

## Lake City boutique hotel nears completion

Article Courtesy of Donna Tracy, Morning News and SCnow.com

LAKE CITY, S.C. — The Inn at the Crossroads has maintained a commanding presence on Main Street in the not-so-sleepy little city just 20 miles south of Florence since construction began last year on the new hotel.

A glimpse through one of the oversized windows fronting Main Street suggests the hotel is far from complete, but inside the three-story brick-faced structure, final details are underway. Extensive wood trim nears completion on the main stairway, furniture begins to occupy rooms and floor-by-floor the building is transforming from the organized clutter of an active construction zone to the serenity of a getaway destination.

According to Steve Moore, project general manager with the management company overseeing current operations, Strand Development Company, everything is expected to be ready to receive guests for their first large group of reservations scheduled for Oct. 17. A grand opening ceremony is planned for the coming holiday season, though a date has yet to be set.

Original plans called for an aggressive construction timetable and an opening date in time for the second year of ArtFields, held in April in Lake City. Once begun, however, several unexpected factors pushed back construction — more extreme than usual weather including winter storms and high levels of rainfall — and a tentative opening date was set for Sept. 15.

Moore said that when they realized that date would come and pass, the company decided to keep the delivery dates for furniture deliveries and their hiring process in place.

“We didn’t delay any deliveries of materials,” Moore said. “We didn’t delay the interview process and team selection process. So when the construction team is done and they turn it over to the operations side of things, we’ll need a period of time to go back here and make it hotel-ready. There’s a difference between construction clean and hotel clean.”

The front-desk teams and many of the hotel’s future housekeepers are already on the payroll, and Moore said the hiring process has been phenomenal. Even though the company hadn’t yet advertised open positions, it already has received almost 300 applications online for the 27 available positions, and it has interviewed 75-80 applicants.

“Word is out that you can go on to the hotel’s website and fill out an application online,” Moore said. He added that of those the company has already hired, 96 percent are Lake City locals, each of whom has gone through an extensive process that includes background checks and two interviews.

“We’ve been blessed, because Myrtle Beach has so many hotels and motels,” Moore said. “All of them need front-desk people, and all of them need housekeepers . . . and a lot of people in Lake City pay to travel to Myrtle Beach to work. To have a 57-room boutique hotel open up right next door to where they live (meant) I didn’t have any problem finding qualified, trained

housekeepers. It's a blessing. We have been able to find qualified candidates fairly easily for nontraditional positions. I think we have found a phenomenal bunch."

The Inn at the Crossroads includes 57 rooms, a business center, workout room and dining facilities, all of which require a thousand decisions to create. From carpeting selection to wall color to the linens that set the tone for each room, every detail is part of what will make the hotel a little different from the usual branded hotel.

"We get to create our own standards, higher than any brand standards," Moore said. "We get to create the design packages without a Hilton, or a Marriott, or a Choice Hotels look to it. It gives more flexibility to create something unique."

Though a hotel is typically designed to host out-of-town guests for brief visits, Moore said the Inn at the Crossroads also offers the local community an opportunity to congregate — whether after work in the lounge or before work with a business breakfast.

"There's more to a hotel than just an overnight room," Moore said. "There is a dining area that will be open for breakfast, and you do not have to be our guest to partake of breakfast here at the hotel.

"Lake City is becoming (a destination) again; you don't drive through Lake City on your way to some where else anymore. Now there's a place to stay and a reason to be in Lake City, and there's a facility to match what you're looking to do."

Its central location in the historic downtown meant the architecture of the three-story building needed to blend with Main Street's existing buildings, none of which exceed two stories.

Joe Rogers with the Lake City Partnership Council, owner of the building, explained that cohesion in building height along the street is maintained despite the additional level, because today's ceiling heights are significantly lower than those traditionally used in the early 1910s and 1920s. In the end, the parapet height of the three-story building is just a few feet higher than those of its older two-story neighbors.

Façades of three stores of such buildings that occupied the location were originally intended to be incorporated into the new construction. That plan had to be revised, however, when the detailed brickwork proved too unstable to be preserved. Instead, mathematical models detailed the brickwork, and the facades were recreated as closely as possible in the new building – to an approximate 98 percent match, according to Rogers.

"It's very, very hard to find a brick like the bricks that were used here in the early 1900s," said Rogers. "The one we used has the right color blend, but it's not the right texture, shape. Ninety-nine percent of people wouldn't know it."