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New water resort expected to be big 'stay-cation' draw

By Matthew Bruun TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

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FITCHBURG — Standing poolside in 84-degree air last night, it was almost possible to forget about the ice storm that left much of the region in a mess.

Spirits were high at the ribbon-cutting for the CoCo Key Water Resort at the Best Western Royal Plaza Hotel and Trade Center. The massive water park, encompassing 50,000 square feet and using 160,000 gallons of water, is a tourist destination that officials hope will rejuvenate the entire area.

"What we're offering is a much lower cost alternative to a vacation," said Robin Kirk, vice president of operations for the CoCo Key Water Resort division at Sage Hospitality Resources, the company that built the park and oversaw the renovation of the hotel. The hotel is being rechristened a Courtyard by Marriott next month.

Mr. Kirk said advance bookings at CoCo Key in Fitchburg exceed those of sister facilities in Danvers and Waterbury, Conn. An estimated 400,000 to 600,000 visitors are expected in its first year of operations, he said.

Economic conditions have made so-called "stay-cations" attractive options for families, he continued. And CoCo Key, with its massive slides, lazy river and dunk tanks, is geared toward that audience.

In his remarks to invited guests, Mr. Kirk said the city had been a welcoming business partner. Fitchburg represents the 10th water park built by his company, which looked for hotel sites near major highways. The Royal Plaza is visible from Route 2.

Mayor Lisa A. Wong greeted guests, but postponed her planned trip down the water slide last night to get back to storm recovery efforts. She joked she would be sure to inform the public when she reschedules, but only after the fact.

Jennifer Smith of Westminster found a break at CoCo Key from the rigors of the recent ice storm. She brought her sons, 4-year-old Keller and 6-year-old Brady, after getting an invitation from a friend who works there.

"They're having a blast," she said as she snapped photos of her splashing sons. "They're going to sleep



A deluge of water pours down on children playing at the CoCo Key Water Resort yesterday afternoon. (T&G Staff Photos/PAUL KAPTEYN)

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Celebrity guests were among the crowd, including Red Sox relief pitcher Manny DelCarmen and Gervase Peterson from the first season of CBS’ “Survivor” reality game show.

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