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Warm cookies and upscale look at new \$15 million Schenectady hotel opening today

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When the doors open today at the new **DoubleTree** by Hilton in Schenectady, New York, visitors may have a hard time remembering the hotel it replaced.

Especially when they get a fresh, warm chocolate-chip-and-walnut cookie at check-in — a hallmark of the upscale brand.

After 50 years as a Holiday Inn on Nott Terrace near the MVP Health Care headquarters, the hotel has been completely rebuilt and expanded — a roughly \$15 million investment that took longer than expected to finish, and cost considerably more than planned.

The business has been closed since Dec. 31, 2013 while a portion of the structure was demolished, an addition built, and another section stripped to the studs and rebuilt like new.



DONNA ABBOTT-VLAHOS

The bar and lounge at the new DoubleTree by Hilton opening today in Schenectady, New York.

It was a painstaking process that became more expensive when the owners, Schahet Hotels of Indianapolis, learned they had to comply with updated building code requirements in the renovated section, such as installing wider doors, replacing the electrical wiring, plumbing and heating and ventilation system.

With the original \$12 million budget blown, and the completion date delayed about six months, there were times when President and CFO Greg Schahet says, only half-jokingly, he wanted to jump off a bridge. But the finished product was worth it.

“We wanted to completely change the building,” Schahet said. “We wanted people to not know this was a Holiday Inn.”

The end result is a 120-room hotel with amenities, furnishings, banquet space and guest services that are a big upgrade from the midscale Holiday Inn brand.

The difference is also evident in the prices for guests. Instead of nightly rates of \$109 to \$129 as a Holiday Inn, rooms will rent for \$139 to \$239 at DoubleTree, not including a \$16.95 breakfast that comes with eggs made to order.

“This is a totally different hotel, a totally different market,” said Jeffrey Brown, CEO of Schahet Hotels.

The owners are convinced they will be able to compete with comparable hotels in Colonie and Clifton Park, especially among travelers who participate in the Hilton Honors rewards program. It’s one of the few DoubleTrees in New York outside Manhattan.

The Schahets know the area well: they also operate the successful Hampton Inn and Suites in downtown Schenectady, one of nine hotels in the chain (all the rest are in Indiana).

For now they have the most up-to-date hotels in Schenectady, but competition will grow fierce within two years with the opening of two

hotels at the Mohawk Harbor casino development and another just across the river in Glenville.

The main lobby at DoubleTree is a large, open area with a modern-but-warm decor, fieldstone gas fireplace, business center, bar, lounge, snack room, and 72-seat restaurant called Sammy's Burger and Bistro that's open to the public for dinner.

There's a new exercise area, indoor pool, outdoor courtyard with fire pit, executive board room, and 3,000-square-foot banquet room with pre-function gathering space that can fit up to 250 for a sit-down reception or more than 300 for a cocktail party.

Guest rooms have new bathrooms with a back-lit mirror on a wider vanity and barn-style doors that roll open and closed. There are 40-inch TVs, new mattresses and box springs and many other improvements over the Holiday Inn.

And about those fresh cookies: they are baked daily in the hotel kitchen and kept warm in a special drawer at the front desk. Every guest is handed one in a small packet at check-in.

They are such a priority at DoubleTree that the hotel couldn't open until the warmer was installed and ready to go.

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