

## After Construction, Senator Inn & Spa survives, thrives by Kris Ferrazza

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(Augusta, Maine) – The Best Western Senator Inn & Spa has been a rock in a sea of changes as the venerable hotel has stood at the center of major construction and a new traffic pattern on Western Avenue.

General Manager David Hopkins, who has been with the company for a decade, said the development that has gone on around the inn is for the better – for the city and for the Senator – however, at times the extensive blasting and lengthy construction period posed a challenge.

“You felt like you were in a war zone for a while,” he said with a chuckle. The addition of Lowe’s and Target behind the inn, and changes to vehicular flow, required well over a year of heavy construction, and was accompanied by dust, noise, truck traffic and a lot of blasting.

“You would feel it just come right up through the ground,” he said of the explosive blasts. “The first few were exciting, but it got old pretty fast.”

Hopkins said Packard Development was very open to suggestions from Senator management, and they all did what they could to minimize the project’s impact on guests and patrons. Staffers worked hard to manage the dust that drifted onto the hotel site, sweeping the parking lot, thresholds and more.

“That was the biggest thing,” the manager said. “Our maintenance guys worked full time to keep us clean.”

Inside the air-conditioned hotel, windows were kept closed, so dust did not infiltrate the guest rooms or overall building, Hopkins said.

Losing the hotel’s nature trail to the development was unfortunate, the manager said, but there are changes in the works to rectify that situation too. “In its place, we’re putting in a meditation garden,” he said. Located right behind the hotel, on facility grounds, the garden will include planting shared from employees’ personal home gardens.

“It will be for employee and guest use, so we’re excited about that,” Hopkins noted.

The change in the traffic pattern also has had an impact on the hotel, but mostly for the better, he said. Vehicles now travel one-way between the Senator Inn & Spa and the Kennebec Journal to go directly to the Augusta Crossing shopping complex and then exit back onto Western Avenue. “In the beginning, it was a little bit of a growing pain,” Hopkins said of the change, but added the system of traffic control is safer now than it was before.

“That light was always so dangerous in the past,” Hopkins said, noting several guests had even been involved in automobile accidents at that site over the years. “It really was a safety factor.” He said it also has been a boon to business, since scores of shoppers now pass the hotel, restaurant and spa day and night to get to the new shopping complex. The stores also attract out-of-town customers to Augusta and the Senator.

“It is a little bit busier going by us now,” he said, adding, “We’ve had people stop in to check out the hotel, the restaurant and the boutique.”

With the sale of the Senator by longtime owners Vern and Betsy Cook to the Bangor-based Lafayette Hotels last summer, Hopkins said the transition has been a smooth one. “The new owners have been fantastic,” he said, adding, “We really have kept the vision of Vern and Betsy going.”

Hopkins said there were no personnel changes, as a result of the sale, commenting, “We’ve kept all the same people, and everybody’s on board with the new ownership.”

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The only change at the hotel facility since the transfer in ownership has been the addition of the Senator's new Immediate Rewards program. It rewards customers upon checkout with a check worth 10 percent of their lodging cost. The rebate can be used immediately for any service the Senator provides, including spa services, gifts from the boutique, drinks in the lounge, or breakfast in the restaurant, Hopkins said. It can also be put toward the cost of lodging at any Lafayette Hotels property. It is a way to reward customer loyalty, the manager said.

The Senator boasts 177 part-and full-time employees, 122 hotel rooms (including some pet-friendly), as many as seven banquet rooms, the restaurant, lounge, spa and boutique. The boutique features Aveda beauty products and even some items handmade by creative employees, including woodworking items, cards, mosaic tiles and gift items.

All in all, Hopkins said he is pleased with the shopping plaza construction, noting it is good for the city and the job market. The only downside; he joked, is "It's dangerous having all those stores back there."



*Staff photo by Andy Molloy*

*All Quiet: Dave Hopkins, general manager of the Senator Inn, is pleased construction behind the facility has ended.*

#### ***About the Senator Inn & Spa***

The Senator Inn & Spa is an Augusta, Maine based hotel committed to health and relaxation. Privately owned and operated by Lafayette Hotels, the Senator Inn & Spa is a full-service getaway that houses the award-winning Cloud 9 Restaurant, offering all-natural, local, and organically certified dishes that are as healthy as they are delicious. A 125-room property, the Senator Inn & Spa includes banquet facilities and a full-service spa complete with saltwater pool, fitness rooms, and a range of body treatments and products in our Spa Boutique. A member of the Green Hotel Association, the Senator Inn & Spa is a designated Environmental Leader, and pioneer in bans on smoking and trans fat. For more information, visit [www.senatorinn.com](http://www.senatorinn.com) or contact David Hopkins at 207-622-5804.