



Eye(s) on the future

Commercial construction leaders set course for new decade, new challenges

New projects. New directions. A new set of trends to navigate. Some of the commercial construction industry's leading executives discussed these topics, and more, during the 2019 Commercial Construction & Renovation Retreat, held Sept. 26-29 at The Hu Hotel in the heart of downtown Memphis.

The three-day event, sponsored by *Commercial Construction & Renovation* magazine, included a series of networking events and roundtable discussions designed to bring together thought leaders from the

2019
COMMERCIAL
CONSTRUCTION
& RENOVATION
RETREAT

retail, restaurant, hospitality and other commercial sectors.

Along with discussing industry trends and challenges over the past year, attendees shared some of the more pressing items on their to-do lists and gave some keen insights into what the future holds moving forward.

On the following pages is coverage of the first half of our roundtable discussion.

The second part will be featured in our January/February issue. You can also read the story online at www.ccr-mag.com.



Vinny Catullo
Director of Marketing
& Sales



Darrel Chaney
Business Development



Kevin Fleming
VP of Business
Development



Megan Haggerty
Founder



Stephen Hekman
VP Retail Services



Tim Hill
Executive VP,
Business Development



Brandon Ingram
Real Estate Associate



Dedrick Kirkem
Facilities Manager



Eric Korth
Retail Facilities
Manager



Abram Lueders
Planning &
Development Analyst



Skip Mason
Director of Sales,
National Accounts



Nate McNeil
Director of
Retail Operations



Michael Morelli
Director of Business
Development



Randy Pannell
Managing Executive



Elizabeth Parker
Facility Designer



Christine Smith
Construction Coordinator



Russell Williams
Manager of Design
& Production



Nicole Young
Business Development



CCR: Give us a snapshot of what you have working right now.

Randy Pannell, Converge Consultants: I retired from Saks Fifth Avenue recently after 21 years, when I was approached by a company based in the UK that wanted to roll out some stores in the US. Right now, I'm heading up their expansion program in the US. Two new studios are now open in New York and one in Hollywood, with more under way. I'm also working with a Paris based luxury retailer called Balenciaga on a big project in Miami Beach and another in Houston. So much for retirement.

Michael Morelli, Signage Solutions: We're working on a variety of cool projects. One is a new concept called KidZania. They open in Dallas in December. Next up will be Chicago, Santa Anna, and then New York. It is a huge indoor facility for kids that stimulate their minds by exploring several professions.

We're also working on a couple JW Marriotts' and there has been an influx of click to brick start-ups that have really taken off. Our solid base of retailers is expanding their footprint and has shown stable growth. Our R&D team has been perfecting the faux neon process and has implemented this in several programs.

Christine Smith, Cedar Realty: We're continually looking for general contractors to work with and whom suit our needs. A big focus for us this year was to implement a web-based project management system. We've been very successful with it. We're still working through some of the challenges, and adapting the system to our construction processes. To do this, we continue to rewrite our processes to utilize the tool. It has helped streamline our construction management process.

Eric Korth, Cole Haan: We have a new store we are working on in Clinton, Connecticut right now. There are other stores in the pipeline. One of our pain points is that the fixturing is coming from overseas. We want to see who is out there—is there a U.S.-based company that can provide wood, metal, glass all in one shot. It would be good to see how the price point from one of those companies compares to what we are paying now for products overseas. We want to see where the value is.

Tim Hill, The Beam Team: We are working on our aggressive five-year plan. In structuring this, one of the things that I found interesting is how we can reach our goals only if we truly partner with retailers, restaurants and hospitality firms that have similar growth plans.

Many of our client partners have five year plans where they will need solid, trained superintendents to lead their projects. Those superintendents need to be experienced with their stores and restaurants, not general construction. I would like to see if anyone has been successful in laying out a strategic plan with GCs like ourselves

when their procurement department or upper management demands competitive bids on every single project?

It seems the goal from our customers would mirror ours, we grow our trained superintendent pool for your expected number of projects, new stores, and remodels. That way retailers can trust that they have the superintendents and PMs to complete the large amount of work necessary to meet their goals.

Cole Haan's Korth: As a retailer trying to bid out the project, we're looking for the best product for the best price. A lot of people will throw out there, "Well, if you give me 10 stores, I can give you a good price." And that's a very good price, but upper executives are not going to sign off on 10 stores. They still want to see all of the competitive bids.



So I bid out to somebody in California. And you have got a couple GCs there who don't have to keep flying the superintendent home. You save money right there. It is as good as a price as you can get with a 10-store build out. You ask to take 5% off of my number and you're still going to get a less expensive product from a GC that's local in that area.

The negative is that you're using a different superintendent and a different GC every time. As a project manager, I want to retrain them. Sometimes it is easier that I use the same GC because he just built this store for me. He knows what we are looking for. But when I go with my five bids you have to pay to train the new person. It is my headache. My bottom line, my job, is to protect the bottom line and the financial interests of my company. It is to get the best product, and that means I have to work a little extra to get that.

Stephen Hekman, Kingsmen Projects: There was a retailer I was working with about three or four years ago, which I won't mention. He had some legacy contractors in his group that were building for him for a long time. They had to do a hire out and, just like we said, there were problems.

They ended up making a deal with the legacy contractors to bring in new contractors, who were going to take the work away from some of these legacy guys. In essence, they knew they were in for a longer term, and as they expanded regionally, they brought in some of these GCs and trained the superintendents for them.

It was like a deal they worked out. I just saw the retailer do this. He received another 260 stores. They were trying to get through a real big growth spurt and not have to hire additional staff to manage those new GCs. Just another avenue if you try to sell it that way.

Randy Pannell, Converge: The challenge with repeat contractors is that the key project personnel are the PM and superintendent. So even if you have the same contractor getting every job, he cannot always guarantee you the same PM and the same superintendent.

Unless you have a team of superintendents—like we are saying—to build the team of superintendents that you can hold for a certain retailer—that’s hard to do. That retailer has to have a program that matches that. That’s your dilemma.

Cole Haan’s Korth: An old boss once told me that you should be 100% comfortable awarding the job to any GC you allowed to bid the project. If you are not comfortable with any of your bidding GCs winning the bid, they should be eliminated from your GC pool.

Nate McNeil, Asa Carlton: I think it depends on the program. It has the match as well. Does that brand have an in-house team—a construction team—managing it. If they have that team, then yes, they want to go with the 10 different contractors for the lowest bid.



In my personal experience, it all depends on the Brand. Does the brand have their own in-house construction team managing projects or are they looking for a long-term relationship to learn the brand. If they have that team, then yes, they will invest the time working to find the lowest bidder for the current projects.

Megan Haggerty, Legacy Capital Investment: I have about five contractors that I generally use. Whenever I work on a project, I will go to those same contractors and ask them what they think. So it is more when I’m running a smaller operation. It is more trust-based, whoever is right for that job. But always looking for more contractors too because, I mean, I think we all know there’s a lot of GCs out there that run away with people’s money. [Laughter]

Nicole Young, FacilityRx Services: My big question, especially for retailers, is what is the conspiracy in not giving a certain number? You

pick five GCs to do your job. They are bidding on the same job. What’s the secrecy in not giving a number or a plateau where to start?

If we are all being competitive in the same market and trying to give the best price—and I know you need to cut costs and save—it’s like a big secret trying to get a number. We’re trying to give you the best numbers that we have to give you the best service.

Cole Haan’s Korth: If I was to tell you my budget was \$50,000, some GCs will spend right up to \$50,000. On the reverse, I could just hand the SOW to the GC to bid and he’d come back with a quote of \$45,000 or less. I’m a big fan of “first and last blind bids.” I don’t like doing business with firms that will undercut everyone else after the sealed bids are received. I had one GC tell me that if I gave him the job he’d beat the lowest bid by 3%. I don’t like that approach at all. I find that tactic to be unfair to the other GC’s that gave me their best blind bid.

Dedrick Kirkem, John Varvatos Enterprises: How do we know if the person is giving the correct amount when it comes to a bid?

FacilityRx’ Young: You call a customer on the phone; you’re trying to get their business and don’t have that much experience. I asked a company recently how do I get the experience if you don’t give me the opportunity? How do I build a relationship with you when I don’t know what the other competitor is bidding against me because I’ve never done your work?”

Cole Haan’s Korth: This is just how we do it and I would hope that other people would do it. When we made out the Clinton, Connecticut, contract, I went to the winner and told them they’d won. I went to the others and told them they didn’t. You were 12% higher than the winning bidder, etc. Here are some

elements: You were 14% high on the electric, etc. I put a lot of effort into telling somebody why they didn’t win it.

FacilityRx’ Young: Some people do not do that though.

Cole Haan’s Korth: You can tell them that they had \$30,000 in electric and everyone else is coming in at \$12,000. We want everyone to have a competitive edge for the next job.

FacilityRx’ Young: This goes back to the five partners you trust and you’re giving them ample opportunity to bid for you. You should trust them because you’re building that relationship. You picked maybe the 10 or 15 that were on your roster.

You can’t trust everybody. Not a lot of people I work with, even if I’m 1% over or 1% under, they don’t call you and say thanks for the opportunity. That would be nice. It would give us some hope down

the road. It shows they took time to review my quote and bid, and gave me some respect.

Vinny Catullo, CDO Group: One of the challenges sending a bid to a client opening up the dialogue after the bid is submitted to properly review them. It can appear the bid process is covered in a veil of secrecy at times, which makes it tough to know which subcontractors are high and which are in the right range. This follow-up is critical to creating a true partnership. At CDO Group, we aren't looking for one-off projects because that isn't where we can provide the greatest value to our clients. We know we won't win every bid we submit but it is this back and forth conversation that allows us to continually improve our project costs.

Converge's Pannell: In my years at Saks, we did the same thing. I always made sure my PMs contacted the unsuccessful bidders. Like you said, we want to build partnerships. We didn't get into specific numbers, only where their bid was by numbers—where they placed. If they wanted a personal conversation as to what line items were too high or too low, then we had that discussion with them.



With respect to budgets, budgets are not actual cost. They are generally created in advance in order to capture capital. They are meant to be a little high. You don't want to ask if they can do it for the budget. Budgets are built high.

Next, you should get five or six bidders because somebody surely is going to drop out. At bigger companies, their corporate policies require a minimum number of bids. CFOs have certain things they want you to do, and you will have a minimum of three bids on the table or you're going to have to rebid. It depends on the company. The larger the company, the stiffer the policies are. I've always been a big believer in bidding. I've negotiated work myself over the

years and that is the easiest way to get a project going. But bidding is the best way to get the best value.

Kevin Fleming, Quality Equipment Management: I was waiting for this to go to negotiating versus bidding. We're always looking for an opportunity to build that relationship to where you can begin negotiating. You started to mention that it is an easy way to do it, but bidding is intended to work better.

Some clients are nice enough to help their partners understand where they missed the mark or why they missed the mark.

Converge's Pannell: I was speaking particularly with the bidding the GC. General construction can be 60%, 65% of the project. Whereas your vendors think there's more opportunity to negotiate with vendors and suppliers, who may be able to buy in bulk. A flooring producer can make the product and warehouse it for you. If you're able to manage that from a capital expenditure standpoint on the corporate side, that's a great way to do business.

Like I said, I've done work that was negotiated. It is a lot easier and takes less time, like time-sensitive schedules that get an exemption from the CFO to negotiate. I still believe that bidding is the best way to get the absolute best price. We always used to have four or five of the same people bid, and then insert somebody new just as a barometer for everyone.

Cole Haan's Korth: Some of my smaller projects are based on spending a specific amount of money. For example, we just performed some work in one of our Florida stores. The entire scope of the project was minimal (new carpet and some new paint). However, it was too much for a handyman to manager and it involved several trades. At that point it's easiest to work with a GC I'm comfortable and ask him "how much to do..." If he gives me a number that works with the budget I've been given, I award the project directly without getting competitive bids. If his number is way off from my number we have an open discussion on why they are so far apart. If we can't agree to a number that works for both of us we shake

hands and walk away. No harm no foul.

Kingsmen Projects' Hekman: The other take on that is that there's some subs who work in those markets working for that GC and prefer to use that sub again. You really can't get direct. They don't like you to poach there.

CCR: Back to the to-do lists—what do you have working right now?

John Varvatos' Kirkem: Right now, I have touch up work to do on a few of the stores. We also are looking at two more store additions—Atlanta and Colorado.

Asa Carlton's McNeil: We have a couple of different things in fold right now. My No. 1 objective is to grow our roll out work so that I can support the 200 employees that we have across the country who are consistently working with retailers and various other projects. That is a big focus right now for us next year.

The second objective is that we're growing in our hospitality and medical/restaurant divisions. We're doing a tremendous amount of ground up work and have been fortunate enough to develop a partnership with Chick-fil-A this year. We're trying to build off of that grow off.

We're also building a new office in Braselton (Georgia), which is exciting. We're at capacity continuously. So, just at a point where we need to get to that next spot and then start planning for the future.

We have a couple of different things unfolding right now. A few of our main objectives are to grow our rollout programs in order to support the tremendous labor force that we have built across the country. Another objective is that we hope to continue growing in our hospitality, medical, and restaurant divisions. Asa Carlton Inc. had a strong 2019 and hopes to continue this trend for 2020.

Our last big focus is on our new headquarters in Braselton, Ga. This will be instrumental for us to be able to support the future growth opportunities. We are all extremely excited and thankful for this next step.

Elizabeth Parker, Quest Workspaces:

I'm an interior designer sub for Quest; I do all of their 13 locations. I also have my own company, Interior Designed Spaces of South Florida, where I do residential and commercial projects. For Quest we are working on one project in New York and two in Coral Gables. We're finishing up in Tampa and we're refacing a lot of the other locations. One of the problems that we are finding is what everyone just talked about—finding a GC who actually sticks to their bids and doesn't come back with the \$50,000 change order at the end of the day being \$100,000 over budget.

The Beam Team's Hill: We have a couple of clients who will call the three lowest bidders for a face-to-face call, conference call or webinar and run through the prints and plans to see if we're really qualified to do it. If you truly look at the prints, you understand all the things that it could happen. There's a restaurant we do this for. Their restaurants are usually a couple million dollars. It's a big job. They put it out to five bidders.

We went to the meeting. We were second up. In the first meeting, the GC was in and out in 30 minutes. They asked a couple questions and found they had not read the prints thoroughly. It disqualified them, even though they had the lowest bid.

I didn't know if that was something that a formal procurement department would allow to occur. I liked it because we read the prints. We end up winning a lot when we do that. If you are using four or five people you always use, you tend to use them over and over. You know they're qualified.

Cole Haan's Korth: I truly believe that quality GCs don't want to change orders anywhere near as much as they do. They want it to be firm so that they're playing the long ball game. We track a lot of data along those lines. We build a lot in outlets. So if they have familiarity with that it helps. They know the super, the building inspector. They know the electric inspector.

Megan Haggerty, Legacy: I attended a grocery construction renovation and I ran into a contractor who was amazing. Everybody knew him from Hudson Yards. He was well known. He had done the work before.

Converge's Pannell: I think you hit on something really big here. Yes, you can prequalify contractors. You can check them out. You can see what groups they belong to. But the best way is really to find out what they're doing today and where. That is why you network with your peers. Who do they like? Why? Why not? Use that as a basis.

Legacy's Haggerty: There are some things that I don't like. There are companies that haven't been honoring their word. Just being able to put more spotlight on the ones who do helps everyone. Things get done quicker. You save money. You save time.



Asa Carlton's McNeil: J.C. Penney's was a staple client with us and we really developed a good relationship with them early on. One of our sub-contractors who had been doing work with us from the beginning came up to me at a CCRP event and passed along some very nice compliments. It led to more conversations and opened up potential future opportunities to work with new clients.

CDO Group's Catullo: I was amazed at how small the construction community is and that referent relationships really do travel fast—more so than any prequalification paperwork or NA documents that need to be filled out. The tighter the community,

the better and more critical it becomes.

Cole Haan's Korth: On the retailer's side, it's equally important that we pay our invoices in a timely manner and that we are easy to work with. Reputation in this business is a very real thing for the GC as well as the client. GCs won't want to work with me if I nickel and dime them throughout the entire process and then I'm late to pay. It won't be long before my reputation starts to get tarnished.

John Varvatos' Kirkem: To add onto that, if we don't pay, the relationship that I built is going to go stale. If I wind up going to another company, that's going to follow me. So I agree with what you're saying.

CDO Group's Catullo: I think it trickles down past just the retailer and the GC. It really goes to the subs and having the GCs qualify the subs. Are they paying them or just floating it all?

Signage Solutions' Morelli: A lot of times, we love working with the retailer PMs' at that level. We understand that it's not their fault we're not getting paid—that it could be at an upper management issue. They get buried in paperwork. I had a conversation with a client who I absolutely loved, but we could not work with them because upper management did not pay their bills. If he does that somewhere else, I feel like I am a deadbeat.

We work on relationships with everybody. That's what we all do. It makes everybody's job a lot easier. The last thing I want to do is chase somebody for money or take my PM off something until everything moves through accounts payable. It's just not worth it. There's too much good work out there.

Kingsman Projects' Hekman: For the supply chain people, the first people you deal with the shippers, whether they work for the client or not. A lot of times, we're in that same chain, whether they're picking up or vice versa. The shippers are on tighter terms. And they see things a lot of times ahead of what we may see.



Converge's Pannell: I had discussions with a marijuana dispensary group in South Florida and took a pass on it, mainly because of the lack of relationship with the Feds. It's a cash business, and that's a little scary right now. But sometimes it's a gut feeling, or it's a business decision. How you make the decision is totally up to you. But you have to do the research, the networking. You have to go back and see who is connected to whom in order to figure it out.

But at the end of the day, it's a gut feeling based on experience.

FacilityRx's Young: Cash is cash. I mean. Years before checks and credit cards came into play, my father's business was started on cash and a handshake. That's the way I do my business. Your cash is good for me. I'm the big prism that hires you; you hire me. And together we build a relationship. I partner up with people who always ask me this question first, "What can I do to help you succeed? If a

customer says that to me in the first conversation, even if it's a cold call, I want to do business with them.

If a customer asks me and I cannot beat the price, I am going to tell them straight up. If that means I lose that one, I hope that you respect me. The next time you call me I'm going to give you a fair price. If I can't beat the number, I am not going to put my family in jeopardy or your family in jeopardy to lose.

Skip Mason, FloorMax: FloorMax hired me to bring some infrastructure to the company. We have a great team on the street. Our goal is to grow our reputation. One of the big things that we're trying to do is Amazon-proof our business. That's a big thing for us. We want to find retailers that we can work with, whether it be restaurant, retail or medical, and continue to expand on that. My to-do list this year is really to find more salespeople. We've implemented a sales force this year, so we are building on that.

We have also built a partnership with some Asian manufacturers, trying to tariff-proof ourselves. We are working with them to put quality product to the floor.

I'm also implementing SAR Floors into the mix. We have some real opportunities out there to grow the business. We have a number of customers who are using our products that we're warehousing the US for them, doing some special one-offs and things like that.

Darrel Chaney, Prime Retail Services:

On our to-do list is to continue to build on our growth. We were concerned about being competitive on the electrical work in the bid process. So, a couple of years ago, we purchased an electrical company called Myriad Electric and brought it into our family. Being able to provide our own electricians on a lot of projects has helped us tremendously.

Along with that, we are in the midst of our five-year plan, which includes adding another thousand W2 employees over the next 15 months. Forecasters see a lot of work

coming down the road (2020 and 2021). Our construction division is nearly at capacity for the remainder of 2019. So, we're planning ahead with our clients on 2020 projects now.

Abram Lueders, Downtown Memphis Commission: I'm probably the only person here from the public or the quasi-public sector here. We're not an organization that hires contractors, but we are incentivizing the developers who are.

One of the things that is picking up for us is our anti-blight work. Essentially, one of our top goals as an organization is to take any building that is under-utilized or vacant and put it into use. We use a lot of tools—legal, financial—to get buildings developed.

Walking down the streets of Memphis you may notice some vacant properties that are still there. But when you look at pictures from 10, even five years ago, you can see the difference our efforts have made.

We're also trying to increase the supply of useable, commercial properties, because if you can't increase the number of workers downtown, residents downtown, the less there are buildings that are actually useable. That includes bolstering retail attraction. That's something we haven't really worked on in a while, partially because we didn't know there was really a market for retail downtown. But as the downtown population and tourist base increases, we're getting to the point where we can start drawing more retail downtown.

Right now, we're looking at local retailers—ones that have other locations in the metro area. We are trying to bring them downtown to open second locations. We're also working with emerging entrepreneurs and business owners. We run things like pop up shops, which give retailers a chance to experiment with downtown retail space.



I'm an analyst, so I'm trying to figure this all out. What are the numbers that we need to reach into downtown? What are the metrics we need to reach in order to start being attractive for retailers? Those are things we're interested in. We track things like population change, amount of investment, visitors. I've set up pedestrian counters downtown to qualify what our pedestrian traffic is.

For us, a grocery store downtown is the No. 1 thing everyone wants. There are 24,000 people living downtown right now. And if we're not at the point where we can attract some of these things, how do we get there?

Another data piece I'm interested in has to do with pricing for contracting work. As I said, we don't hire contractors, but as a part of our overall incentives, we review project budgets. It is very important for a lot of these programs to have credible numbers. One of the challenges is that we are not working with a bunch of big-box buildings. Each one is so radically different. For example, one of our large corporations downtown moved into a space in a renovated mall. They turned a mall into an office space. FedEx is moving business offices into a closed Gibson guitar factory.

These are very unusual reuse projects. Bass Pro Shops set up shop in an abandoned entertainment arena. We're dealing with all these really unusual developments and trying to make sure that when people come to us with these projects, their numbers are realistic and credible because we're offering people public incentives.

Kingsmen Projects' Hekman: I have been with Kingsmen for more than 10 years. Back in 2009, 2010 and 2011, we had a little set back on the retail side, so I was taking retailers overseas.

Since then, we have opened an office in North America. We have a lot of clients that are now coming overseas. Retailers like Topshop are coming here. We just had T2, the tea company, that came over from Australia. We did five stores with them last year.

They wanted to deal with somebody they knew, which is Kingsmen. But we're not a contractor. We are overseas. Basically, we help them select the contractor. We help them with bids and facilitated the whole job. It was turnkey.

We do hire. We hired the sign people. We hired the permit advisors. We all that for them. It was all under the umbrella. But we're really not that kind of service. We're an FF&E provider. Right now, I think retail in general is a little bit soft. Things are changing where it's just rollouts and retail. We're looking at different types of things.

Converge's Pannell: I think you hit on something really significant here. We all know retail has been affected by the internet business. I'm not a believer that Amazon killed retail. And I don't think retail is dead, just unconscious. For retail to rebound it is going to have to reinvent itself and become more relevant to current shoppers. Today, people want to be entertained while they shop. The whole entertainment factor is huge. Look at American Dream, for instance. Three million square feet, and more than half of it is entertainment.

Cole Haan's Korth: A couple of things: You asked about what would bring a Cole Haan into the mix. We want to be where people are going to shop our brand. We want to be next to a Coach or a John Varvatos. If you have the price point to buy a John Varvatos suit, you have the price point to buy a pair of Cole Haan shoes.

I know that's a huge conversation when you look for new spaces in retail. Look at what the outlets are next to—a Kate Spade. I went to Pittsburgh recently and there was a place called The Stacks—three to four different hotels and all kinds of everything, including a movie theater, shopping center and restaurants. It was all interactive.

I could only imagine that 20 years ago, The Stacks area was a waste land—a run-down mill that nobody used anymore. Today it is one of those areas where if you bring a convention in, you are going to draw lots of people.

CCR: At what point to make the jump to be the first retailer in a place like that?

Cole Haan's Korth: I think you have to have Saks' buying power—and anchor retailer. And then it is the small guys chasing the big guys. Saks knows that if it goes somewhere other, smaller retailers will go, too. They'll migrate to Saks. I think it's the bigger places that kind bring in the smaller places. We mentioned supermarkets. That's smart. It's a huge thing. **CCR**

Bring on the blues

Legendary Blues City Cafe hosts
CCR Retreat attendees



BB King. Jerry Lee Lewis. Reverend Al Green. Hank Williams Jr. Sam Phillips. Quick: What do all of these music giants (and the scores of others we do not have room to list) have in common with Commercial Construction & Renovation? They have all been to Blues City Cafe, a Memphis institution rooted in legendary Southern cooking and even more legendary music. The little cafe at the end of Beale Street played host to the first night of activities for the Commercial Construction & Renovation Retreat, held Sept. 26-29 at The Hu Hotel in downtown Memphis. Included with a night of the blues was three-days of roundtables and meetings, hosted by *Commercial Construction & Renovation* magazine.

Ridin' with the King

Graceland tops Retreat networking stops

You really cannot call yourself a rock 'n roll enthusiast until you have walked through the Jungle Room. The legendary room, part of the grand tour of the first house of rock 'n roll—Graceland—is steeped in '70s decor (and then some). The Jungle Room is where Elvis and his posse spent endless hours hanging out, making music and changing the world. The Graceland tour was one of the networking highlights of the Commercial Construction & Renovation Retreat, held Sept. 26-29 at The Hu Hotel in downtown Memphis.



Let's Rendezvous

Attendees take a lunchtime break at iconic BBQ joint

In 1948, when Charlie Vergos decided to clean out his basement and found an old coal chute, little did he know where that discovery would lead. The chute would go on to become a smoker for Vergos' menu items, eventually allowing him to serve more than just ham-and-cheese sandwiches. Today, thousands of visitors to Memphis flood the old basement for some of the best ribs this side of heaven. Following their tour of Graceland, attendees of the Commercial Construction & Renovation Retreat kept the Memphis vibe going with some classic style barbecue at the Rendezvous. The lunch stop was part of the Retreat, held Sept. 26-29 at The Hu Hotel in downtown Memphis.



Beale Street Royalty

B.B. King's Blues Club delivers the goods

As iconic as the founder himself, the original B.B. King's Blues Club, located at the top of Beale Street in Memphis, is home to some of the best food, drinks and live music in the world. You want it—B.B.'s has it. The blues. Classic soul. Rock 'n roll. Incredible BBQ and signature drinks. The iconic club was also the perfect spot to celebrate the last night of the Commercial Construction & Renovation Retreat, which set up shop Sept. 26-29 at The Hu Hotel in downtown Memphis.





History beckons

CCR attendees get brush with history at National Civil Rights Museum

Tucked away at the end of Mulberry Street in Memphis, the National Civil Rights Museum is one of the most important places in American history. Housed and built around the Lorraine Hotel, where Martin Luther King, Jr. was fatally shot, the Museum is a structural marvel of multi-sensory and multi-media innovations, historical artifacts and structures, events, speakers and online resources. Attendees were able to catch a glimpse of history during the Commercial Construction & Renovation Retreat, held Sept. 26-29 at The Hu Hotel in downtown Memphis.

Where legends once reigned

Sun Records tour provides glimpse into music and cultural history

There is not really much you can say about Sun Records except for if you are going to be in Memphis, the stop better be on your to-do list. Where else can you mingle in the same halls that some of the greatest performers rock 'n roll has ever known did? You want to grab the same microphone the King he used and take a photo. Sam Phillips' iconic and amazingly preserved studio, which is still active mind you, is the place where Elvis, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins and Jerry Lee Lewis gathered to jam. The tour was part of the Commercial Construction & Renovation Retreat, held Sept. 26-29 at The Hu Hotel in downtown Memphis.