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New waterpark makes CT Holiday Inn major attraction

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Dennis Nessler



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WATERBURY, CT—The recent transformation of the Holiday Inn Waterbury from a relatively obscure, midscale property into a destination hotel has been achieved largely on the strength of one amenity. Granted that amenity happens to be rather significant, namely a waterpark.

Following its purchase in June 2007 by Sage Hospitality, the previously independent hotel was subsequently rebranded as a Holiday Inn and has since undergone an extensive renovation, which included the addition of a 50,000-square-foot CoCo Key Water Resort.

The hotel's general manager, Chris Costabile, said the hotel has already received a big boost from the addition of the waterpark, which opened for business in early October. "It's an amenity. The hotel is different in being a water resort, but we look at it like an entire experience. You check into a room and experience all a hotel offers. It's a hotel with a very attractive amenity," he said.

This particular CoCo Key Water Resort was built at a cost of approximately \$20 million. Sage Hospitality Resources along with Wave Development LLC developed the CoCo Key Water Resort brand.

The Holiday Inn Waterbury is home to the eighth CoCo Key Water Resort and Connecticut's first indoor waterpark. Costabile noted that while "the footprint is a little different for each, the attractions are pretty much the same."

He stressed that the hotel's location, with metropolitan areas like New York and Hartford in relatively close proximity, makes it a perfect fit for this amenity. For example, the Sheraton Ferncroft/Boston Resort in Danvers, MA, just outside of Boston, includes a CoCo Key Water Resort. Costabile noted that his hotel has already gained the business of many area residents who noted, "Now we don't have to drive to Boston." He added the typical demand radius for the waterpark is from 60 to 90 miles.

In addition to the two aforementioned properties, CoCo Key Water Resort developments are currently open at the Sheraton Chicago Northwest in Arlington Heights, IL; Clock Tower Resort in Rockford, IL; Cherry Valley Lodge in Newark, OH; Holiday Inn Central in Omaha, NE; Sheraton Cincinnati Hotel in Cincinnati; and Sheraton Sports Complex Hotel in Kansas City, MO. Additional CoCo Key Water Resort developments are under way in Mt. Laurel, NJ, and Fitchburg, MA.

Costabile acknowledged that there are many operational challenges associated with running a waterpark. For example, he pegged the additional energy costs at approximately \$1.5 million a year. "It's expensive to operate. Energy needs to run 24/7," he said, adding that approximately 180 new employees have been added just for the waterpark.

Costabile is hopeful that the company's new HVAC system with an energy mode will help

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Costabile is hopeful that the company's new HVAC [system](#) with an energy mode will help save on some of the costs. However, to counter the operational costs, he noted that he expects occupancy to spike about 10% as a result of the waterpark. He also expects average daily rate, which is already up about 20% for the year, to increase as much as 27% with a boost from the waterpark.

Costabile also noted that in terms of seasonal business, he expects every season to be busy, particularly holiday time, but summer will possibly be a little bit slower. Although, he also noted he expects to get a big lift from "summer camps."

Coco Key's décor and atmosphere are designed to reflect the tropical appeal of historic Key West and offer three water slides—the Shark Slam, Pelican Plunge and Barracuda Blast—the Coral Reef Cavern activity pool; a "dip in" movie theater; Coconut Grove adventure river; the Palm Grotto indoor/outdoor spa; Parrots Perch interactive play island; Pizza Hut Express and A & W Snack bar; the Wet Rooster bar arcade; and birthday party spaces.

Guests of the hotel, who have access to the waterpark through the first and third floors, are offered a number of different packages for the Coco Key Water Resort, which is also open to the public, according to Costabile.

He recently made use of a rather unique marketing tool when the GM decided to put a giant four-sided wrap on an adjacent building advertising the property as well as the water park. The 12,000 square-foot, brick, adjacent building had been a storage area for years. He noted the large signage has received lot of positive feedback.

In addition to the waterpark, the 284-room hotel also underwent a heavy renovation and now has updated rooms, a new restaurant/lounge, an indoor pool and a fitness center. The property also now has 40,000 square feet of meeting space.

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