

Hotel expands to build business bookings

Houston Business Journal - July 21, 2006

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Houston Business Journal

The **Omni Houston Hotel** has purchased adjacent land at the Riverway location, and plans to spend \$9 million on a new ballroom, health club and spa.

Hotel executives opted for expansion as a way to attract more convention business and drive up occupancy in the 378 guest rooms. The super-sized Omni will be capable of accommodating conventions and other group business that were turned away in the past due to lack of available space.

The current 16,000 square feet of meeting space will increase to 26,000 at the Omni once expansion is complete.

"It will change this hotel dramatically," says Jim Snow, regional vice president of operations for **Omni Hotels** in Texas.

"We have a lot of demand on the hotel for space that size that we currently can't even bid on," he says.

An average of 27,000 to 28,000 room nights each year are attributed to group convention business. Snow is confident expansion will boost that number to 40,000 room nights per year.

The upgrade in size won't put the Omni in the same league as a true convention center hotel, says Tandy Lofland, president of Intergroup Realty Inc.

Lofland, who specializes in buying and selling hotels, notes that the Hilton Americas-Houston has 92,000 square feet of meeting space. But additional meeting space will give the hotel access to certain kinds of group business that it cannot get now.

"That could help them fill rooms," says Lofland, president of Intergroup Realty Inc. "That's a smart move."

The hotel at Four Riverway, near Woodway and the West Loop, is one of two Omni locations in Houston.

Existing space includes a 5,500-square-foot grand ballroom with dinner capacity for 300 to 350 people, and a 3,700-square-foot colonnade ballroom.

The new 10,000-square-foot ballroom overlooking the pool will have a grand foyer area and will accommodate 750 to 800 people at dinner.

The expansion will also bring the hotel up-to-date with current trends. Most new facilities include a full-service spa, but the now-popular amenity wasn't the norm when the Omni was built some 22 years ago.

The hotel currently has one spa treatment room, but the new 5,000-square-foot facility will have six upscale treatment rooms overlooking the pool. The spa will primarily treat guests but will also be open to the public.

The Omni's existing 900-square-foot health club will be replaced by a new facility 1,500 to 1,800 square feet in size.

To accommodate growth, the Omni acquired 11,967 square feet of land from American Ventures Realty Investors, owner of the Three Riverway Office Tower next door to the hotel. Omni paid \$400,000 for the parcel in June.

Executives with American Ventures say they support the expansion, noting the hotel and the 400,000-square-foot office building have augmented each other nicely over the years.

Omni executives anticipate construction to begin this fall, and it could take up to a year to complete.

Omni Houston Hotel Before

16,000 square feet of total meeting space

9,200 square feet in two ballrooms

900-square-foot health club
one spa treatment room
* average 27,000 to 28,000 room nights annually

After

26,000 square feet of total meeting space
19,200 square feet in three ballrooms
1,500- to 1,800-square-foot health club
5,000-square-foot spa with six treatment rooms
* projected average of 40,000 room nights annually

* From convention business only

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