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**Lancaster hotel opens doors**

By: Jim Skeen



LANCASTER - A grand opening took place Thursday for a Marriott TownePlace hotel, a project that signals an expansion of the city's hospitality industry and of better economic times.

The four-story, 92-suite hotel at Avenue J-8 and 20th Street West is the first phase of a retail complex by developer Rob Martin, who has a long history in the

Antelope Valley's development community. The project will eventually have approximately 180,000 square feet of floor space. The hotel is approximately 52,000 square feet in size.

The hotel, actually open for visitors since last month, employs 25 people.

It was originally planned for development in 2008, but was placed on hold when the economy, already in recession, collapsed even further in the fall season. The hotel is the first to have been built in Lancaster since the recession.

"This is a great sign of the economy coming back," City Manager Mark Bozigian said. "They are investing in Lancaster, and they are hiring people from Lancaster."

Jim Vose, chairman of Lancaster's Planning Commission, called the hotel a symbol of Lancaster's rising place as a destination for business travelers and tourists. City officials envision the hotel especially attracting those from the region's aerospace and solar energy industries, as well as families for soccer and softball tournaments, and from tourists seeking recreational opportunities, such as mountain biking and hiking.

"This is a sign we are pulling out of the recession," Vose said.

The hotel is the first four-story hotel in the city. It also represents the first project financed through the EB-5 program, a program that provides citizenship to people making large investments in the United States.

Nelson Mamey, owner of Mamey Investment Corporation, a partner in the project, said they were able to attract \$18 million in foreign investment within 30 days.

"Using it (EB-5 financing) was a creative way to solve the financing problem," Mamey said.

Martin said the next step in the project will be the construction of a 13,000-square-foot retail space. Construction is scheduled to begin next week.

Martin said negotiations are ongoing with several prospective tenants, but none of the talks are to the point where announcements can be made.

One goal is to attract either a regional or national restaurant chain to the site, Martin said.

Having the hotel completed will help spur those talks, Martin said.

The new hotel is designed for the extended-stay traveler in mind. Its suites include fully equipped kitchens and separate working and sleeping areas.

The hotel also has an outdoor pool, a 24-hour exercise room and laundry facilities.

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