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**Originality**

In November 2014, Heart of America Group (HOA) closed its Comfort Suites hotel in Urbandale, Iowa in order to debut Hotel Renovo, a boutique property that is anticipated to be the foundation for a lifestyle brand, with two more already in the pipeline. Creating a brand from scratch doesn’t daunt HOA, which owns and manages more than a dozen hotels – the majority IHG, Choice Hotels International and Marriott International product. The group already has developed the proprietary Wildwood Lodge, with properties in Iowa and Wisconsin.

The Urbandale Comfort Suites was chosen as the Renovo starter site because the franchise agreement was up and the location was considered “iconic.” The 14-acre site is an entrance to Living History Farms, and is also the location for the Machine Shed Restaurant, also owned by HOA. This restaurant celebrates the modern farmer with its menu and décor. Leveraging this agricultural influence, the in-house design team created a modern farmhouse architecture with clean, crisp architectural lines while using natural simplistic materials.

The 102-room Hotel Renovo endeavor went way beyond cosmetics and décor. In addition to creating the signature port cochere, each guestroom was revamped down to studs, with bathrooms reconfigured and brought up to code. LED lighting was installed, an advanced technology infrastructure was created and fire alarm/life-safety systems were replaced. A new elevator, a glass staircase and a two-story stone fireplace grace the lobby.

Looking to create greater sustainability, landscaping now includes low-maintenance native grasses and plants, and a solar farm is in the offing with an array of photovoltaic solar panels slated to be placed near the front of the hotel to supply electricity to the property. The drive toward being greener plays well against the name Renovo, which in Latin is defined as “to revive, renew, restore, and repair.”

HOA also added generous public spaces inside and outside. Guests can relax on the patio, play a game of bocce ball or sit by a fire pit. An apple orchard can set the stage for an outdoor dining event. Under vaulted ceilings in the lobby, a proprietary restaurant accommodates morning and evening service. A special Iowa Plate features products such as Maytag blue cheese and Milton Creamery Prairie Breeze cheddar. The bar offers local and regional beers and spirits. The space also hosts culinary events to bring in local traffic.

**Impact**

Heart of America believes that hotels in the 21st century, particularly upper-middle and above, need to have an experiential factor. It should have a local factor, and the design and the décor should be unique, not cookie–cutter prototype. With the Wildwood Lodge, more of a mid- to upper-mid independent hotel, Heart of America has learned how to market a hotel that doesn’t have a national chain reservations system. With that knowledge HOA has freedom to create new lifestyle brands. The company takes a boutique approach to every property, branded or not.

**Commercial impact**

The Urbandale Chamber of Commerce announced its first, “Best in Class” award recipients on November 6, 2015. Hotel Renovo was voted the winner in the Hotel/Lodging category, and runner up in the Place to Host a Business Meeting category.

**Culture of Innovation**

The company got its start in restaurants, debuting The Machine Shed in June 1979 just outside Davenport, IA. HOA owns and operates more than a dozen restaurants in six states under four brands, including The Machine Shed, The J-Bar, Thunder Bay Restaurant and Johnny’s Italian Steakhouse. HOA also has an office building and 1.4 million sq. ft. of retail space. The company currently owns and operates Elmore Marketplace in Davenport, IA, where a 104-room Holiday Inn & Suites anchors the development. HOA is currently underway with The Shoppes at Prairie Crossing in Altoona, IA. This development will most likely include two hotels, possibly Marriott branded.

Other brands remain in the growth mix for HOA as well. Set to open in Olathe, KS in January 2016 is a 200-room Embassy Suites and Conference Center that will include The J-Bar restaurant and a rooftop bar. HOA has also started construction on a six-story, 108-room AC Hotel by Marriott in the trendy East Village section of Des Moines, IA.

Heart of America plans to expand across the country as time goes on. For future Hotel Renovos, the company is currently looking at two places in Texas that are much more dense, mixed-use, urban developments that will fit the Renovo brand and its guests.