

TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

While Vantage Hospitality grows, Bernie Moyle handles the operations.

Bernie Moyle didn't intend to start a hotel brand when he graduated law school at Nova Southern University in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. "I was dragged into it kicking and screaming by Roger," he jokes about his longtime partner Roger Bloss.

But since 1999, Moyle and Bloss, with the help of several other associates, not only started Vantage Hospitality, but also created one of the more innovative and fastest-growing franchise brands in the industry.

A lawyer by trade, Moyle began his career working in construction litigation and business law. He was managing partner of a small firm in Fort Lauderdale.

His transition to the hotel industry came about from playing softball. "I met three guys, Roger Bloss, Lewis Fisher, and Barry Greer. We used to play softball together," Moyle recalls. "We used to hang out together."

Moyle had started a small real estate investment company. "It was chugging along just fine. We owned a couple of apartments, some houses, some land," he recalls. "In 1994, Roger called me one day and said, 'What do you think of the hotel business?' I thought it was a pretty cool idea."

However, Moyle's original thoughts turned to more than he was originally in for. "Of course, I had dreams of the big guys, big brands, and Roger sent me a bunch of paperwork to read and it was all on economy lodging," he says. "The more I read on the numbers and about the number of people who stay in economy hotels, and the impact the Internet was beginning to have on the lodging industry, we decided to move forward."

Moyle says it also helped that Bloss had an idea for developing an easy license model, which would become one of the backbones of the company. "It was sort of a handshake on paper," Moyle explains.

From there, Moyle called his investors in his real estate business and convinced them to shift focus and buy a couple of hotels. "Most of them stayed with me, a couple opted out," he says. "We acquired our first series of hotels all with what we called leases with options to buy."

The new company started out with three hotels with Bloss managing the hotel business and Moyle working the financials. "They were all under different brands," Moyle says.

Soon, Moyle says, Bloss presented him with a concept for a hotel brand. "Since I wasn't a hotel guy—I was a construction guy—I had no good ideas and no bad ideas. I took it as it came," Moyle says. "I told [Bloss] to talk and I wrote it all down. It was one-year deal, we had to perform, low prices, member involvement, all the things we would become, he was laying it all out on the table."

From there, Moyle put together a two-page contract, which he says was pretty consistent with what Vantage Hospitality still uses today.

At the time, Moyle was still practicing law. As the company grew to about 12 hotels, Bloss met with a troubled organiza-

CLOSE UP

POSITION: Partner, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Vantage Hospitality **RESIDENCE:** Coral Springs, Fla. **FAMILY:** Wife (Cheri); Four children (Ryan, Brendan, Chelsie, and Cameron) **ACTIVITIES:** Community service; fun things with my wife; golf; tennis **LAST BOOK READ:** 1421: *The Year China Discovered America*, by Gavin Menzies **LAST MOVIE SEEN:** *Salt* **HOTEL MUST HAVES:** The right product and the right service within the value proposition being offered.

tion in South Dakota. "He calls me one day and says, 'we need to buy this organization,'" Moyle recalls. The organization was called Independent Hotels of America and it had approximately 130 members. The idea was to buy the organization and convert the properties to what was then Best Value Inn. "That took us from 12 hotels to 140 hotels," Moyle continues.

In 2001, Moyle met with the partners. "They said we were getting big enough to need someone to run this company full time. They asked me if I'd be willing to leave the practice of law to do it," Moyle says. "One of the things I've noticed with my clients' companies is that they had a really good industry guy and really good business guy. I figured Roger's got the industry covered, and I think I can handle the financials."

After long talks with his wife, Moyle made the jump to run operations and finance for Vantage Hospitality. Today, Bloss and Moyle oversee a company nearing its 1,000th hotel. Vantage Hospitality, which consists of America's Best Value Inn, Canada's Best Value Inn, and The Lexington Collection, not only grew to be self-sustaining, it has become one of the largest hotel companies in the world.

And for Moyle, the risky jump from law to the hotel business has been well worth the chance. ■

