
Downtown inn to open its lush doors

By Amos Maki

Saturday, October 20, 2007

The long-awaited River Inn of Harbor Town, a 28-room boutique hotel that has been in the works since 2003, will open its doors Oct. 29.

The \$9 million luxury hotel will cater to business travelers during the week and leisure travelers from around the region on the weekends.

"We are responding to demand from both the the business and leisure travel segments who were seeking high-touch, white-glove service in an intimate, yet casual environment," said Karl Friedrich, general manager of the hotel. "The River Inn fills a special market niche Downtown and we're certainly excited to welcome guests to this beautiful property."

The hotel, located in two buildings at the corner of Harbor Town Square and Harbor Town Circle, is infused with Memphis and Mississippi River Delta history.

The touches of marble placed throughout the hotel were removed from the Shrine Building when Henry Turley first redeveloped it in 1981.

An 1800s circa fireplace in the lobby of the four-story building that houses the restaurant Currents was rescued from New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina.

The heart of pine floors in the hotel were salvaged from an 1800s textile mill in Virginia that was being razed.

Looney Ricks Kiss designed the hotel, which blends in with neighboring Harbor Town properties, has New Urbanism principles on full display.

Unlike most traditional sprawling hotels, the River Inn of Harbor Town is about density, packing 28 rooms and suites on 32,000 square feet of space.

"It fits like a glove," said Looney Ricks Kiss principal Carson Looney.

The hotel has a European influence, from the small libraries that greet visitors when they exit the elevators to go to their rooms to the Port wine and chocolate truffles served at turn-down.

A conference room that can be used for business meetings or small dinner parties looks into an 1,100-bottle wine cellar.

The hotel owners, Lewis Holland, Tom Scott, Joe Weller and Turley, and management team are touting luxury and service.

The hotel offers 24-hour concierge and valet services. Fresh flowers and artwork are placed throughout the hotel. Each room has a 32-inch flat-screen television and high-speed wireless Internet service. Each room has crown molding, walnut armoires and four-poster beds.

A standard room goes for \$245 a night; a grand suite for \$550 and a penthouse suite for \$595.

The hotel also features two restaurants, one fine-dining and the other more casual.

Currents, the restaurant, serves gourmet American/Continental cuisine in a chandelier-adorned dining room featuring original art.

Tug's, which will not open until Nov. 7, is a casual grill that will cater to residents of Harbor Town and Mud Island.

"It's almost like some of those great places in Europe where it's a great restaurant with rooms upstairs," said Chuck Pinowski, owner of Pinkowski & Co., a Memphis hospitality consulting firm.

With the asking rate for the rooms, Pinkowski said that hotel will have to deliver on its promise of high-end service.

"Customers will be willing to pay if they deliver," he said. "They're proud of their product but they better deliver."

Pinkowski said regional leisure travelers should find the hotel appealing, but the key to its success will be getting corporate travelers with a taste for the finer things, a relatively small portion of the overall corporate travel market.

"The weekend market is certainly a strong potential for them, but they're going to have to get the corporate travelers in there," he said.

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Rolling on the River

The River Inn of Harbor Town will open its doors Oct. 29.

Cost: \$9 million

Rooms and suites: 28

Targeted markets: Weekend leisure travelers and corporate travelers.

Special features: Sprawling rooftop patio with views of the Mississippi River, library-style

sitting library on each floor, two restaurants.

Web site: riverinnmemphis.com

Phone: 260-3333



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