

# HOTEL NEWS DIGEST

## NEW HOTELS

When Warren Reuther, along with partners Mickey Palmer and Patrick Quinn, announced their plans to turn the CBD's long-tall Queen and Crescent Building into a 132-room hotel, it came as little surprise to the financial community. After several years' hiatus, building or turning structures into hotels is what most people with the wherewithall are doing.

In fact, if you count those projects in the works and those seriously seeking financing, there are no fewer than 18 hotels waiting to be added to the local inventory. By one count, current jobs include six properties serving up 913 new rooms and representing nearly \$70 million in investment.

The two plans most recently announced are the Queen and Crescent, which puts longtime tourism player Reuther with Palmer and Quinn, experts in the development of small, European-style hotels, and the top 10 floors of the Maison Blanche building on Canal Street. The MB project is projected to add 418 rooms to the city's supply.

Upwards of a dozen people have agreed to participate in the \$9 million Queen and Crescent venture, seen as opening in January of 1996. That is the same month Palmer and Quinn anticipate launching a 101-room hotel in the old Gravier Building.

"This is the first time Pat and I have done a deal with other investors," Palmer said. "I wouldn't like to see someone come in and put up 6,000 hotel rooms in New Orleans, but the city still doesn't have enough first-class hotels."

For his part, Reuther seemed a natural for the hotel business, as his companies starting with Destination Management Inc. book busloads of room nights each year - and his Airport Shuttle and New Orleans Tours buses deliver the loads. Rates at the 12-story Queen and Crescent are projected at \$89 to \$149 per month, with first-year occupancy estimated at 74-78 percent.

All this development has placed New Orleans third behind Las Vegas and Orlando. And according to John Keeling, director of the Houston office of San Francisco-based PKF Consulting, those two cities are so unusual because of Disney and gambling that New Orleans is truly the busiest typical destination in America.

Hot hotel news item include the Pelham, another Palmer-Quinn property with Graham's restaurant at the corner, the recently opened effort to resurrect the Pallas, and the new Comfort Suites and Hampton Inn. This month marks the projected opening of the French Quarter Courtyard as well.

The "Coming Soon" category includes the long-awaited Chateau Sonesta - Pres Kabacoff's passionate mission in the old D.H. Holmes building - plus two additional Courtyard by Marriotts.

Though people on the street tend to see the hand of gaming behind all this construction, most informed observers agree that the now-approved Phase III for the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center is where the action truly is. As hotelier Brett Smith put it:

"It's the convention center that drives the market. I don't believe people are

building rooms based on the casino. And if they are, they're making a mistake."

## WINDSOR COURTING

The city's most prestigious property received two presents at the same time. The first was its favorite familiar present (oh, this old thing!): the state's only set of AAA five diamonds. The second was a new managing director, Hansjoerg Maissen from that oh-so-organized hotel country called Switzerland.

In naming Maissen to the top job in their most visible North American outlet, Orient-Express Hotels pointed to his 30-plus years in the industry. The past six, in fact, were spent as managing director of the Hotel Bel-Air - not the one in Los Angeles but the one in Cap Ferrat on the French Riviera. Rumor has it they have casinos over there too.

Prior to the Riviera, Maissen held various management positions at hotels in the United States, the United Kingdom, Greece and Saudi Arabia.

"Hans Maissen's extensive background in deluxe international properties will be an immense asset to the projection of the Windsor Court Hotel's outstanding facility," said Orient-Express VP Jean-Paul Foerster.

"His invaluable knowledge in luxury properties and fine cuisines will ensure the Windsor Court Hotel will maintain its unique identity and its rightful place as one of the best hotels in the U.S. and the world."

Maissen arrives in New Orleans (right across the street, in fact, from the future home of Harrah's) with no shortage of honors.

These are led off by his 1976 nomination to the distinction of officer of the Franco-Britain Association for civil services rendered to France. In 1994, Maissen received the Medal of Tourism from the French government and was honored as general manager of the year by Master Guide. Also, the American Travel Digest publication nominated Maissen for the second consecutive year as one of the world's 50 best hoteliers.

Just as the new boss was settling into his office, the latest good news arrived from AAA.

The Windsor Court's five diamonds mark its ninth year in a row bearing the auto association's top ranking. Fewer than one percent of the 30,000 properties given diamonds are given the full set of five.

The good news extended to the Windsor Court's restaurant, the Grill Room. Five more diamonds for it meant AAA had selected it as one of North America's outstanding dining establishments - offering exceptional cuisine, flawless service and luxurious surroundings. In case you're wondering, only 25 North American restaurants received this honor.

Gneme Clarke, AAA's VP of travel, marketing and financial services, put things in perspective this way:

"These world-class establishments received the Five-Diamond Award because their staff and management have dedicated themselves to providing uncompromising standards of excellence in all areas of operation."

Maissen, late of the French Riviera, should fit right in.



Hansjoerg Maissen of the Windsor Court

## PROMUSES, PROMUSES

Calling itself the nation's leading chain of upscale all-suite hotels, Embassy Suites arrived in the Crescent City in December - all dressed up and, its executives hoped, with up the only way to go. Its 226-suite property in the Warehouse District had been, until the day before, the Radisson Suites.

The announcement was made by Ray Schultz, president and chief executive officer of The Promus Hotels - already a familiar name in the downtown neighborhood.

"We are happy to provide visitors to this unique and vibrant city with a distinctive lodging alternative," Schultz said. "As an attractive option for convention business and leisure travelers, Embassy Suites is a perfect fit in a city known for its history, cuisine and entertainment."

A little bit of that history reminds us that the property opened in the excitement leading up to the 1984 World's Fair. It was known as the Sugar House back then - and looked like a fair-only affair, since there was nothing else going on in the neighborhood. How times have changed!

The hotel is just two blocks from the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, the Louisiana Children's Museum and a glittering selection of art galleries, upscale boutiques and some of the city's best restaurants and nightclubs.

Of course, if Promus is allowed to keep its promise, the world's largest land-based casino, Harrah's New Orleans, will open just three blocks away. And the French Quarter and the revitalized riverfront are just a stroll or a streetcar ride away.

In terms of in-house selling points, the Embassy Suites-New Orleans offers the 80-seat Sugar House Restaurant and a 50-seat bar, an outdoor heated pool and whirlpool, jogging track and 6,000 square feet of meeting space.

The property also offers amenities including spacious two-room suites with two televisions, two telephones, a coffee-maker and a refrigerator. In addition, it offers a full complimentary breakfast each morning and a manager's reception each evening.

"Our goal," says GM Larry Bell, who ought to know since he ran the place as the Radisson, "is to be the No. 1 choice for convention attendees, as well as the leisure guest seeking product value, great service and added space for comfort."

The hotel is owned by Felcor Suite Hotels Inc. of Dallas and managed by Embassy Suites, a division (like Harrah's) of the Promus Company.

## HILTON AWARDS

1994 was a busy year for the New Orleans Hilton Riverside - and not just because a riverboat casino tied up at its backdoor. Among other things, the huge 1,600 room property next to the convention center picked up no fewer than five awards given by readers of the country's top meeting and convention publications.

It marked the first time any New Orleans hotel had been so recognized.

For the ninth consecutive year, the Hilton received Successful Meetings' Pinnacle Award - and was again the only hotel in either the city or the state chosen by readers of Association Magazine to receive its Inner Circle Award. The Hilton was also the only property to receive Medical Meetings' Merit and Distinction Award.

Adding to the glow were Corporate and Incentive Travel's Award of Excellence and Meeting and Convention's Gold Key. Readers based their choices on outstanding staff service, quality of food and beverage, quality of guest rooms, and services available in the overall property.