

Intro

Welcome to season eight of Bridge the Gap, a podcast dedicated to informing, educating, and influencing the future of housing and services for seniors. The BTG network is powered by sponsors, Aline, NIC MAP, Procare HR, Sage, Hamilton CapTel, ServiceMaster, The Bridge Group Construction, and Solinty and produced by Solinity Marketing. Bridge the Gap in three, two.

0:45 - 1:16

Lucas McCurdy

Welcome to Bridge the Gap podcast, the senior living podcast with Josh and Lucas. It's a beautiful day. Summer day here in Nashville, Tennessee, at the NHI Symposium. We're back after a few years of a little bit of break. It's great to be back here. We love Eric Mendelsohn and his team. Cameron Bell helped put this together and also helped us with this amazing guest list that we're going to be rolling out here. And we've got an awesome guest on today. Welcome, Jimmy. Just as CIO at the William James Group. Welcome to the show.

1:16 - 1:18

Jimmy Justice

Thank you. Thank you. Glad to be here.

1:18 - 1:58

Lucas McCurdy

Well, we are so glad to meet with you. And you know, this is not your first rodeo with NHI or even senior housing. You've been around a while, you've seen some things, done some things, but you also have a relatively new company that you guys are getting off the ground and being very successful at.

And we're excited to pick your brain about kind of the perspective that you have of your career and then launching this new company to see, number one, what are the goals that you have for your organization, and then what are the challenges that y'all are facing in 2025, and what are some solutions that you're coming up with? A couple of big questions there.

1:58 - 2:48

Jimmy Justice

Right. I'll start at the beginning. So I've been in senior housing for 26 years now. Started in skilled nursing a long time ago and worked my way through assisted living CCRCs and we were doing some stuff with NHI with my former employer and, Donald Thompson with the senior living communities came to me and my business partner Marcel and was like I can see you guys doing your own thing in a few years.

And, we took that to heart. And that was probably 2018. Okay. And then 2021, we launched our own thing, started with two properties in Kentucky that we purchased, and we've grown to 16 now over about four years. So, it's been a quick, a quick trip to 16. It's been some challenges, but it's been fun. It's been fun.

2:48 - 2:53

Josh Crisp

So you're predominantly secondary and tertiary markets. Are you all based out of Kentucky?

2:53 - 3:13

Jimmy Justice

We are not. We're based out of Myrtle Beach and Charlotte a kind of hybrid office. I live in Myrtle Beach, and we've been there for 15 years. My business partner has been in Charlotte for about the same amount of time. And, so we don't have a home office, you know, Covid, Covid kind of showed folks you don't need that. And so we do a lot of remote team calls.

3:13 - 3:26

Josh Crisp

From 2 to 16 in basically four years. That's a lot of growth for a newly started operator. What's been your strategy? And are you sticking to that? Now, looking ahead?

3:26 - 4:16

Jimmy Justice

We've been very fortunate to be introduced to some folks who are eager to grow with us. You know, it's amazing, this industry, the networking, and how small it really is once you get into it. And we've just been able to find some, some like-minded individuals that want to grow and are happy with what we're doing.

And so our strategy is to continue with the secondary and tertiary markets. You know, being a small player in the industry, a lot of the larger operators don't really want to get into those markets. They're more, you know, looking for the large-scale properties. And we do, you know, anywhere from 40 to 80 beds is typically kind of our footprint there. And so just finding folks that realize that there's a market for that and are excited to join with us on that journey. And yeah, it's been good.

4:16 - 4:26

Josh Crisp

So, a strong background in skilled nursing, I'm assuming now, are you just in assisted living and memory care, or do you still have some skilled nursing portfolio?

4:26 - 4:44

Jimmy Justice

We do not have any skilled nursing at all. If it came along in the right setting as a CCRC or something like that, we would venture into it. But being in skilled for a long time and just knowing the challenges with not just regulatory compliance, but also with reimbursement and those kinds of things, we try to shy away from that if we can.

4:44 - 4:46

Josh Crisp

So, what is your growth strategy over the next few years?

4:46 - 5:11

Jimmy Justice

You know, we started out with this. We're like, yeah, we're gonna try to get 20, 25 communities. And I think Marcell, my business partner last week, was like, yeah, I think I want to get to 50. And so, you know, we take it as it comes. We have a lot of good relationships with brokers that send us stuff quite frequently. And you know, if it fits and it makes sense, then we'll get to 40 or 50 and see, see where it goes from there. Yeah.

5:11 - 5:17

Josh Crisp

So, what are you seeing as the unique challenges with the market the way it is right now?

5:17 - 5:30

Jimmy Justice

It's probably the same thing everybody is seeing as it's just staffing really. Trying to get that frontline team member who's bought into what we're trying to do, and be consistent with our practices and our policies, and just, you know, being there for the residents.

5:30 - 5:45

Josh Crisp

With that, you're obviously having some success in that. So what would you share with our listeners are some key takeaways that you've seen over the last several years working in the recruitment of that worker? And I would assume retention as well?

5:45 - 6:20

Jimmy Justice

It's all about valuing and listening to the employee. This group that's coming through now, they have a voice, and you have to make sure you're listening to that voice. When they come up with their problems, you've got to have solutions. And it, you know, goes from anywhere from having to help with childcare, you know, figuring out how to cover those, those days when, when they just don't have anybody. And we get creative with that. You know, we try not to have bring your kids to work every day, but sometimes you have to allow that. And it's just really the workforce now is just a lot more vocal than it was probably 5 to 10 years ago.

6:20 - 6:39

Josh Crisp

So you brought up childcare. You know, I've heard that a lot. There have been communities that are actually either partnering with childcare centers or even creating childcare centers. So with that being an issue that we're hearing more and more about, looking ahead, what do you think will be some of the answers for that?

6:39 - 7:09

Jimmy Justice

It's going to be a full gamut of responses to that. And I think, you know, at some point, you know, we've talked about do we open up kind of a childcare center on site, some places, some places we can we could do that because of the size and space, but somewhere are just, you know, space restricted.

You know, you're looking at some of these businesses that don't have activity space for residents, and you're talking about trying to do a childcare center for the staff. And it just, you know, where it makes sense. I think you could probably pull that off. To give that extra help to those staff members who need it.

7:09 - 7:21

Josh Crisp

So that's one big change. Are there any other things when you talked about values and listening, what are some other things that you're seeing shifts in labor and workforce, that you're adapting to?

7:21 - 8:01

Jimmy Justice

There's a lot more focus on work-life balance. And, you know, you used to have employees that would work seven days a week, you know, 12 to 16 hours a day because that's what they were doing. But now I think, honestly, after Covid, a lot of folks were home for a long time and got to experience home life with their families.

And I think that's a big part of it. Now you see a lot more vacation days from your frontline team members that you probably didn't see 5 to 10 years ago. And so just working through that and you really have to we're constantly hiring and honestly over hiring a lot of locations just because, you know, you're going to have shifts to cover. So, regardless of what your staffing looks like today, it will change tomorrow.

8:01 - 8:28

Josh Crisp

So, for our listeners that maybe haven't worked or aren't as familiar with the secondary and tertiary markets, obviously, your communities you mentioned are a little bit smaller naturally, because they're in smaller markets. Outside of that, the community itself is it is it ran a lot differently. Is there a lot in different types of amenity packages, or what are you finding that's meaningful to attract residents to these communities and their families? You know, versus maybe a primary market.

8:31 - 9:04

Jimmy Justice

The thing we see is that in the secondary and tertiary, you've got to be a part of the greater community. You know, there's a lot of small towns, a lot of people that know everybody that kind of works there and and just really trying to to go in and be a good neighbor, to the communities and embracing their culture and trying to find folks to lead those communities that that go to church with the people that are going to be having their mom and dad live with us.

And so it's really about just becoming more of a family with those folks, in those markets. Then, you know, the larger Atlanta metro area, where you're not going to have that same kind of feel.

9:04 - 10:25

Mid-Roll

Let's take a quick pause to talk about a game changer in senior care. Procare HR. Procare HR is more than an HR provider. It's a comprehensive partner designed specifically for senior living and

health care operators. They help streamline essential HR functions so that you can focus on delivering quality care and driving operational excellence. From payroll processing and employee benefits management to workers' compensation and talent acquisition. Procare HR has the tools and expertise to handle it all.

What sets them apart is their deep understanding of unique challenges senior care operators face, like labor shortages and understanding compliance with cutting-edge technology and hands-on air support. They help reduce turnover, optimize labor costs, and boost workforce efficiency. Their clients have seen incredible results, lower agency staffing costs, improved retention, and streamlined processes. Procare HR delivers solutions that align with your goals, whether you're scaling operations or enhancing HR performance. If you're ready to transform your workforce strategy and take stress out of HR, visit [Procarehr.com](https://procarehr.com) to learn more. That's procarehr.com. Now back to the conversation.

10:25 - 10:34

Josh Crisp

So beyond, a secondary, tertiary, operations model. And it sounds like the southeast predominantly.

10:35 - 10:37

Jimmy Justice

We call ourselves the SEC of senior housing

10:37 - 10:53

Josh Crisp

Oh, I like that. Well, at least you're in the SEC. I like that. So, what would be other differentiators? Right. We're here with a lot of different operators. Great management companies for you all. What's your secret sauce? What makes you unique and stand out?

10:53 - 11:40

Jimmy Justice

So we've learned a lot through the years from different places we've worked. And we try to bring all of the good from those previous stops. And really, it's just about cultivating relationships, and again, you know, just having that honest, open discussion with the families and being there for them. You know, we host a lot of town hall meetings in our properties to just have a constant connection with those folks.

It's just it's really important for them to see us there. And we're very present, you know, in our buildings, you know, sometimes once a month or more for some of our other buildings that need the attention. Marcel does the same thing. We constantly have someone from our home office team present on the property just so they can see us. We're not at we're not a distant operator where we come in on day one, and you don't see us again for six months. We're there a lot.

11:40 - 12:01

Josh Crisp

Well, and, you know, I've heard, from many capital sources, that that's increasingly important to have the principals involved and really understanding not only what's happened with the management, but

what's really happening at the community level, at the property level. And it seems like that's something that's given you all an advantage. Even with your partners here at NHI.

12:01 - 12:23

Jimmy Justice

Yeah, it has, it has. And I think part of that is from our background, you know, Marcel and I both came up through being an administrator and being an executive director, and then to a regional, and where we are now. And I think sometimes we wish, we wish we could kind of take a step back sometimes and focus on the bigger picture, which is we have to make time for that. But we're so used to being in the weeds and getting on the ground and going through the day-to-day operations, and it's kind of who we are.

12:23 - 12:42

Josh Crisp

So looking ahead for the next few years, obviously, talking about a big shift in population, the boomers coming in, what do you think is in store for operators, maybe in the southeast, too. What do you think are the biggest challenges but also opportunities that lie ahead?

12:42 - 13:22

Jimmy Justice

I think one thing that we're really focused on for the future is becoming more tech savvy and having, you know, a lot of the folks are going to be moving in the next ten, 15 years. They have the iPhone in their hand, they have the computer, and they have the laptop. And so just making sure that we're set up and the infrastructure is in place to be able to accommodate those needs, so that when they want to get online and do their things that they don't have any issues with, with internet connection, that's something we face a lot still, you know, we partner with a good idea group and we're constantly like, okay, we need to expand this and give a better, you know, download time and upload time and just anyhow, just, just, just trying to really focus on the, the tech aspect of the folks that are moving in because they're going to be very tech savvy.

13:22 - 14:06

Lucas McCurdy

Well, that is a good segue into the question I was going to ask about, you know, the physical plan. So you're talking about adding tech to existing buildings. You're also talking about acquisitions. We know from NIC MAP that a lot of the data for the existing communities, these are older buildings circa 1990s, 2000s, many of them need, you know, a little bit of a facelift.

How are you managing, kind of in your acquisition strategy? You know, these value-add opportunities are where. Yes, the value add is on the management side, and the value add is on the technology side. But we also have some physical plant stuff where, you know, we need a little bit more than just painting here. May need to do a little bit of some other things. How have you? what's your strategy around that?

14:06 - 14:30

Jimmy Justice

Honestly, that's kind of where, you know, NHI really helps us out a lot because they've got a lot of connections, and, and you know, when we need something done at one of our buildings, we're reaching out to Cameron. And, hey, do you guys have a guy for this? Yeah. Because it is, you know, we don't have the bandwidth that, you know, the eyes of the world do our other private equity partners. And so we lean on them a lot, honestly, to say, hey, what have you seen in other buildings? What are they doing? And can you connect us with those guys?

14:30 - 14:31

Lucas McCurdy

That makes a lot of sense.

14:31 - 15:12

Josh Crisp

Well, so that's your physical plan, getting the right infrastructure in there. What do you think it's going to change for management companies, for operators and even for, you know, the administrators at the community level where the residents that are going to be moving in, aren't there going to be there's an expectation in there, not only of the infrastructure, but do you think that changes how our service delivery as management companies and what is our IQ? You mentioned a partnership with the IT team, but does that mean our teams? We're going to have to have people that are savvy on the ground, or is this a phone call away service center, or what does it look like?

15:12 - 16:03

Jimmy Justice

We're working on getting all of our folks on the ground in a position to be successful, you know, and it is a challenge, you know, talking about the residents that are coming in more tech savvy. Well, we've got some folks in our leadership positions who aren't tech savvy. And so working through that, getting them trained up. And unfortunately, some of them, you know, they just don't want to do it because it's not who they are.

And so we're seeing that. But we need to have somebody on the ground who isn't closer than a phone call away. Yeah. So that if, you know, Miss Jones is having an issue with it and she needs somebody to come up and help her, we've got somebody there to do that. Sure. And so we're working. You know, that's something we focus on too with our recruiting, you know, what is your ability to handle these kinds of issues? And a lot of it kind of unfortunately falls on the maintenance position because they're just kind of where it goes. And so we're trying to make sure that we hire folks in those roles who are able to do the simple fixes that we need.

16:03 - 16:38

Josh Crisp

Moving along, even beyond just your IT infrastructure in service, you know, now, as you know, operators are getting inundated with tech, software, and solutions to solve challenges. And so a lot of tech, even from other verticals, is now being repackaged. And, I'm sure you probably get 100 calls and emails. So that selection process of picking the right technology, what does that look like in your organization as you're vetting what tools you're going to use?

16:38 - 17:08

Jimmy Justice

So, a lot of it, we really focus on folks that we know. You know, one thing that we've done in a lot of our properties is add the Sage Call System. Just reaching out to folks that we know we trust. Because I get 20 emails a day. Hey, let's try this out. Try this out, try this out, and I'm like, I don't know that system. I don't know that. But reaching out to folks we've had a history with, and just trying to build upon that, and know that they're going to have our best interest in mind as well.

17:08 - 18:11

Josh Crisp

Well, and Lucas, that just, you know, reiterates what we've had conversations about me and time again. This is such a relationship-based business. You're not building widgets. You're taking care of humans, people who rely on you for not only their housing, but their healthcare coordination. And so having the right teams, the right infrastructure, the right tools is so critical.

And so that relationship is built on trust, it's an industry that it's probably a little bit tough to get into as a new technology company. And you have to prove that you're invested in it for the right reasons. And I think that, so hopefully our technology partners are all out there listening, because there are so many great solutions coming to market that we're going to need. And it's a big task for managers and operators. Lucas gets to see this, on the front line, doing these, community, renovations and turnarounds, and repositions, on a regular basis.

18:11 - 18:26

Lucas McCurdy

That's right. There's a lot changing in the marketplace and a lot of challenges, but there are solutions out there, and it's great to hear your perspective, your history, and your knowledge on these topics. To our audience here at Bridge the Gap. Really appreciate you spending time with us.

18:26 - 18:27

Jimmy Justice

It's been a pleasure. Thanks for having me on.

18:27 - 18:42

Lucas McCurdy

So, as we kind of wrap up this, I know NHI has a big curriculum today. There's going to be a lot of sharing of ideas. There's going to be some activities. Are you going to be on the pickleball courts, or are you going to be taking calls because you know your business partner is on it, going on vacation, right?

18:42 - 18:46

Jimmy Justice

It's going to be a combination thing. Like we're actually, I think I'm doing the wine and bourbon.

18:46 - 18:47

Lucas McCurdy

There you go. That's the one I would pick.

18:47 - 18:54

Jimmy Justice

That's a little slower-paced. I can actually be on my phone while I'm doing this. So that's some selective, picking there for.

18:54 - 19:11

Lucas McCurdy

That. There you go. Well, very, very good. We'll, we'll let you get back to your schedule. And so thank you so much for taking time with us today. Appreciate it. Thank you. And to our listeners. You can get a btgvoice.com download this content and so much more. Connect with us on LinkedIn. We'd love to hear your thoughts and views on this conversation. And thanks for listening to another great episode of Bridge the Gap.

Outro

Lucas McCurdy

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