

# HOME, SWEET (short-term) HOME

Need a place to rent without a long-term commitment? This Bradley alumni-owned company can help.

HOUSING TREND  
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10 MIN.



LEFT Singley in a Chicago suite.  
RIGHT Walker in Tennessee.



SINGLEY: ZEKE DOLEZALEK (@IANZEKED);  
WALKER: HOUSEHOLD PHOTOGRAPHY (@DEREK\_DARMSTAEDTER)  
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## YOU'VE JUST RECEIVED A DREAM ASSIGNMENT

— working at your company's headquarters for three months on a special project. But it's far from your home and you'll need someplace to live. It'll need to be secure, close to work and offer additional amenities, but you don't have time to hunt down furnishings and other necessities.

Who are you going to call first?

Pinnacle Furnished Suites, founded and run by a pair of Bradley alums with help from other graduates, could be the answer.

**Collin Walker '07**, a former Bradley baseball star, worked as a residential real estate broker in Chicago when he noticed a trend.

"We were doing a lot of residential leasing throughout Chicago and what we found was we were getting a lot of interest and a lot of inquiries for things shorter than your traditional, full-term, unfurnished lease," he said. "We looked at that and the amount of inquiries we were getting and the fact people were willing to pay a little more for shorter-term furnished ... We looked at that hole in the market and it blossomed from there."

Walker knew **Matt Singley '09** from his college days and the pair worked together on other investment real estate projects before deciding to investigate a different part of the real estate world.

"We hadn't really intended to start much of anything, at least, not at first," said Singley. "The plan was to set up and manage one or two furnished apartments in our spare time and make some 'bar money.' Looking back,

**RIGHT** “We serve almost every national/global corporate housing company as a supply chain partner for their needs in Chicago and Nashville,” said Singley.

we were probably lucky that we experienced zero vacancies between various initial clients and profited early on. With that ... it didn't take long to start exponentially growing our portfolio of apartments and clients.”

In June 2014, Pinnacle got underway, dealing with short-term clients who had a minimum 30-day stay.

“When someone stays in our units, the only thing you need to bring is your toiletries and your clothes,” Walker said. “We're going to take care of linens, housewares, kitchenware, furniture.

“We pay all the utilities so you're going to have high-speed internet, cable TV, everything is set up for you. What we're trying to do is take all the stress out of it.”

While tilted toward the corporate side — including companies hoping to impress and recruit summer interns — there are others who need Pinnacle's expertise.

“We have a really good relationship with Broadway in Chicago. We house a lot of their staff members and actors,” Walker said. “People coming into Chicago to film movies or athletes that get traded midseason. Some of our best contracts are with restaurant chains. There are all these niches that have evolved.”

Singley said the corporate housing market traditionally works on trust, consistency and customer service, and Pinnacle has grown those client relationships. The small company (12 direct employees) works with various contractors and its own cleaning firm, Just Clean It, also operated by Singley.

While demand does affect supply, Pinnacle had more than 600 leases and 200 units last year at peak times between its hometown of Chicago and a relatively new operation in Nashville, Tenn.



Located predominantly in luxury buildings in the heart of those cities, some units are owned by the company outright but it leases others for the one-year standard and then subleases for shorter times to clients.

Singley called the Chicago location a no-brainer because he and Walker were already there and familiar with the real estate markets. Nashville is a strategic move.

“By strategic, I mean we love country music, and what better way to experience more of it than to get to go to Music City for work?” said Singley. “It worked out well that Nashville is experiencing tremendous growth. Some existing clients have a need there and the competitor landscape there is comparatively sparse. The success of the last three years in Tennessee has shown us that we can expand and be successful almost anywhere due to the structure, systems and relationships we’ve established over time.”

Its growth led Pinnacle to multiple listings on the Inc. 5000 ranking of the fastest-growing, privately held companies.

Most units are rented sight unseen and details are worked out online. In many cases, clients never meet face-to-face with Pinnacle personnel. Everything from inquiring about rentals to applications and lease-signing is handled electronically.

“Anything that can be automated without sacrificing customer service either has been or will be,” Singley said. He also noted Pinnacle uses a “dynamic pricing model,” adjusted daily like an airline, with the goal of maximizing revenue and reducing vacancies.

“Ultimately, we’re a customer-driven business. Our entire job is to take stress off the customer’s plate so you find yourself being more on the hospitality side,” added Walker, who recently moved to Nashville, Tenn., to run the company’s branch there. “It’s about the customer and their experience.”

He told of a CEO they worked closely with on setting up her housing: “Usually we pick out the furniture and do everything in the units. We went back and forth with her for a month ... doing Pinterest boards to see the types of furniture and artwork and things she liked. We built the apartment for her liking.”

With travel, especially global travel, limited by the COVID-19 pandemic, Pinnacle has gotten creative in keeping units filled. Walker said they offered units at cost or with large discounts for Chicago first responders and

medical personnel, giving them a place to stay while keeping families safe.

“It was a great feeling to help out others who were helping during the pandemic.”

While these efforts kept units occupied, negotiating contracts and building on relationships continued and the staff had to step up in many ways.

“There have been no off hours for any of us since this started,” Singley said. “The COVID-era has amplified the responsibilities of everyone as revenue declines, the staff is reduced and the number of tasks to complete increases. Luckily, things are trending in the right direction and we are fortunate that we will make it out the other side.”

Strong Bradley connections include **Connor Vance '10**, who is Walker’s brother-in-law and director of operations. He works behind the scenes, furnishing the units and scheduling a deep clean after the tenant leaves. Vance also sets up regular housekeeping services for clients who want to add it as an amenity.

“We’re taking time between (renting) units,” Vance said. “Everything is getting sanitized; we’re wearing masks.”

He’s also tasked with delivering, if possible, on customer requests.

“There are definitely people who pay for something and expect more than what they pay for,” he said. “Most of the time the requests are something small that we can deliver. It’s a small cost for us to make someone happy. We do our best to accommodate as much as we can.”

IT director **John Moats '06**, a fellow Sigma Nu alum with Singley, rounds out the leadership team. Walker added several of the members worked together at a few Peoria nightspots, giving them an extra relationship layer.

“We know how to talk to each other. I would say our daily conversations are probably more casual than the average corporation.”

Moats backed him up. “We do not have layers of management at Pinnacle. Everyone has a responsibility critical to the day-to-day operations. Matt has always stressed ... keeping the circle small.”



#### ABOVE

A glimpse inside Pinnacle’s home office in Chicago. Taking the stress away from clients has kept the company busy and helped garner several awards, including the Corporate Housing Providers Association naming Pinnacle the 2019 Company of the Year (\$5 million–\$15 million in revenue).

Singley sees other advantages. “You could never understand as much about someone via a relatively random interview than you could after years of friendship. You know how smart they are, how hard they work, how they think about things and what they’re capable of.”

But there are downsides. While Moats mentioned the challenge of listening to country music in the office, Singley said the group’s connection can interfere with other areas of life, noting they travel and vacation together, leading to constant work that carries over to their daily operations.

“You never truly complete anything and there’s always more to do,” Singley said. “Sometimes I miss the days where I could finish a job and take a breather. Those days are gone. With that being said, I wouldn’t trade back.” **B**



## Singley’s Strategies for Success

As a pre-teen, Singley started his career by picking weeds and building mailboxes. From there, jobs included owning a lawn care company, washing cars, bartending, real estate construction-investment-management and his latest endeavor — a centralized marketplace for real-time bookings of corporate housing. Along the way, he’s picked up some pointers:

• **WORK SMARTER** than anyone you know, if you can. There’s always an easier way with the same (or better) end result. Always. You just have to find it.

If you can’t do that, **WORK LONGER AND HARDER** than everyone else. If you can figure out how to do both of those things, you’re truly unstoppable.

• **ALWAYS KEEP YOUR COOL** and learn to **UNDERSTAND** people. Try to understand where

someone else is coming from in any conflict.

• **NO ONE CAN DO EVERYTHING** themselves. Figure out what you don’t know and ask for help.

• **MAKE FRIENDS, NOT ENEMIES.** I attribute the majority of my personal success to those around me. If you push people away for selfish or prideful reasons, you’ll lose out on those chances.