

HOTEL ONLINE

The Ben in West Palm Beach Set for topping off

Alexandra Clough | The Palm Beach Post, Fla. | March 15, 2019 3:24pm

March 14-- Mar. 14--Another hotel in West Palm Beach is moving swiftly toward completion as the county continues to prepare for future growth in both leisure and business visitors.

The Ben is slated to open later this year on the site of Flagler Banyan Square, the old city hall site now being developed into a hotel, apartments and shops. On March 19, The Ben will be "topped off," a construction milestone meaning the building's last beam is placed at the top of the structure.

The Ben name refers to a home in West Palm Beach owned by a pioneering resident, Author Byrd Spilman Dewey, who owned land that later became Boynton Beach. She and her husband also owned a home in downtown West Palm Beach along the water dubbed Ben Trovato, said Frank Navarro, master developer of the hotel complex and a partner in the hotel with Concord Hospitality.

Evoking the pioneering West Palm Beach Dewey sets the stage for the themes of this 208-room hotel slated for 251 N. Narcissus Ave. It's Old Florida and history, plus adventure -- but with a modern twist. Expect a blending of design styles when the hotel is completed, including exposed concrete floor and late 19th-century period furniture.

Navarro said "ben trovato" means, roughly, "a very interesting story, in Italian. Plausible. It could even be true."

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So the hotel's adventurous decor will be a place where maybe the truth could be stretched a bit when travelers come back from, say, a fishing excursion. The effort might be assisted by a visit to a planned rooftop bar atop the hotel.

Although The Ben's decor suggest whimsy, the finishes and service will be buttoned down. After all, The Ben is a Marriott Autograph Collection hotel, which means the property will conform to Marriott's hospitality standards.

The hotel's completion by year-end is expected to be accompanied by the completion of apartments and retail space by that time as well, Navarro said.

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With the project planned for cultural events and entertainment, Navarro predicts the site will enliven this portion of town and create a reason for people to linger along the city's waterfront. "I do think it has the potential to be a destination, meaning if you come downtown, maybe you come to Flagler Banyan Square," Navarro said. "We're an authentic experience, right on the waterfront."

The Ben's advancement comes amid news of record-breaking visitors to Palm Beach County in 2018.

Discover The Palm Beaches, the tourism marketing organization for Palm Beach County, said year-end hotel performance data shows 8 million visitors came to the county last year, a 1.7 percent increase from 2017. The increase marked ten years in a row of visitor growth to Palm Beach County and serves as a good indicator of things to come.

Numerous hotels are in the works throughout the county to accommodate the growing demand.

In West Palm Beach alone, the Canopy by Hilton Hotel on Dixie Highway is set to open in the fall. Meanwhile, plans are afoot to build a Radisson Blu at 415 S. Dixie Highway, between Fern and Gardenia streets. An Indigo Hotel north of CityPlace, at Railroad Avenue, between Third and Fourth streets, also is planned.

In addition, One West Palm, a two-tower complex at 550 Quadrille Blvd. featuring offices, hotels and apartments, also has started construction.

Jeff Greene, One West Palm's developer, said he just inked a deal to have New York's Rockwell Group, "the best designers in the world," handle the towers' interior design. Rockwell will design the hotel, office space common areas, apartments and an indoor tennis courts that will convert to meeting space for more than 1,200 people.

Look for a contemporary design with plenty of photo-worthy features. "I want people to walk into the lobby and say, 'Wow,'" Greene said.

He expects the foundation will be poured in another month, at which point the 30-story project will start to go vertical.

Topping off is expected in about a year, with another year needed to do all the interior build-out of the towers, Greene said.

There's also talk about building another hotel next to the Palm Beach County Convention Center.



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Discover The Palm Beaches noted increases in visits both by leisure and business travelers. Interestingly, visits from international travelers increased by half a percent to 749,000, with growth from the United Kingdom, Brazil and Colombia.

But Discover sees room for more growth from the international markets, and in February it said it planned to launch new marketing efforts in Argentina, Canada, Colombia, Germany and Mexico.

Helping goose tourism was the West Palm Beach convention center, which has seen strong growth since a Hilton hotel opened there in 2016. Discover President Jorge Pesquera recently said that business and corporate meetings are an increasingly important element of the county's economy, providing a hedge against dips in leisure travel.

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