

Hotel has no problem filling rooms

Hampton Inn officials pleased with bookings so far

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The rule of thumb is that it takes months for a new hotel to take off. But when it comes to Schenectady's latest, it took less than 12 days. The weekend after the Hampton Inn opened, nearly every room was filled, according to a hotel official. Now it looks as if that wasn't an anomaly: Bookings have stayed strong in the five weeks since then, Chief Operating Officer Greg Schahet said at Wednesday's official grand opening.

Two weekends ago, the hotel nearly sold out again, renting 86 of its 93 rooms, Schahet said.

Weekdays are big too - 68 rooms were rented Tuesday, mostly to business travelers, he said.

There has been one disappointment. The hotel has not turned out to be a hot destination for parents heading to the Union College graduation this weekend. Only 24 rooms have been booked so far.

"We think that's because most of them make reservations a year in advance," Schahet said, noting that the Holiday Inn is sold out. His family also owns that hotel.

He's hoping to pick up some last-minute reservations, but one slow weekend won't hurt him. Things are already going much better than expected.

"Generally the rule is that it takes a year to ramp up, so we're excited," he said. "We've had a couple of real busy weekends. A couple of nights were very close to selling out. The indications are pointing to us being pretty successful here."

Right now, rooms are going for about \$149 a night, although the prices drop when most rooms are empty and rise when the hotel starts to fill up.

The Hampton brand's claim to fame is deluxe accommodations, so the hotel boasts pillowtop mattresses, flat-screen high-definition televisions and free Internet access. They even provide a computer if you don't bring your own.

Photographs of Schenectady decorate the inn, ranging from a view of the lighted train bridge over State Street to a shot of the Central Park rose garden.

The only jarring view is the one from the hotel's breakfast nook. There, early risers have a perfect view of the four derelict buildings across the street.

Schahet acknowledged that he wouldn't be happy if he thought his guests would be stuck looking at those crumbling buildings for years.

"I'm not worried because I've been told change is coming," he said. "We knew there were other things in the works."

At the grand opening ceremony, County Legislator Gary Hughes said a plan for the buildings would be announced within weeks.

That plan involves relocating Pizza King, the only remaining business there. The owner originally refused to move until his lease expires in 2011, but he recently agreed to consider other options. He wants to move two blocks down, to the State Street storefront currently rented by Nextel.

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