



Arnold Palmer pairs up with Marriott

By Joe Napsha, PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW
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Golfing legend and businessman Arnold Palmer said on Wednesday he will develop a unique hotel with Marriott International Inc., one the Latrobe area sorely needs.

"That is very much in demand. We needed a place for people to stay when they come to Latrobe Country Club to play golf and for my various associates, whether it be for golf or business," Palmer said after groundbreaking ceremonies for a \$14 million, 109-room Springhill Suites by Marriott. The hotel is expected to open next June.

Palmer is its majority owner, through his Palmer Hospitality L.P.; Concord Hospitality Enterprises Co. of Raleigh, a part-owner, will manage the hotel.

Palmer said the hotel at the corner of Route 981 and Arnold Palmer Drive will accommodate travelers on Spirit Airlines, which operates out of Arnold Palmer Regional Airport, and business travelers that Kennametal Inc., a global manufacturer whose headquarters is across the street from the hotel site, brings to the area.

Construction began about six weeks ago, said Mark Laport, CEO of Concord Hospitality, which manages or has under construction 80 hotels under brands such as Marriott, Hilton and Hyatt.

"I've worked with and lent my name to several other remarkable golf courses around the country, but this hotel, in my hometown, and affiliated with my home course, is the most personal to me," said Palmer, who owns the 23-acre site.

Though Unity has hotels -- the Wingate by Wyndham on Route 30 and Mountain View Inn is just off the highway -- Laport said market studies showed a need for another.

The Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau, the designated tourist organization for the area, has not conducted a market study of the demand for hotel rooms, said spokeswoman Julie Donovan.

In addition to overnight accommodations, this one will offer use of a board room with some of Palmer's photographs and memorabilia, though he hasn't decided which items to put there. Palmer said daughters Amy and Peggy can decide that, along with Marriott officials.

Concord Hospitality partner Keith McGraw and Laport see the advantage of having Palmer associated with the hotel. For example, guests can buy packages to play golf at Palmer's Latrobe Country Club.

"Golfers clamor for the opportunity to soak up the Arnold Palmer experience at Latrobe," McGraw said.