

## Main@Broad Courtyard Marriott hotel to open Friday

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The new Courtyard Marriott hotel across the street from the Peace Center adds 135 rooms to Greenville's downtown hospitality sector, and its managers aim to make it a central gathering spot for the entertainment district. The latest Marriott design concepts include large public areas to allow guests to "hang out," said sales manager Michael Bonasia, pictured, giving a tour of a room in the new hotel.

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Published April 29, 2010

The façade is getting a pressure washing, the beds are made, and the Nantucket Grill has already entertained GE Aviation's executive team as the Main@Broad Courtyard Marriott hotel prepares to check in its first overnight guests on Friday.



General Manager Glenn Williams, a Clemson graduate with 20 years experience in hotel management, says opening a week ahead of graduations at Clemson and Furman University is good timing for the new hotel. The hotel already is about 50% booked for its opening week, as he says business generally in the hotel sector has been seeing an uptick.

"Hotels are seeing an upturn in bookings; this may turn out to be fortunate timing," Williams said.

Bo Aughtry (pictured at left), principal of Windsor/Aughtry Co., the developer of the new hotel and office building, said the company has experienced

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fortunate timing since the inception of the project to build a showcase hotel on what he describes as the best commercial property in South Carolina.

“When the horse is out of the barn, you have to ride it,” Aughtry said as he stood in the busy lobby of a hotel getting ready to open its doors.

Built in the midst of one of the worst recessions in a generation, the building has had its challenges in attracting office tenants as every business sector in the nation slumped.

“If we’d started 90 days later, we probably would not have gotten financing,” Aughtry admitted to journalists gathered to see the interior of the hotel for the first time. And attracting corporate tenants for the office spaces has also been a challenge as the recession produced a glut of empty office space across the Upstate.

But Windsor/Aughtry scored a coup when it signed Fidelity Investments as a marquee tenant. It is the first office for Fidelity in South Carolina, on one of the most prominent commercial corners in the state.



Aughtry said he is in the final stages of signing another major tenant, is close to agreement with two other potential tenants, and expects to have three to four floors leased in 45 to 60 days.

“The energy of this project will bring people downtown,” Aughtry said. “It

will also make us more attractive to more groups. The Convention and Visitors Bureau will now have more than 850 rooms downtown to offer to groups.”

The new hotel has 135 rooms, and four meeting rooms, the largest of which can hold 135 people.

Michael Bonasia, sales manager for the Courtyard Marriott, said the hotel’s design incorporates Marriott’s latest thinking on design, and meeting the needs of modern travelers. The large, intimidating front desk has been replaced with a much smaller check-in station, while hotel staff are outside the station to be more accessible to hotel guests.

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“The lobby is designed for people to get out of their room and hang out,” Bonasia said. “This lobby is going to be full of energy. People don’t want to hide out in their rooms anymore.”

A bistro is a central feature of the lobby, to serve breakfast, and it switches to “Nantucket lite” in the evenings for people who don’t want to sit down in the main Nantucket Grill dining room for a meal. The lobby also features ample business stations, with computers, and free wireless access for people with their own computing devices.

The emphasis of the design is on the public spaces, Bonasia said.

Some of the rooms have panorama views of the mountains and the cityscape. Bonasia said he’s already had a reservation request for a room with a mountain view.



In addition to large standard rooms, the hotel has five two-room suites that allow for small business meetings in a room separate from the sleeping area. And a fitness center overlooks the Peace Center for the Performing Arts.

Bonasia said the location across the street from the Peace Center is a plus for the hotel. A major show weekend could account for as many as 20 rooms, he said.

One of the office tenants will be the Rick Erwin Dining Group’s headquarters. Erwin owns the Nantucket Grill, the fine dining venue in the [Main@Broad](#) Courtyard Marriott. Erwin, pictured at left, also owns the West End Grill, which he said has just experienced its best year ever, despite the recession.

“Certainly, our economy has seen better times,” Erwin said. “But when this opportunity presented itself to me three years ago, I jumped at it. We feel very fortunate in Greenville that we have weathered the storm. We’re off to a fabulous start.”