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**Making a splash: Indoor water park opens in Fitchburg**

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FITCHBURG –

Lisa Fitzgerald, from Westminster, brought her four nieces and nephews to the Coco Key Water Resort in Fitchburg for the park's grand opening Tuesday and had one reaction when she walked in.

"Wow, this is awesome," she said.

Fitzgerald joined hundreds of hundreds of first-time spectators, city officials and hotel staff for the grand opening of the park Tuesday.

The new 160,000 gallon indoor park includes a four-story water slide, a water playground including slides, climbing ropes, an electronic game room, and a food and alcoholic drink bar.

"It's just so thrilling that we're finally open," said Jamie Wolfe, general manager of the hotel.

The \$40 million project included the construction of the park and a complete remodeling of the adjacent hotel. He said the hotel will expand its payroll from 50 to about 250 jobs. Wolfe said the grand opening of the rest of the hotel – with new rooms and a new restaurant -- will likely be next month.

Robin Kirk, divisional vice president of operations for Sage Hospitality, which owns and operates the park, said developers chose the Fitchburg hotel because of its proximity to Route 2.

Kirk said the water park has the potential to "redefine what is means to come to this area."

"We think this is a very special place," Kirk told the crowd before he, along with the park's mascot parrot, Coco, cut the ceremonial red ribbon for the event.

Kids could be seen trying out the park for the first time Tuesday while lifeguards patrolled the pool areas.

Lisa Savoy, of Templeton, said her four kids, between 12-and 15-years-old, were all enjoying the park Tuesday.



Addison Roy, 16 months old of Ashburnham plays in the water at the Coco Key Water Resort at the Best Western Royal Plaza Hotel, Tuesday.



Manny Delcarmen, relief pitcher for the Boston Red Sox plays with his son during the VIP grand opening of the Coco Key Water Resort at the Best Western Royal Plaza Hotel, Tuesday.

"I think it's really nice to have something like this so close," Savoy said. "It's nice not to have to travel so far."

She said her kids were especially fond of the four-story water slide and a large bucket that fills with water and about every 10 minutes spills on to a group of screaming children.

The event also included special guests Boston Red Sox pitcher Manny Delcarmen, who was on hand with his son, and Gervase Peterson, a finalist from the first season of the CBS television show "Survivor."

"This is awesome," Peterson said looking out over the park. "What kid wouldn't love this?"

David McKeehan, president of the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce, said the project will attract tourists from around Boston, southern New Hampshire, Connecticut and Rhode Island.

"This has an opportunity to boost the entire region," he said.

He said the water park would be the perfect compliment for people who come to the area to pick apples in the fall or ski at Wachusett Mountain in the winter. McKeehan said attracting more tourists to the area will help other businesses in the region.

Mayor Lisa Wong said the resort represents "a wonderful economic stimulus" for the region and said it represents the "hopes and dreams of the future" of the city.

"This is a symbolic project of the potential in this city," Wong told the crowd before the ribbon cutting. The park is open for company events, birthday parties, family get-togethers and events for kids and families, Wolfe said.

Rates for the park begin are \$20 on weekdays and \$30 on weekends. The park will be running a promotional event today where the first 250 entrants to the park will be free and tickets for the rest of the day will be \$10. The park is open year-round from 11 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. daily, but is open Friday until 9 p.m. and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.

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