

DID YOU HEAR?

MetLife Debt Team Leader Moves Into C-Suite at MDH Partners

A Daily Look at the Movers and Shakers in Commercial Real Estate



Arun Singh, who served the past several years as an executive at MetLife, joins MDH Partners as chief financial officer on Monday. (MDH Partners)

By [Tony Wilbert](#)
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Jeff Small, who founded MDH Partners in 2005, knew he needed to take a bold step to keep this real estate investment firm on a strong growth trajectory as the economic crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic unfolded.

Small figures he accomplished just that when he recently persuaded **Arun Singh**, who served as a vice president and team debt leader for MetLife's Southeast region, to join Small's boutique firm that specializes in value-add industrial deals. Singh, a member of the MetLife investment committee that reviewed each of the life insurance giant's commercial mortgages, starts Monday as chief financial officer of [Atlanta-based MDH](#).

"It's a huge hire for us," Small said in an interview. "As we look for acquisitions, he's going to be a key voice as we're underwriting properties. His experience in the lender side will be very helpful for us."



Jeff Small, CEO of MDH Partners

In addition to advising on potential acquisitions, Singh will manage the company's lender relationships, negotiate debt financing and oversee administration, accounting and compliance with joint ventures and lenders.

Small founded MDH in 2005 and previously served as president and CEO of M.D. Hodges Enterprises, a large industrial development firm started by his late grandfather that Blackstone acquired in 1999.

MDH's current fund has about 5 million square feet of property under management, and it plans to double that number over the next year to 10 million square feet and then increase it to 15 million over the following two years, Small said. The company also manages about 15 million square feet of industrial space that the company, with the Harvard University endowment, sold to Blackstone in 2018.

Last week, MDH and partner Ackerman & Co. revealed [plans to redevelop some of the warehouses](#) at their [Lee + White mixed-use development](#) in Atlanta into creative office space and develop a new building with a food hall and spots for shops.

Singh replaces **Mike Herman**, who served as CFO for more than six years. Herman will remain at MDH as a partner in a more limited capacity as managing director of operations. "This new role will allow Mike to take some more personal time with his family in a flexible work schedule as opposed to the nonstop pace he has been running these last few years as we have been growing our platform," Small said.

During the past five years at MetLife, Singh worked directly with MDH to finance multiple large acquisitions as the firm's commercial mortgage lender. Singh said he looks forward to being part of the MDH team.

"From the beginning, I've been impressed with the company's ability to deliberately execute against its strategic vision, creating value where others cannot," Singh said in an email.

When Herman decided to step away from the CFO position, Small said, "At first I was very nervous because CFO is a critical role at an organization like this."

MDH executives immediately thought of people the company they knew who had the requisite skill set but might not yet have served as a chief financial officer. Singh fit the bill perfectly, especially because of the work he and MDH had already done together, Small said.

"As a small shop, culture is very important to us," Small said. "His personality fits really well with that."

Most recently, at the height of the coronavirus pandemic, Singh worked with MDH to close on a \$60 million mortgage with MetLife. The funds helped MDH finance a major acquisition in the Phoenix market, where the company [acquired a six-property industrial portfolio](#) totaling 303,790 square feet of space.

"They stood by us, and we closed, really, in the middle of the crisis," Small said.

The economic fallout caused by the pandemic likely will allow MDH to acquire nonperforming loans and pursue other opportunities. Singh's expertise in that arena will be a major benefit, Small said.

"His broad experience and energy are exactly what we need at MDH to take us to the next level," he said.

While at MetLife, Singh managed an existing loan portfolio exceeding \$8 billion and drove new loan originations totaling more than \$2 billion annually. In addition to having a vote for all of MetLife's new commercial mortgages, he also served as the portfolio manager and oversaw \$16 billion of investments across the Pacific Northwest, Mid-Atlantic and Southeast regions. Prior to working at MetLife, Singh worked at Google and BP.

On his first day at the office, Singh already is looking ahead to find new opportunities for MDH.

"The recovery will be uneven for both debt and equity, dependent on property type exposure and geography," he said. "I believe we will see the best outcomes for the long-term capital sources that are investing on a portfolio basis, rather than asset by asset."

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