

Mayor Kevin Burke slated to be new Hilton Garden Inn's first guest

New hotel could be open by mid-September

Tribune Star, Terre Haute, Indiana 8/28/2007

By Howard Greninger

TERRE HAUTE — The old Tribune Building, former home of the Tribune-Star in downtown Terre Haute, opened Thursday as the new Candlewood Suites.

The hotel, owned and operated by Dora Bros. Hospitality Corp., is a franchise of the InterContinental Hotels Group, the world's largest hotel group by number of rooms. Dora also owns the nearby Hilton Garden Inn, which has been open for one year.

Workers continued Thursday morning to clean windows, caulk minor exterior spaces and go through a checklist on each room. A stack of four boxes of Gideon Bibles rested near the front door, ready to be placed in each room. That was just one small detail that Trish Williams, regional manager for Dora Bros., worked to get accomplished before 5 p.m.

The hotel officially came online to rent rooms about 3 p.m., taking Internet reservations through InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG). The hotel was inspected for the last time Wednesday by IHG, but had been given a green light Monday to allow guests to stay.

Williams said one guest checked into the building Monday, with 16 on Tuesday and 10 on Wednesday, "and that was without any advertising. We really were not officially open yet." Williams said some rooms were taken by guests who had attempted to stay at the Hilton, which has all its rooms booked this week, she said.

"We have reservations for [Thursday] already and this weekend; we are looking good," she said, estimating about 50-percent occupancy at Candlewood for the weekend.

Williams said the building was about 90 percent ready early Thursday, and she expected it to be 100 percent by the end of the day. Some hotel workers were brought in from a Dora-owned hotel in Plainfield to help expedite last-minute work, she said.

Each room is slightly different in design, with one- and two-bedroom suites available. Guest rooms include a kitchen, with stove, microwave, full-size refrigerator, dishwasher and plates and utensils.

"All of our reservation system had been in a meeting room where front desk personnel had been training," said Tim Dora, owner of Dora Hotel Co. LLC, a hotel development and management company and co-owner of Dora Bros. Hospitality Corp. That system was moved to the front desk Thursday.

The hotel opens with 81 suites, with 16 more suites to open once the new Terre Haute Children's Museum, now under construction next door, is completed early next year. The hotel will occupy

the fourth floor, which is separate from the museum, giving the hotel 97 suites.

“Our target market is people who stay five-plus nights,” Dora said. “Candlewood Suites is a mid-market price.” Dora has a 140-room Candlewood Suites in Indianapolis and soon will construct a Candlewood in Columbus, as well as one in Bloomington next year, he said.

“Our interest in the Candlewood [in Terre Haute] has been extremely good and I am confident we will do very well. We have a lot of things booked in advance,” Dora said, adding that the hotel is part of a priority club for IHG.

Dora said the hotel opened somewhat behind schedule because of unforeseen renovation issues.

“We had a few more problems than we anticipated, but overall, it went very well,” Dora said. “The whole south side, the whole exterior wall south, we basically replaced all of it. It was in really bad shape. That was probably the biggest thing we did not expect.”

“We framed it out and covered the brick with EIFS, which stands for exterior insulation finishing system. It took a lot more time,” he said.

Tim E. Murphy, who is the band director at Terre Haute South Vigo High School, has photographically documented the construction/renovation of the building along Wabash Avenue into the Candlewood Suites. He has a Web site, www.terrehautehouse.net, where he has posted photographs he has taken, both inside and out.

“I always loved old buildings and historic preservation, and I saw an opportunity to document something positive that is happening in our downtown,” Murphy said. “The Web site got its name from the Terre Haute House that was demolished. It snowballed from there ...then about a year ago, I decided this was bigger than one corner and should cover all the great development downtown.

“I think it is such a great victory to see something preserved downtown. We’ve lost a lot of fine buildings in the last 75 years. I feel it is real important to show folks there is still stuff worth saving. I am glad there were people who had the vision to say this can be reused and adapted,” Murphy said.

“I am just so pleased that they did this and I think it says a lot,” he said.

After taking a quick tour Thursday, Rod Henry, president of Terre Haute Chamber of Commerce, agreed.

“What a facility. I look at it as taking a dinosaur, a building that was empty and unproductive, by somebody who could come in with the resources, creative juices, and the dream and vision to turn it into the showplace that it is now. I think it is amazing,” Henry said. “It is an asset to the whole community.”

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