

SALUTE TO BRICKELL

Area hotel competition getting fierce as newcomers innovate to fill beds

BY ASHLEY D. TORRES

Brickell area hotel competition continues to be fierce, with new properties opening this year vying for a slice of the downtown visitor pie.

Although downtown lodging only garnered 18.7% of overnight visitors in 2010, according to the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau, the area boasts a number of hotels with unique features that give them a competitive edge.

One of the new hotels breaking into the Brickell market is the Hampton Inn & Suites Miami Brickell – Downtown, 50 SW 12th St., which is to open in September. The hotel is to be a state-of-the-art, mid-range property, said Bernard Wolfson, president of hotel developer Hospitality Operations Inc., and is to satisfy the need for such a facility in the downtown market.

“We feel we’re going to fill a niche in the area,” he said.

In addition, the hotel is to feature an average rate of \$150 to \$200 depending on the time of year, Mr. Wolfson said, which is at least \$100 less than other Brickell-based properties.

Hampton Inn hotels also feature a unique 100% money-back guarantee for unsatisfied guests and as a result staff members are expected to ensure guests enjoy their stays.

To tap into the Brickell business market, the hotel is also to include 3,500 square feet of meeting space.

“Being in a business district,” said Paul Pebley, the JW Marriott Marquis Miami’s director of sales and marketing, “you have a built in market because you are surrounded by the business community.”

The JW Marquis, located just north of the Brickell Avenue Bridge at 255 Biscayne Boulevard Way, caters to the business traveler and corporate groups with its 80,000 square feet of meeting space.

In addition, the hotel features the only AT&T Telepresence video conferencing service in South Florida, which enables professionals to conference with business counterparts in 45 global locations. The hotel opened in October and its newer technology, Mr. Pebley said, provides a competitive advantage.

The hotel also boasts unique amenities for guests and downtown residents including its Jim McLean Golf School and retail space, which includes fine chocolate boutique Le Chocolatier.

Leisure overnight visitors have also had a positive impact on the downtown hotel market, which includes the Brickell area.

“We feel the momentum,” Mr. Pebley said, “as downtown is emerging as a viable location for leisure travelers.”

For the Conrad Miami, 1395 Brickell Ave., being in the business district allows the property to cater to the business clientele during the week and cater more to leisure travelers on weekends.

The modern property focuses on personalizing service, said Philippe Thevenet, the Conrad’s director of sales and marketing, and the 203-room hotel is small enough to emphasize name recognition.

“We all want to be called by our first or last name,” he said.

Rising hotel occupancies have benefited Miami-Dade’s properties, and with strong first quarter numbers, Mr. Thevenet said, the trend is expected to continue.