

Hotel renovations revive local luxury

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Davidson Hotel Co., Tennessee-based manager and joint venture owner of the 380-room Holiday Inn Select at 700 E. Main St. in Stamford, with Ohio-based RockBridge Capital, joined with more than 300 invited guests Thursday to celebrate the hotels reconstruction. (Kathleen O'Rourke/Staff photo)

When the Holiday Inn Select in Stamford was built in 1984, it was a key contributor in the city's renaissance, and now, after spending \$20 million in renovations, its new operators are touting it as the region's most desirable destination for the business and leisure traveler.

Davidson Hotel Co., Tennessee-based manager and joint venture owner of the 380-room hotel at 700 E. Main St., with Ohio-based RockBridge Capital, joined with more than 300 invited guests Thursday to celebrate its reconstruction.

The renovation included a redesign of the hotel's public spaces, facade, meeting facilities, guest rooms and suites. The lobby lounge, front desk and pool were relocated, and the atrium lobby, with marble floors and soaring ceiling, was enhanced.

Also new to the hotel is a health club with an indoor lap pool. Guest rooms have new bedding and 37-inch LCD high-definition televisions. DiLeonardo International was the design firm, StudioAD was the architect and Shakman Construction was the primary contractor.

To commemorate the event, Stamford Mayor Dannel Malloy participated in a ribbon cutting ceremony. Joining him were officials of Davidson and RockBridge Capital and InterContinental Hotels Group, the franchisor.

"This is a wonderful moment for Stamford. Here we are sitting and standing on the site of the old Scalzi Paint store," said Malloy, recalling his days as a youth. "Stamford is a

business capital of the world. We now have another world-class property to partner with. This level of investment is a great testament to Stamford."

Calling the project a "labor of love," John Belden, Davidson's president and chief executive officer, said the hotel is ideally located to serve the business community of metropolitan New York and Fairfield County, as well as leisure travelers.

Weeknight rates start at \$199, and weekend rates are \$99.

"We want the community to know that this is a long-term commitment," he said, whose company joined with RockBridge to buy the complex early last year from FelCor Lodging Trust for an undisclosed amount. "Part of our business strategy is to identify underperforming hotels. We're look for a great business community and a building with good bones."

Located within walking distance of more than 75 restaurants, clubs and the Stamford transportation center, the property features 20,000 square feet of meeting space, on-site guest laundry facilities and a full-service business center.

Its restaurant, 700 Main, specializes in American cuisine, and guest rooms are equipped with complementary high speed, wireless Internet access.

"What we have is essentially a brand new hotel within the walls of an existing building. There is almost no resemblance to our



Al Reingold, Director of Brand Management for Intercontinental Hotel Group, joins guests at the Holiday Inn Select on Thursday. (Kathleen O'Rourke/Staff photo)

old facility," said Michael Bennett, hotel general manager, who came to the hotel from Davidson's Hilton Hotel in Washington, D.C., in August.

Bennett and the hotel's 150 employees had the challenge of reassuring and serving patrons during the construction process.

A large majority of the employees remained with the hotel through the changes, including Stamford resident Keeva Crelan, senior sales manager, who has worked there since it opened.

"In 1984, when it opened it was absolutely beautiful," said Crelan, who welcomed the change in ownership. "I'm still in shock and awe. It's a property that I'm extremely proud to sell."

She was surprised to hear Bennett announce that a suite on the 10th floor has been named in her honor.

Also attending the event was Norwalk resident Herb Grant, who worked at the hotel for its first 31½ years as director of personnel.

"It's still here and even more fabulous than when I was here in the 1980s," said Grant, a board member of the Fairfield County Convention & Visitors Bureau. "We have a keen interest in hotels and attractions in Connecticut."

Margaret King, president of Bridgetown Travel Agency in Stamford, attended a professional workshop a few weeks ago at the hotel.

It was her first visit since the renovations.

"They really modernized it," she said. "I had to do a double-take."

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