

Sweeney and Beck take back Parkway Plaza Hotel

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Retain 90 percent of employees

by Carol Crump

The “little more time to work things out” that Casper businessman Pat Sweeney requested last January ran out last week. The former owners of the Parkway Plaza took back the Casper hotel and convention center at noon July 8.

“In the normal transition of business, because of lack of payment and default on the contract, we’ll take the asset back,” Sweeney said.

The Casper entrepreneur won approval from the Casper City Council to move a parked liquor license back to the hotel July 6. The transfer of retail liquor license #13 became effective as soon as Hospitality Development took over ownership of the Parkway. The resort liquor license currently held by Amidee was cancelled at that point. “It’s simply procedural so there’s no interrupted service,” Sweeney told the council before the transfer was approved unanimously.

All of the Amidee employees at the Parkway lost their jobs when the hotel changed ownership. They immediately were eligible for rehire by Hospitality Development and interviews are already going on. Sweeney said the employees were to be credited for “doing the best they could with limited resources. Amidee had laid off employees to make payroll, so Sweeney anticipates hiring “about 90 percent” of the current employees and hiring back some of the hotel’s former employees, including the former executive chef. Sweeney will serve as the Parkway’s general manager, replacing Renee Penton-Jones, who left with Amidee.

Hospitality Development Corporation has also started to rebuild relationships with vendors and the utilities are now under the corporation’s name. Sweeney hopes to again lease space for a gift shop. Renovations will start as soon as financing is in place with the mall ways and the banquet side of things, he said. “The rooms will come next.”

The multiple liens that have been filed against Amidee were part of the negotiation that culminated in the takeover. There are two classes of debt at the Parkway, said HDC corporate attorney Drew Perkins. Trade debt such as the money owed to food vendors and linen suppliers is the obligation of the former owner. Liens filed against the Parkway Plaza by the Wyoming Workers’ Safety and Compensation Division for unpaid workers’ compensation premiums and the Wyoming Department of Revenue for back sales taxes also named HDC as property owner. Those liens will be end up being adjudicated. The Casper attorney said “those claims won’t stick,” because of HDC’s landlord-like relationship with Amidee.

Hospitality Development Corporation will take a different approach to the lien filed by a local plumber for work done at the hotel while it was under Amidee ownership and management. “We’ll talk with him and his attorney instead of just saying ‘no’,” Perkins said.

The bond holders that were party to raising funds for Amidee’s proposed renovations have contacted Sweeney about the possibility of coming up with a plan to protect their financial interests. HDC would have no obligation to accept an offer, Perkins said, although it could be an area for refinancing or equity.

Amidee Wyoming LLC is a subsidiary of the Houston-based Amidee Hotels and Resorts, Inc., which is a subsidiary of Amidee Capital Group. The bankruptcy filed by the capital group in January in Texas did not include the Wyoming subsidiary.

Although major renovations to the hotel and convention center promised by Amidee never materialized, Sweeney said the facility is in better condition than when he and Beck took it over in 1994. “It will take some time, some patience from the community,” he said.

Sweeney has already begun “major damage control.” The hotel lost a major regional convention that was booked for 2011 to a facility in Cheyenne due to lack of progress on renovations at the Parkway promised by Amidee, he said.

“We’re back...service, cleanliness, food quality, we can address immediately. We’ll be able to stop the bleeding.”