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Hotel brings more lodging options

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Jim Hannon/TimesDaily

Florence Mayor Bobby Irons speaks beside a concept rendering of the Marriott Residence Inn at its ground-breaking ceremony.

An \$11 million apartment-style hotel will begin construction in August adjacent to the old Sweetwater Plantation, and tourism officials expect it will accommodate visitors during peak tourism times.

The Marriott Residence Inn is expected to be completed by the fall of 2009, bring 35-40 jobs and is projected to have \$2.8 million in revenue for its first year.

The hotel will have a total of 110 studio, one bedroom and two bedroom suites that will include full kitchens, will be larger than typical hotel rooms and will resemble the layout of an apartment.

"The goal of the property is to provide a homelike atmosphere with business amenities and give a sense of community to its patrons," says Tony Contigiani, regional director of operations for Yedla Management Co., the project's developer out of Huntsville. "This can be achieved by guests connecting with guests, connecting with the associates and connecting with the community," he said.

Yedla Management also owns the Hampton Inn at Florence Boulevard and Mall Road.

The hotel will have a 24-hour market as well as evening socializing. There will also be a connected outdoor patio, and indoor pool and whirlpool, conference rooms, and a court suitable for volleyball, tennis and other games. The property will be pet friendly, as well as having boat parking and outdoor plugs.

"We are excited to add a Marriott Residence Inn to the brand mix of lodging properties in the area," said Debbie Wilson, director of Florence/Lauderdale tourism.

In 1994, Florence and Lauderdale county had about 500 rooms and since then, occupancy has grown to more than 1,000 rooms, according to tourism officials.

Wilson said hotel occupancy rates are pretty high, so another hotel that can help with overflow during peak tourist times is beneficial.

"There is enough demand for this to be viable," Wilson said.

"The hospitality industry is alive and well," says Steve Holt, president of the Shoals Chamber of Commerce. "We're playing in a good economy, not a perceived downturn."

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