

## 60-SECOND PROFILE

## EARLY ADOPTION

Saunders Hotel Group was going green even before it was the thing.

Although he always knew he'd end up working in the lodging industry Jeffrey Saunders didn't know exactly what part of the industry he'd end up pursuing. Saunders along with his brothers are third-generation hoteliers. Their grandfather,

Boston real estate entrepreneur Irving Saunders, founded Saunders Hotel Group in the 1940s as a small management company. The company began when Irving purchased a small hotel across from the former Metropolitan Theater (now The Wang Center).

"I knew that it was something that I wanted to do from an early age, although at that age I really had no idea which area I'd best fit into," Saunders says.

While studying hospitality at Cornell University, the young Jeffrey pondered his future place in the industry. "I'd worked in internships at The Ritz-Carlton, the Waldorf=Astoria, and a resort in South Carolina, but I never really knew where I wanted to land. I only knew that I wanted to go on the journey," Saunders recalls. "It turned out that I had a love affair with operations."

Today, as president and CEO of the company, which has grown to six hotels, Saunders oversees a company that puts operational efficiency and guest service at the top of its goals. Over the years, Saunders Hotel Group has become known as a company that places a high priority on environmental issues, both for the good of the world and the good of its hotels and their guests.

That reputation stems from the fact that Saunders Hotel Group was a very early adopter of "green" initiatives and has continued to cultivate an eco-conscious mindset ever since.

"It's very much at the core of who we are and very much part of the culture of our company," he says. "At the same time, green programs need to make sense from an economic perspective."

Saunders Hotel Group's roots in the green move-

ment go back more than 20 years. Saunders credits his brother, Ted, for bringing the idea of being green as a means to a better financial bottom-line to the company. Back then, Ted, who runs the company's environmental program and has his own consulting company, wrote a book called "The Bottom-Line of Green is Black". "Even though that book was written 20 years ago, nothing could be more true today," Saunders says.

The company's environmental program began at its Park Plaza Hotel in the 1980s. Saunders says the Park Plaza wasn't built for efficiency, as most hotels of the era weren't. He also

**{CLOSE UP}** **POSITION:** President & CEO, **RESIDENCE:** Boston, Mass., **FAMILY:** Wife, two children, ...  
**EDUCATION:** Cornell School of Hotel Administration, **ACTIVITIES:** Golf, piano playing, building a summer house,  
**LAST BOOK READ:** *A Company Man* by Joseph Finder, **LAST MOVIE SEEN:** *Avatar*,  
**HOTEL MUST-HAVES:** Cordless phone, down pillow, cleanliness, and a good service mentality

says the company's decision to embrace greening was born from Ted's passion for the environment. "He was an early adopter in the United States and an extremely early adopter in the hotel industry," Saunders says. "That's why our company became so well known for our green programs, because no one else was even talking about it, let alone doing it. We actually questioned—at the time—whether it was the right approach, but he created very strong logic for getting into the program."

Saunders says the key to green programs is to make sure they are economically viable, otherwise there won't be any corporate buy-in. In his company's case, the buy-in happened because the case for efficiency was made.

Over the years, the company's program has evolved to a point that Saunders describes it as "endless." The company now holds green team meeting every month at each of its hotels. "They're held just like you'd hold a safety meeting or marketing meeting," he says. "We take the program seriously because it's become synonymous with our name and therefore has become part of our sales and marketing effort."

These days, Saunders and his brothers have taken the company to another level, creating three hotel funds to buy seven hotel projects. The properties, which consist of two new-builds, are located from New Hampshire to Virginia. Saunders says over the past 10 years the portfolio has changed dramatically. "Our company is all about putting aces in their places and building great teams with passionate service," he says.

And at all, the company will keep developing its green program. ■

