



Right: In the eight years since Hyde Park Hospitality entered the airport space at DFW, the company has expanded its food and beverage operations to four additional airports. Pictured is the New Belgium Brewing Company opening at DEN.



DIVERSIFY TO THRIVE

With Hyde Park Hospitality, President and CEO Marc Brooks Just Keeps Growing

BY SALLY KRAL



Above: Marc Brooks, president and CEO, Hyde Park Hospitality.

Hospitality, coupled with an entrepreneurial spirit, are the driving forces behind Marc Brooks' career, which began with him operating restaurants in his hometown of Chicago. "At one point I was running 23 restaurants," he says. "But brands have life cycles, and my former partner and I happened to come in at the tail end of a good cycle into a difficult cycle."

It was 2009 and they had signed a franchise deal with **Burger King** to run restaurants throughout the Midwest. "They had a younger management team and we saw that they were building some traction, and they welcomed us with open arms to grow in the system and become one of the largest African-American franchisees," he says. "Lo and behold, not long after consummating the deal with them they were sold to private equity. We as franchisees in the field felt the brunt of a reduction in corporate resources, in national and local marketing, and in the headcount side of the corporation. So, we had to live through four years of negative same-store sales, which was tough, and at that point we elected to sell the entity back."

Those difficult four years led Brooks to shift his career goals. "I wasn't going to be caught in that position again—I promised

myself that I wouldn't be pigeonholed to one brand," he explains. "I want the benefit of having some diversification where if one brand is struggling, it's offset by another brand that's positive or having some growth."

Brooks transitioned from freestanding restaurant ownership to starting Hyde Park Hospitality and initially developing accounts in the food service management arena with companies like **Aramark**. It was during those early stages of Hyde Park Hospitality that Brooks was approached by Anthony Joseph, who was president of **Concessions International** at the time. "This was around 2013 and they were looking for local folks to round out their team for a bidding opportunity that was coming up at **Chicago O'Hare International Airport (ORD)**," Brooks says. "Even though I knew of airport concessions, I didn't know all the granular details – Anthony and Concessions International really helped me understand the scope of it."

Jumping In

And so Hyde Park and Concessions International put together their plans to bid on the ORD opportunity but the RFP never ended up coming out. Despite

this disappointment, Brooks persevered. “I still had an interest in and affinity for the industry, so I had to figure out a way to move forward with getting into airport concessions, but not necessarily getting in in my home market because it wasn’t available,” he says. “I plowed forward and I was able to get a deal with **High Flying Foods** at **Dallas Fort Worth International Airport (DFW)** in 2016.” Brooks had already been forming a relationship with the concessionaire, so when a live deal came up and he had both ACDBE certification in Texas and access to capital, the pieces fell into place. “It’s a joint venture and we have 35-percent ownership of the concept, called Artisan Market, and we’re still there today,” he says.

From there, Brooks has grown Hyde Park Hospitality tremendously: The group partnered with High Flying Foods again at **Denver International Airport (DEN)** for a New Belgium Brewing location, with a new concept called Santo slated to open next year; entered a joint venture with **HMSHost** at **Los Angeles International Airport (LAX)** for Rolling Stone Bar & Grill, Panda Express, The Counter Custom Burgers, two locations of Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf, Taste of LA and BLD; and entered a joint venture at

AT A GLANCE

NAME OF COMPANY: Hyde Park Hospitality

HEADQUARTERS: Chicago, IL

FOUNDER(S): Marc Brooks

YEAR FIRST AIRPORT LOCATION OPENED: 2016

NUMBER OF AIRPORT LOCATIONS: 17 food and beverage locations, plus 1 opening in 2025 and 1 opening in 2026. 17 lounge locations, plus 4 slated to open by year-end and at least 4 more to open by 2026.

AIRPORTS: Food and beverage operations in DFW, ORD, EWR, DEN and LAX, with lounge operations in an additional 15 U.S. airports, with more to come in 2025.

FOOD AND BEVERAGE CONCEPTS OPERATED: Artisan Market, New Belgium Brewing, Rolling Stone Bar & Grill, Panda Express, The Counter Custom Burgers, Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf (2), Taste of LA, BLD, Starbucks, Chick-fil-A, Manchu Wok (3), Saladworks, Cafe Zoot, Half Moon Empanadas, Santo (slated to open in 2025), Bronzeville Bar + Bites (slated to open in 2026)

LOUNGE CONCEPTS OPERATED: The Club (13, plus 2 more by year-end) and Chase Sapphire by The Club (4, plus 2 more by year-end),

FUTURE PLANS: Hyde Park Hospitality will continue to take a methodic approach to business development, looking for continuous, yet calculated growth that fits within its overall corporate strategy.

Newark Liberty International Airport (EWR) for Starbucks. In addition, Brooks and his partner and Hyde Park executive vice president Cortez Carter are part of a subtenant deal with HMSHost at ORD where they collectively operate three Manchu Wok locations, plus Saladworks, Cafe Zoot and Half Moon Empanadas. Also at ORD, Hyde Park is the majority partner of an all-ACDBE deal for a Chick-fil-A slated to open this September. And most recently, Hyde Park entered a joint venture with High Flying Foods at ORD for Bronzeville Bar + Bites, which is slated to open in 2026.

In the middle of this rapid expansion, an unexpected opportunity came Brooks’ way in 2018 when **Airport Dimensions** reached out to see if Hyde Park would be interested in coming on as an ACDBE partner to help run airport lounges. Brooks hadn’t previously considered lounge operations, but felt that the hospitality element fell well within his wheelhouse – plus he also has a background in retail, having operated stores in the wireless space before getting into restaurant ownership. “But I told Nancy Knipp, president of Airport Dimensions and who has since become a great friend and colleague, ‘We’re

interested in doing something with you, but we want to be able to build some scale – a one or two lounge deal doesn’t really interest us.’ And Nancy came back and said, ‘Let’s start with these three or four lounges and see how it goes.’ Fast forward to now and we’re operating 17 lounges with them, including both The Club and Chase Sapphire by The Club,” Brooks says. By the end of this year, Hyde Park will be operating more than 20 lounges, and additional openings are planned in 2025 and 2026.

In addition to airport food and beverage and lounge operations, Brooks also accepted an offer in 2019 from the Hilton Hotel on the ORD campus to operate its food and beverage business. “It’s not a traditional concessions deal, but it was a huge opportunity for us, and today we have almost 100 employees there managing \$12 million of business,” Brooks says. “As an entrepreneur, you either build this huge infrastructure and then hope you get the business, or you get the business and backfill the infrastructure. We did the latter because we just didn’t know a lot of these opportunities existed. We’re talking about going from me having one employee back in 2013 to now north of 1,000.”

It certainly seems the sky is the limit for Hyde Park with Brooks at the helm who says a focus on leading with service and quality is at the core of the business. “We’re a hospitality company through and through and we pride ourselves on that.” ■

Left: Since starting out in lounge operations in 2018, Hyde Park Hospitality now operates 17 Airport Dimensions-owned lounges in 15 airports across the country, with more locations to open by the end of this year.

