

AHA bringing together Atlanta hospitality leaders

By **Tonya Layman**
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

In an effort to bring networking to their home turf, a couple of Atlanta hospitality pros formed an association that pulls Atlanta hospitality leaders together for networking, education and promotion of the industry.

Dan Weede, partner with **Carlton Fields**, and Monty Levy, senior vice president at **HREC Investment Advisors**, recognized they spent too much time while at national conferences shaking hands and having coffee with their Atlanta peers instead of meeting folks who could help them form national relationships. It seemed ironic they had to fly across the country to connect with someone who did business just down the road from them in Atlanta.

"We all go to the same conferences each year and it became somewhat of an embarrassment that we would have to fly to L.A. or San Francisco or New York to sit down and have coffee together," Levy said.

"We talked about putting something together for years but it never happened until three years ago we really started to recognize the desire to have something local," Weede said. "It frees up our time at the national conferences and it helps create an Atlanta identity at these conferences. With 200-plus people in Atlanta that go to these conferences, we can create a sense of professional community while helping business leaders network and creating a sense of belonging in this vibrant community of hospitality investment."

This thought process led to the creation of **Atlanta Hospitality Alliance**. The organization was formed in 2009 with a focus on professional development, networking and charitable endeavors. It serves the leaders of the Atlanta hospitality community involved in the transactional side of the business, such as hotel owners, managers, investors and developers.

In the fall of 2009, Weede and Levy pulled together a database of potential members and sent out a questionnaire to determine if there was interest in the group. When they found there was, they moved quickly and planned the group's first event in December 2009. They attracted 60 people and knew then the organization "had legs," Weede said.

Today, Weede serves as the organization's president and Levy is the



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Hospitality huddle: AHA board members Monty Levy, Mary Beth Cutshall and Daniel Weede.

president-elect. Just two years after its creation, AHA has nearly 200 members, a board of directors composed of some of the most prominent hospitality executives in Atlanta and participation by most of the senior members of Atlanta's hospitality community.

"There are some real recognizable names and recognizable leaders in the hospitality community who wanted to get involved," Levy said. "We are fortunate to have so many great hotel developers here in Atlanta and that is clearly reflected in the growth of this group. People really jumped in head first to help us grow and institutionalize this group."

Mary Beth Cutshall, vice president of acquisitions and business development of **Hospitality Ventures Management Group**, is one such board member. She serves as AHA's corporate secretary and vice president of public relations.

"This is one of the few organizations in the industry for transactional hotel professionals," Cutshall said. "We serve a particular part of the hospitality sector. These people are the movers and shakers in the industry."

The alliance holds quarterly meetings where attendees can network for an hour with about 100 colleagues and then sit in on an educational event for the second hour — sometimes these events highlight keynote speakers; other times they feature a panel of experts who discuss industry trends and take questions from the audience. "We try to give the attendees information that they will find useful in their day-to-day lives," Levy said.

Members must have five years of experience in the industry and be at a senior level within their organization and sponsored by a current board member during the application process. They also must pay annual dues, currently \$100.

"This organization allows us to be resources to each other and it deepens the relationships we have. It really has served a fantastic purpose as it serves all of our businesses in Atlanta and the overall Atlanta business community," Cutshall said. "I am excited to see how we will grow and contribute to the industry and how it will strengthen the hospitality business as a whole."

The group's next event will be Dec. 1 at **Georgia State University's Student Center**. The event will feature an update on economic projections for the hospitality industry from Mark Woodworth at PKF Hospitality Research followed by a program given by a faculty member of GSU's hospitality school. Also at the event, AHA will announce it is endowing a scholarship at the school for a student in the hospitality program, Weede said.

AHA board members

- **Paul Breslin**, Panther Hospitality
- **Mary Beth Cutshall**, Hospitality Ventures Management Group
- **Jatin Desai**, Peachtree Hotel Group
- **Monty Levy**, HREC Investment Advisors
- **Michael G. Murphy**, Smallwood, Reynolds, Stewart, Stewart & Associates Inc.
- **W. Michael Murphy**, First Fidelity Mortgage Co.
- **Reide Onley**, Pellicano Construction
- **Carlos Torres**, Hardin Construction Co.
- **Dan Weede**, Carlton Fields
- **Tim Dick**, TriMont Real Estate Advisors
- **Mark Woodworth**, PKF Hospitality Research
- **Jim Anhut**, InterContinental Hotels Group Plc
- **Tom Woodward**, Hodges Ward Elliott
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