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MEETINGS & CONVENTIONS GUIDE

The Goodwin readies for restaurant, rooms renovation

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Less than a year after buying the property, Northland Investment Corp. is moving forward with plans to give a major facelift to the 124-room Goodwin Hotel in Hartford.

Northland bought Goodwin Square, an office complex with the hotel attached, in June 2005 for \$41 million, adding to its already large footprint in Hartford, which includes the Hartford 21 development adjacent to the Hartford Civic Center.

To lead the renovation, Northland has put two new faces at the helm of the hotel: Christopher Barstein, the hotel's new general manager, and Russell Camolli, the hotel's new executive chef.

Barstein took his post at the Goodwin less than two months ago. He was previously director of operations of the 306-room Omni New Haven Hotel at Yale. He worked at the Omni for six years, but prior to that, worked in the restaurant industry, including running his own restaurant in Norwalk.

Barstein, a native of East Haven, calls his position at the Goodwin "an exciting opportunity."

"There are no projects going on like this anywhere," he says of the planned renovation.

Northland has contracted with DiLeonardo International, a Rhode Island-based design firm that specializes in hotel work, to spruce up the Goodwin. Representatives from the DiLeonardo came to The Goodwin recently to take a tour and should have design ideas by April.

"It's going to be a dramatic change," says Barstein, explaining that everything from styles and textures will be updated, "not only in the guest rooms but in the public spaces as well."

The hotel's two eateries — Pierpont's Restaurant, which serves breakfast only, and America's Cup Bar & Lounge, which serves lunch and dinner — will also be part of the renovations.

"We're excited about doing a new concept that's timely, not just for hotel guests, but for folks in the Hartford community," Barstein says of relaunching the restaurants.

One of the goals in the renovation is to "differentiate ourselves from our large chain competitors."

Over the last year, competition in Hartford's hotel market has heated up, with the Hilton Hartford completing a \$35 million makeover in March 2005, the opening of the Marriott Hartford Downtown attached to the new Connecticut Convention Center and the Crowne Plaza Hartford, which has also undergone recent renovations.

"There are a lot of hotel rooms downtown fighting for a share of the market," he says. "We've been holding our own, but is it as much as we'd like? No. But we're pretty confident that we can increase that with the renovations and our service initiatives."

Along with the physical upgrades, Barstein says he's planning several initiatives that will focus on polishing the customer service offered by the hotel's 85-member staff.

"It's not *what* but *how* it's delivered," Barstein says.

Once the renovation is done, Barstein says The Goodwin will be working toward upgrading its rating with AAA from three to four diamonds. In order to do that, the hotel will have to apply to AAA and outline the changes that have been made. Then, AAA sends out a "secret shopper" to evaluate everything at the hotel.

Working in tandem with Barstein, is Camolli, who as executive chef has dominion over all aspects of food at The Goodwin, including the restaurants, room service and catering.

Prior to coming to The Goodwin a few weeks ago, Camolli was chef d'cuisine for a catering company in Wallingford. He's a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) and his background in the food industry is varied. He's done everything from running the café at the Ritz-Carlton in Naples, Fla., to running his own restaurant.

Camolli was attracted to the position at

The Goodwin because of its location in the heart of the city, and its history.

"When I first did a walk through, I saw that the hotel had a lot of character," he says.

He describes his style of cooking with words like "fusion" and "globetrotting," but resists any strict labels. His focus, often, is creating the right mix of flavors, as well as colors for each dish.

"I look at a plate as I would look at a canvas," he says.

"I enjoy making food look great." ■

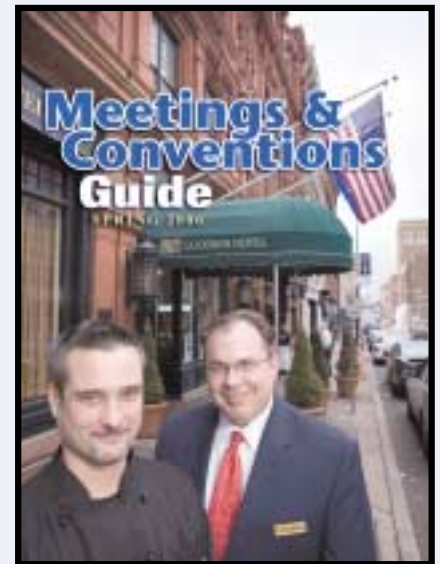


Photo by Steve Laschever

Standing outside the Goodwin Hotel in downtown Hartford are Executive Chef Russell Camolli and General Manager Christopher Barstein. The property was acquired last year by Northland Investment Corp., which is in the process of updating and renovating both the hotel and its restaurants. The changes come in the face of rapidly increasing competition for hotel, meeting and banquet business in the capital region.