

Azim Saju of ARK Holdings Awarded Franchisee of the Year by International Franchise Association

Owner of various Choice Hotels' properties across Florida was recognized at IFA's Annual Conference

PHOENIX, Feb. 18, 2024 – The International Franchise Association (IFA) today named Azim Saju, CEO of ARK Holdings, as a 2023 Franchisee of the Year. Saju was honored at the 64th IFA Annual Convention in Phoenix, Ariz., for being an outstanding franchise establishment owner-operator.

“Franchisees of the Year exemplify what franchising is all about – providing opportunity, serving others, and fulfilling the American Dream,” said Matthew Haller, President and CEO of the International Franchise Association. “We are proud to recognize Azim Saju with the highest honor IFA awards to individual franchisees, and I have no doubt his work is changing lives and making a lasting community impact.”

Saju is a part of a multigenerational franchise family that began their journey with the Econo Lodge brand in the 1990's. With a well-diversified portfolio of hotels across different companies, Saju has demonstrated his expertise and commitment to the industry. He has been highly engaged with Choice Hotels, owning and managing various properties across Florida, North Dakota, and Kentucky, under the Comfort, Suburban, and Quality brands, and representing franchisees through leadership positions in Choice Hotels Owners Council (CHOC), which is Choice Hotels' largest volunteer franchisee advisory council. Serving on CHOC since 2009, Saju was elected Chairman twice, showcasing his exceptional leadership skills. Additionally, he has mentored aspiring franchisees through Choice's Rising Star program, contributing to the development of future industry leaders. Saju's remarkable journey and dedication to excellence continue to inspire and shape the future of hospitality.

The Franchisee of the Year Award recognizes leading franchise owners from IFA member brands whose outstanding performance and contributions help protect, enhance, and promote the franchise business model. Nominated by their parent company, individuals are selected for their involvement in their communities, embodying the entrepreneurial spirit, fostering a strong and healthy culture with their workforce, and assisting their fellow franchisees when called upon.

There are approximately 806,000 franchised businesses across the U.S., providing over 8.7 million direct jobs and generating over \$858 billion in economic output. According to [Oxford Economics](#), franchising on average provides higher wages and better benefits than non-franchised businesses, as well as greater entrepreneurial opportunities to minorities, women, veterans, and other underrepresented communities.

About the International Franchise Association:

Celebrating over 60 years of excellence, education, and advocacy, the International Franchise Association (IFA) is the world's oldest and largest organization representing franchising worldwide. IFA works through its government relations and public policy, media relations, and educational programs to protect, enhance and promote franchising and the approximately 806,270 franchise establishments that support nearly 8.7 million direct jobs, \$858.5 billion of economic output for the U.S. economy, and almost 3 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). IFA members include franchise companies in over 300 different business format categories, individual franchisees, and companies that support the industry in marketing, law, technology, and business development.

About Choice Hotels®

[Choice Hotels International, Inc.](#) (NYSE: CHH) is one of the largest lodging franchisors in the world, with over 7,500 hotels, representing more than 630,000 rooms, in 46 countries and territories as of December 31, 2023. A diverse portfolio of 22 brands that range from full-service upper upscale properties to midscale, extended stay, and economy enables Choice® to meet travelers' needs in more places and for more occasions while driving more value for franchise owners and shareholders. The award-winning Choice Privileges® rewards program and co-brand credit card options provide members with a fast and easy way to earn reward nights and personalized perks. For more information,

visit www.choicehotels.com.

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