

'Grand opening' for new Downtown hotel



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Being able to add new life to century-old buildings gives Cincinnati the chance to differentiate itself from larger peers.

That was the message Tuesday from a line of speakers celebrating the grand opening of the Renaissance Cincinnati Downtown Hotel. Although the hotel at Fourth and Walnut streets opened about a month ago, the hotel's owner, city leaders and officials from companies involved in the building redevelopment praised the benefits of adaptive reuse projects in the urban core.

Remaking the former Bartlett Building was a \$50 million undertaking led by Crestview Hills-based Columbia Sussex Corp. The 18-story hotel has 283 rooms, 40 executive suites, and 14,380 square feet of meeting and event space. Also part of the hotel is d. Burnham's restaurant and the R Lounge. Columbia Sussex owns and manages the hotel.

Interim City Manager Scott Stiles called the building a "priceless addition" to the city. He said it wasn't long ago when Cincinnati police worked to remove squatters from the facility that had been vacant since 2010.

"These buildings are what successful cities are using to drive their growth," said Paul Muller, executive director of the Cincinnati Preservation Association.

The Bartlett Building, designed by famed Chicago architect Daniel Burnham, was built as the Union Savings Bank and Trust building in 1901.

The current structure is actually three separate buildings that have been blended into one over the years. The structure now features neoclassical architectural elements and those from the time of the Great Depression. The building was Ohio's tallest one for five years and the tallest in Cincinnati for 12 years.

The Bartlett Co. bought the building in 1985 and renamed it. The building is listed on the National Register of Historical Places.

Downtown-based FRCH Design Worldwide helped lead the hotel's architectural renovations, which is complete with a silver certification under Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards.

"In a city like Cincinnati, the assets that this city has is akin to creating distinction in a national market," said James Tippmann, FRCH chief executive.

Tippmann said Cincinnatians likely have many memories of visiting the building at some point in their lives. The building held banking, law and doctor's offices, jewelers and other retailers as tenants. Old bank vaults sit mothballed in lower levels of the building until a determination is made what to do with them.

The hotel is Downtown Cincinnati's first full-service hotel brand that's part of the Marriott chain. It's also the latest hotel to open Downtown since the 21c Museum Hotel opened at Sixth and Walnut streets in 2012.

The city's central business district now has about 3,500 hotel rooms, said Julie Calvert, a vice president with the Cincinnati USA Convention & Visitors Bureau. Next year, 249 more rooms are expected to open with the Homewood Suites and Hampton Inn & Suites renovation being completed at 617 Vine St.

Calvert said the addition of more rooms Downtown will be helpful in efforts to sell Cincinnati to convention planners and other groups seeking to host large events.

The city of Cincinnati didn't put any money into the project directly, but is providing a 12-year, 75 percent property tax abatement on building improvements for being LEED certified.

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