

Hunter Conference: Companies target paths to growth

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Leaders from HVMG, McNeill Hotel Company and Meyer Jabara Hotels spoke with HNN during the Hunter Hotel Investment Conference about their growth strategies at this point in the lodging cycle.

By [the HNN editorial staff](#)

ATLANTA—Hotel ownership and management companies are looking for growth in many forms at this point in the cycle, be it through joint ventures, expanding their services or exploring new deals. Executives from three companies shared the latest news and developments at their companies with HNN editors during the [Hunter Hotel Investment Conference](#).

### **Hospitality Ventures Management Group**

It's been a big year for renovations for the Atlanta-based hotel investment, ownership and management company Hospitality Ventures Management Group. The company has eight new and ongoing renovation projects, three of which were recently completed, totaling around \$110 million.

This effort is being led by John Edwards, VP of design and construction, who joined [HVMG](#) in 2016.

"The company grew fast and evolved rapidly," Edwards said. "This is a company focused on growth—it acquires, renovates and holds properties. It can be tough to support existing operations and implement more work. When I joined, we had a limited number of staff with a lot of workload, and I looked at putting an overall structure in and leveraging everybody's skill sets."

The eight renovation projects include three full-service Marriott projects, four full-service Hilton projects and an independent hotel.

Edwards and his staff work with other internal HVMG teams that manage property improvement plans and F&B to ensure renovations, PIPs and reflags are not only beneficial to the guest, but also to the company, said Mary Beth Cutshall, SVP and chief business development officer for the company.

"We're one of a few companies that has this truly integrated organization," she said. "Very few management companies that offer third-party have this integration that winds up saving a lot of money in the long run."

Edwards cited the company's work on the new-build 132-room SpringHill Suites Orange Beach at The Wharf in Orange Beach, Alabama. The owner, a petrochemical construction company, decided to build the hotel and brought HVMG in as operator.

"Once they saw our skillset, they got our development services to design and deliver the hotel," Edwards said. "This is how we're developing our company to be efficient for the owner and broaden that base. We look at design and construction as an extension of operations."

Edwards said it's been interesting to look comprehensively at the full-service projects the company is undertaking to be smart and efficient while creating great experiences for the guest.

"We look at the space available and what guests want," he said. "Is it a better fitness center instead of a pool? We want to do something engaging and exciting for the customer," while still balancing the overall goals of the owner.

From a trends perspective, Edwards said flexibility in design and construction rules the day.

"Anything that facilitates the interaction of people, how they conduct business and how they're comfortable, in whatever shape that takes, will be successful," he said. "People are interested in emotional comfort. Design has to facilitate communications, make the lifestyle easier and be flexible in meeting the guest's needs."

### **McNeill Hotel Company**

Germantown, Tennessee-based owner-operator McNeill Hotel Company is seeking to raise \$50 million in joint venture capital as part of plans to grow its portfolio through acquisitions and development. The nearly-two-year-old company—led by CEO Phillip McNeill Jr. and President and COO Mark Ricketts, both veterans of the hospitality industry—is focusing on select-service Marriott International and Hilton projects in secondary and tertiary markets.

"We were mainly utilizing a private network for investors," McNeill said. "We're now looking to expand beyond that group. It felt like if we could access some of the more institutional investors, it would allow us to pursue the opportunities we're looking for."

The two started [McNeill Hotel Company](#) after a combined 60 years in the industry. McNeill said they felt it was time to go out on their own, taking what they had learned and applying it to a business of their making. In their past work, they had been exposed to different management companies, Ricketts said, seeing the good and bad.

"Whether it's the structure of our organization, how we manage, how we approach development—we just wanted to use that experience," he said.

The company is close to completing the construction of its Hampton Inn & Suites Memphis/Germantown, McNeill said, which is part of a mixed-use development that includes luxury apartments and retail.

"We felt like it was a good fit for the total development," he said. "Germantown is a difficult market to get into. There's a high barrier to entry. The entitlement process takes three years. There was just a need for that type of hotel in that market."

The hotel is an all-brick building, Ricketts said, which demonstrates the market's high barrier. It's an affluent area surrounded by medical facilities, he said, and it's close to FedEx and International Paper.

The company is looking to get three hotels under contract, recently broke ground on a Homewood Suites by Hilton in Athens, Georgia, and has another two to three projects in early planning, the executives said.

## **Meyer Jabara Hotels**

The Danbury, Connecticut-based Meyer Jabara Hotels is undergoing “a very nice growth spurt,” according to Justin Jabara, VP of development and acquisitions.

“We’re in an exciting, transformative period as we look at what the coming years have in store for [Meyer Jabara](#),” he said. “We’re a family company—and that’s going to continue, and we’re positioning the company for the next five, ten, 20 years.”

Founded in 1977 by William Meyer and Richard Jabara, the company now has 24 hotels in its portfolio, largely located along the eastern half of the United States, from Boston to Florida. The portfolio includes four independent hotels, several soft-branded properties and the rest branded with Marriott International, Hilton, Choice Hotels, Hyatt, IHG and La Quinta flags.

On the management side, Meyer Jabara “sits in a nice niche,” Jabara said, and focuses a lot on efficiency. “Costs are going up, so we always push our operating teams to be more efficient,” he said. “We spend a lot of time on purchasing, and on thinking how we can get better at what we’re doing because what we did yesterday may not get us where we are today.”

Ownership and hotel development is top priority, he said. The company has an ownership stake in 80% of its properties, with several joint ventures and new projects in the pipeline.

“We are buying right now, but we’re buying hotels that have a story,” he said. “We can very efficiently, effectively renovate a hotel, put a new flag on it, put our operations in there and increase performance with correct revenue management. That’s the space we look at in purchases.”

Jabara said the company has a long-term outlook, whether that’s with its own corporate succession planning or the hotels it owns.

“We look at the future,” he said. “We will be going to the west coast. In 10 years, Meyer Jabara will span coast to coast. We’re building, we’re hiring, all because we’re growing and staying in front of it.”

*Compiled by Stephanie Ricca and Bryan Wroten.*