

Hotel Business®

Saunders Hotel Group looks to expand Boston footprint

BY [ADAM PERKOWSKY](#) ON APRIL 21, 2020 [PRINT STORIES](#)

BOSTON—Saunders Hotel Group (SHG), based here, has been a mainstay in hospitality in and around this city for 80-plus years. In late January, the fourth-generation, family-run company changed forever when its CEO Jeffrey Saunders passed away at the age of 62.

“Jeff and I worked together for more than 40 years, much of it as sole owners and partners of SHG,” said his brother Gary, chairman of the company. “We never had an argument in all those years. Our relationship was one of absolute trust, respect and mutual confidence. He was a great guy, an outstanding hotelier and a supporter of all of the communities we serve. His passion was people and his ability to put aces in their places was second to none. He was also a talented and accomplished poker player. And the best brother.”

Jeffrey Saunders left a company that operates three hotels in the greater Boston area: The Lenox Hotel and Beacon Hill Hotel & Bistro in the city, and Comfort Inn & Suites Logan International Airport in Revere, MA.

The company started in 1938 with the Saunders brothers’ grandfather Irving, who owned Boston’s Broadway Hotel. Their father joined later, but stepped away from the firm in 1990 when he passed the responsibilities of president of the Boston Park Plaza Hotel to Gary Saunders. At that point, the day-to-day control of the company was passed to the third generation.

“Over the generations, SHG has adapted to a really broad spectrum of hotel properties and has been widely recognized by its guests, franchisors, and investors for operational expertise and excellence,” said Saunders. “Over the last 60 years, we have operated independent hotels that exceeded RevPAR for our branded comp sets, and have exceeded brand RevPAR norms for the branded properties we’ve managed. SHG is one of the few fully integrated hospitality firms in the United States that has its own pool of discretionary capital, and is a significant investor in the properties we manage.”

Like many other companies, SHG was doing well at the start of 2020, and then the coronavirus pandemic hit the U.S., affecting everyone in the hospitality industry. The company stepped up to make sure its employees are taken care of during the crisis.

“We had our best year ever in 2019, and were on track to exceed those results in 2020 with a very strong first quarter until the virus outbreak,” said Saunders. “We have financially supported all of our team members, just as they have supported our operations and truly are the core of our success. Without them, we would simply be just another hotel, a place to sleep. We are much more than that; we are a group of people who will stop at nothing to ensure that we incite in each guest the desire to return again and again. The Lenox is one of the few hotels in Boston that remains open and operational. Our Comfort Inn and Suites at Logan Airport continues to run decent occupancy even during this crisis, largely in part to the team there, and continues to be the hotel of choice for flight crews and other airport travelers.”

The executive said that his company offers a wide range of management expertise to its clients, including site selection and initial feasibility; working through architectural, design, engineering and permitting matters; pre-opening planning; and full operation “and everything in between.”

He added, “If it involves hospitality, real estate or operations in the Boston market, it’s in our sweet spot. We know its demand generators and have a deep, four-generation history here. It’s where we bring the most value to our operations.”

The flagship property of the SHG portfolio is The Lenox Hotel, which has been in the “family” since Saunders’ grandfather. “Located on the corner of Exeter and Boylston in the heart of Back Bay for 120 years, The Lenox continually outperforms the comp set and has been a top-five-rated hotel in Boston for 13 years running,” said Saunders. “We are particularly proud of the fact that it is both family owned and unflagged, and performs so well. Another property that is doing well for us is our 208-room Comfort Inn and Suites at the Logan Airport. It is one of the top three of all Choice hotels.”

As for projects in the works, the Raffles Boston Back Bay Hotel & Residences, under construction and slated to open in mid-2022, will be the first North American outpost for Raffles Hotels & Resorts. “It will be, in our opinion, the first truly world-class, five-star product in the Boston market. There is already a significant waitlist for the residences,” noted Saunders.

SHG is also a major investor and operating partner in a new Cambria property in Somerville, MA, which is also under construction and scheduled to open in 2022.