partnership with the AHFA Foundation already has provided benefits, she said.

"The core of what we do, which is advancing women in leadership, is absolutely going forward, but it's going forward on a much larger platform," Berg said. "It's allowed us to amplify what we're doing in

many ways."

Now, the two organizations are also part of the Women in Hospitality Leadership Alliance, a recently created collaboration of 17 groups with a shared purpose.

"It brings together all the many organizations that are working on this endeavor to bring women up into leadership, so that we can all understand what each other are doing," Berg said. "We can coordinate our efforts and we can amplify each other's efforts."

The alliance was assembled by Humphrey, who temporarily served as interim president and CEO for the association. Humphrey, along with retired Best Western CEO Kong, is now one of the founding partners in DEI Advisors, a non-profit organization providing a unique approach to promoting diversification.

Caught on camera

Humphrey began assembling the alliance last year, she said.

"I had an opportunity to bring together several of the leaders of organizations doing great work in the hospitality industry to elevate women in hospitality, the idea being that collaboration would



Lan Elliott, a principal at not-for-profit DEI Advisors and co-founder of Acacia Hospitality LLC, said women have a different style of leadership that may be hard for some men to accept.

make us stronger," Humphrey said. "At a time when human and capital resources are stretched, it made sense to facilitate communication among the groups already engaged in this space."

She started with six organizations and expects to add more in the future, Humphrey said. Current members include AAHOA, AHFA ForWard, FAB Conference, the Global Business Travel Association, Hertelier,

the International Society of Hospitality Consultants' Questex Diversity Council, She Has a Deal including Fortuna's Table, the Travel Industry Executive Women's Network, Women Leading Travel & Hospitality, Women in Travel Thrive, African Association of Women in Tourism and Hospitality, Forum on Leadership for Women by Red Roof, Inspiring Women in Hospitality, Latino Hotel Association, Raizup and several individuals.

DEI Advisors is one of the more recent additions, Humphrey said.

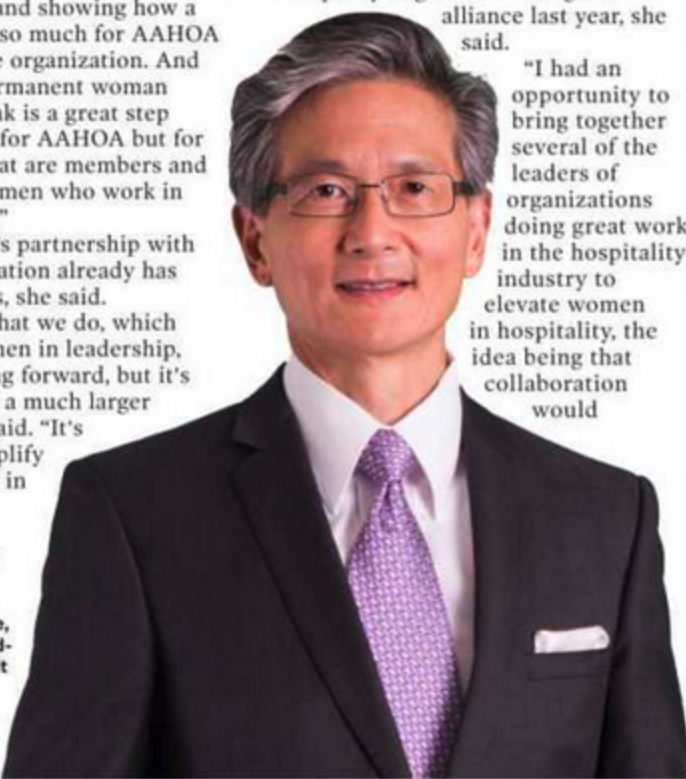
"David joined us in one of our early meetings with the vision for DEI Advisors to hear what other groups were already doing in this space and to see where he might be able to fill in some of those gaps," Humphrey said.

Based in Scottsdale, Arizona, DEI Advisors will conduct a series of interviews with industry leaders with the intent of sharing inspiration and guidance to help individuals navigate their careers. The interviews will teach how to overcome conscious and unconscious bias, seek advancement, face structural barriers successfully, establish networks, advocates and mentors and better integrate their work life and personal life.

"I formed DEI Advisors as a non-profit organization to collect and share insights and learnings from industry leaders," said Kong, who is DEI Advisors principal and founder. "Essentially, we're aiming to prepare future leaders in the industry for the driver seat of their own journey, where they get to truly help create and advocate for their own destiny."

Subjects of DEI Advisors' video interviews include Pat Pacious, Choice

Retired Best Western Hotel Group CEO David Kong, is the founder of Scottsdale, Arizona-based DEI Advisors, a not-for-profit organization that provides training and mentoring for women in the hotel business.



Hotels International president and CEO; Amanda Hite, president of STR; Radhika Papandreou, managing partner at Korn Ferry; and Heather McCrory, Accor Hotels CEO for North and Central America who also was the first winner of the Castell Award.

Kong said the video interviews are just a starting point for DEI Advisors.

"The whole idea is recognition that the industry is paying attention to the AI opportunities. Many companies in the industry are doing wonderful things to try to create programs and try to promote diversity, inclusion and equity," Kong said. "I've seen many positive changes. Just look at the many employment positions where women were appointed to them and a lot of companies making a mandate to, when they search for high level positions, they want a diverse slate of candidates. They have set a goal to have a certain percentage of representation on the executive committee in the boardroom."

The other principal at DEI Advisors is Ian Elliott, co-founder of Acacia Hospitality LLC. She also said women have made much progress in hospitality, but there remain hindrances to further progress.

"I would say the biggest barrier is that women have a different leadership style, which can also be very effective," Elliott said. "But I think a lot of leaders who tend to be men are used to seeing what leadership looks like on a man. And so, their style of being a good leader, you need to be authentic to your own style and a woman is not going to look authentic, being a leader and following it in the way that men do it."

It is in the leadership of the hospitality industry that the most change is needed, Humphrey said.

"In hospitality, it's an incredibly diverse industry. You know, when David joined as a dishwasher, he saw a tremendous diversity," she said. "But, as you go up that triangle, as you rise up through that pyramid, it

Zina Patel, managing partner at Anaya Hospitality in Bakersfield, California, helped organize Red Roof's recent 4th Annual Forum on Leadership for Women Entrepreneurs. She has been a Red Roof franchisee since 2015 and serves on the company's franchise advisory council.



Red Roof Chief Marketing Officer Marina MacDonald on stage to kick off the 4th Annual Forum on Leadership for Women Entrepreneurs.

becomes less and less diverse at the top and you can see that just looking around at the president and CEO positions."

In order to continue to elevate women to those positions, a couple of things needs to happen, Humphrey said.

"One of them is having a different or more open view of what makes someone qualified, what is the path

to leadership, because it's going to be very different," she said. "Until those mindsets start to change about whether someone already has those skills or can develop those skills are already evidences this leadership or can evidence this type of leadership. That's where you're going to, I think, start to see that greater impact."

Elliott said a holistic approach would be most effective.

"It is about education and giving women and other underrepresented groups opportunities to learn," Elliott said. "I think it has to come from both sides. There is a lot that women and others can do to put themselves in a better position. Also, I think there is some bias that still exists in organizations. It's one thing to give people a lot of tools and skills, and then if they go back into the organization, that's exactly the same as it was before. Yes, they're going to be more skilled in order to do it, but I do think that there's work on both sides that's needed."

Leading the charge for women in the industry is not just a job for not-for-profits. Many hotel companies, including Red Roof and Wyndham, also are stepping up their efforts to promote women.

A place to make your point

Red Roof began its women's forum in 2016 but had to put the event on hold during the pandemic. This

year's event was held in Austin, Texas, and was very successful, said Marina MacDonald, Red Roof's chief marketing officer who started the forum.

"The past two years have been challenging, especially for women, and the impact the pandemic had on travel and hospitality exacerbated the pressure felt by women in our industry. As women juggle work lives and home lives, there really is no such thing as work/life balance. Rather, there are work/life choices



that women are forced to make every day," MacDonald said. "I designed this hybrid professional/personal event to help our attendees further develop their business and leadership skills, as well as the tools to take better care of themselves, so that we will not only help grow more successful and happy women entrepreneurs, but we will also encourage the development of sustainable habits that will lead to a lifetime of success."

One of the attendees and planners of the forum was Zina Patel, managing partner at Anaya Hospitality in Bakersfield, California. She has been a Red Roof franchisee since 2015 and serves on the company's franchise advisory council.

"This one was amazing. The location was great, the speakers, the vibe, I think after being away for two years,

Purvi Patel in San Antonio, Texas, has joined Wyndham's Women Own the Room program to help fund her conversion of the first Econolodge Inn and Suites in Texas from an Americinn she's purchased.



think outside the box from the other speakers that were there."

Zina said the forum is especially important for her as an Indian woman.

"There's a lot of Indian women that feel like their voice isn't heard, and they don't know how to speak properly," Zina said. "There's the first generation coming from India, so English is their second language. But this conference made them feel like whatever you want to say, is valid and important. And if you don't know how to say it in the way you want, it's okay. We're here to teach you the skills. And you can keep talking until you can get to your point."

Wyndham's new "Women Own the Room" program is a more recent program that aims to increase the number of women hotel owners. However, it's already helped several women, including several Indo American women.

Where women own the room

Wyndham launched WOTR in January in an effort to overcome the common barriers women face in developing, opening and running their own hotel. The program provides assistance with financial solutions, personalized operational support and networking and educational opportunities.

Previous participants include Trusha Patel, founder and CEO of Platinum

Holdings in Austin, Texas, and Neha Jadhav of Chantilly, Virginia. Now, Purvi Patel in San Antonio, Texas, has joined the program to help fund her conversion of the first Econolodge Inn and Suites in Texas from an AmericInn she's purchased.

"I took the risk and everything and the brand president came in then. He came to visit me some this year in February just to see how my project was going and how I was doing," Purvi said. "When he came, he asked 'Who is helping you?' and I said, 'What do you mean?' And he said 'I don't see anybody with you.' I usually buy the distressed hotels, and then I turn it into a different brand. I do everything by myself. And he's like, did you know about the Woman Own the Room program with Wyndham?"

However, Purvi said the challenges of being a woman hotel owner is beginning to overwhelm her.

"I can't do this anymore. I just can't explain any more. I don't know what words I need to use or where I should," she said. "It's just hard to explain to some, like the bank and investors and the owners. I'm just so done with all the work."

At least, with WOTR, she has the support she's long needed.

"I'm not by myself sitting with the bank in the meetings," Purvi said. "I was pretty much alone before, trying to convince them and they're just looking at me hey, I know you're



Heather Carnes, left, previously AAHOA's vice president of marketing and communications, has been promoted to executive vice president for communications and chief strategy officer, and Phelps Hope has been hired as executive vice president for operations and chief development officer. Laura Lee Blake, president and CEO of AAHOA, said the promotion and new hire are part of her efforts to restructure the association's leadership.



trying to convince us but we really need somebody from Wyndham telling us about this brand and that was not available before but now it is available through this program."

Better together

For Purvi, what she needs the most is just the opportunity to meet other likeminded women in the hotel business.

"I feel as a woman, I feel so alone. I have a lot of friends, I have a lot of lawyers around us," Purvi said. "But, in the business world, I'm so alone. I'm


sitting at my desk, reading articles on LinkedIn and in magazines because I'm trying to always continue to keep up with the trends and the knowledge and everything that's going around. But I don't have anybody to discuss that with."

Blake said the resurgence of programs that can provide that support is critical for women and the industry as a whole.

"It is important to note that women have made significant contributions to advancing innovation, advocacy, and entrepreneurship in many fields, including hospitality," she said.

"According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the lodging accommodation workforce (primarily hotels) was 53 percent female in 2020. With women making up more than half of the hospitality workforce, AAHOA recognizes that women serve as role models in the industry and are the groundbreakers when it comes to bringing about change for things like pay equity, diversity, and inclusion."

AAHOA has an important role in continuing this pro-woman trend.

"There is a popular saying at AAHOA that women are the backbone of the association. The efforts of the franchisors Wyndham, Red Roof, and others, such as DEI Advisors, to create these new programs showcase that, indeed, women and other minorities are top of mind for the industry," Blake said. "While this is long overdue, we are grateful to see the significant progress that our industry is taking to elevate programs specifically for women hoteliers." 



Attendees at Red Roof's Forum on Leadership for Women Entrepreneurs participated in community service and action sessions, including this session from women-owned business Gardenuity.