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DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT



SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-PRESS

A rendering of the Luminary Hotel & Co. that will be built adjacent to Harborside Event Center in downtown Fort Myers

‘Luminary Hotel’ to rise on Fort Myers riverfront

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Luminary Hotel & Co.

That’s the full name for the long-awaited riverfront convention hotel and garage complex to be built next to Fort Myers’ Harborside Event Center.

Informally, most folks are likely to call it the Luminary Hotel or maybe even the Luminary.

Tampa-based Mainsail Lodging & Development revealed the name Thursday morning in front of about 200 city and county dignitaries, businesspeople and others gathered at the Sidney & Berne Davis Art Center, just a few blocks from the future construction site.

“We’re not going to let you down,” Mainsail President Joe Collier told the crowd.

The hotel will employ more than 200 people, and will be worthy of civic pride, Collier promised: “It’s not going to be a cookie-cutter hotel.”

It’s too early to be sure, but Collier estimated starting rates for guestrooms would be in the upper-\$100 to low-\$200 range.

The lodgings company is aiming for a groundbreaking ceremony in June. The plan is for the hotel to open in early 2019.

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Hotel

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It will be a 12-story high-rise with 237 guest rooms and suites overlooking the Caloosahatchee and take Fort Myers historic River District.

The hotel will join the Autograph Collection Hotels, a Marriott International portfolio of high-end, boutique properties.

City and business leaders long have yearned for a hotel-event center combination that works.

In the mid-1980s Sheraton Harbor Place opened with great fanfare, a few blocks to the east of Harborside. Occupancy never supported the hotel's expenses, though.

Over the years, it went by many names, officially closing in 2008. Today, it's undergoing a transformation into Campo Felice, an upscale, high-rise retirement community.

Hotel Indigo, a much smaller boutique property, debuted on downtown's Broadway during the recession. It survived rocky times and foreclosure — but couldn't supply all of the rooms that a re-energized Harborside Event Center would need.

The hotel and convention center idea has been on the city's radar for many years, with the project changing hands several times because of difficulty in securing the money to make it a reality.

There's a lot left for developers to reveal about the Luminary Hotel, which will connect to and complement the event center.

Foodies already are licking their chops about the hotel's signature restaurant, not yet named; a local, street-side diner; a rooftop bar; and a culinary theater. The latter is a tiered-seat space within the hotel that will welcome world-renowned chefs to teach culinary techniques to guests as well as members of the public.

About 8,000 square feet of hotel space will be devoted to group functions, although the bulk of that business niche will be relegated to Harborside.

Space also will be reserved for some retailing: Count on seeing hotel totes and T-shirts sporting local artist Joshua Noom's illustrations that were inspired by real-life characters or luminaries from Fort Myers' history.

The hotel also has committed to building a riverfront band shell in Centennial Park.

Fort Myers Mayor Randy Henderson predicted the new hotel will inspire "more transactions, more activity" downtown.

Mainsail Lodging & Development and the city are principals in a development agreement and long-term lease in which Mainsail will build the hotel and parking garage; renovate Harborside Event Center; and operate the hotel event center complex.

Said Henderson: "It's the perfect scenario for the city."

Irma and Roger Spencer live about a half-mile away, in High Point Place. They're keenly interest-



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Joe Collier, president of Mainsail Lodging and Development, talks about the new downtown hotel on Thursday during a ceremony revealing its name and branding. It will be called the Luminary Hotel & Co. and will feature 237 guest rooms and suites in 12 stories. It will also have a rooftop bar, a culinary theater, a diner and a signature restaurant. A riverfront bandshell will also be added to Centennial Park.

ed in downtown development: Roger's a board member for the Downtown Property Owners Association.

Irma Spencer said she's excited about the hotel project moving forward: "Probably we'll use it for dining out. The restaurant, rooftop bar and diner will be great assets."

However, not everyone is wowed by the hotel's design, as it is shown in architectural renderings.

South Fort Myers artist and arts writer Angela Savko called the hotel's exterior "cold, defensive and unwelcoming."

"It is not an inviting or interesting addition to what could have been a charming, historic vibrant destination downtown," Savko said in a Facebook post.

But Jeff Webb, owner-operator of the only Hampton Inn & Suites within city limits, called it "pretty, clean and very modern."

"This type of hotel is exactly what we were looking for, for that space," said Webb, who's president of the Lee County Hotel Association.

Webb cautioned that the new hotel and work on Harborside won't make it a convention center on the scale seen in Tampa or Orlando.

"But it should bring more meeting groups of 200 to 300 people," Webb said.

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