

Arnold Palmer's Palmer Hospitality Opens its First Hotel with the 109-room SpringHill Suites by Marriott Latrobe in Pennsylvania

By Joe Napsha, The Pittsburgh Tribune-Review/McClatchy-Tribune Regional News

June 20, 2012--Arnold Palmer has put his stamp on another business venture -- a unique \$9 million hotel in Unity that opened Tuesday, in time for the Westmoreland County Air Show this weekend and the Pittsburgh Steelers training camp at St. Vincent College in July.

SpringHill Suites by Marriott Latrobe, a four-story, 109-room hotel at the intersection of Route 981 and Arnold Palmer Drive, just south of Latrobe, opened for business with a flourish. Palmer toured the hotel to give his stamp of approval to the upscale project, and local business and government officials joined in a reception.

Palmer's hotel will be in competition with other hotels along the Route 30 corridor from Greensburg to Ligonier. But Palmer was confident that the Latrobe area not only can support another hotel, but needs it.

"With the (Arnold Palmer Regional) Airport expansion, the (Latrobe) Country Club ... with Kennametal's national headquarters right across the street ... there's just a very dramatic need for this kind of facility," Palmer said.

"As a matter of fact, I'm not sure that it will be adequate for very long," he added. "It is filling a need now, and as we grow around this area, it will be very valuable."

The SpringHill Marriott is Palmer's first hotel. He owns a majority of the business, through his Palmer Hospitality L.P. Construction began about a year ago. The facility has 40 full-time and part-time employees.

He developed it with Marriott International, but it is not a typical chain hotel. The first floor is a showcase of Palmer golf memorabilia, including photos chronicling his career from the time he was a youngster who played at Latrobe Country Club to his rise as the nation's top golfer. Murals outside the elevators doors on each floor show a panorama of golf courses he owns or has played.

In a presidential suite hang photos of Palmer with past presidents and letters he received from presidents over 60 years. Among them are a message from President Dwight David Eisenhower, who apologized for not recognizing Palmer during a 1958 visit to Ligonier. A pre-Watergate President Richard M. Nixon congratulated Palmer in a January 1969 letter, and Gerald Ford thanked Palmer as the new president faced the challenges of the office.

"This is the most unique SpringHill Marriott in the United States," said Keith McGrew, a partner in Concord Hospitality Enterprises Co. of Raleigh, a part owner and the property manager.

Palmer's hotel, built on a 23-acre site he owns, offers a perk that other motels in the area can't duplicate -- an opportunity to play a round of golf at Palmer's Latrobe County Club, less than a mile away.

Among the first guests at the hotel will be the members of the U.S. Navy's Blue Angels, the aerial demonstration team that will perform Saturday and Sunday at Arnold Palmer Regional Airport across Route 981 from the hotel, said Tiffany Price, hotel sales director.

On Sept. 10, Bill Marriott, former chief executive officer and chairman of the hotel chain, will visit the hotel on Palmer's 83rd birthday, said Dawn Roberts, general manager of the SpringHill Suites.

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