
**THE WEEKLY COMMUNITY
NEWSPAPER OF
ASSOCIATIONS, CVBs
AND HOTELS**

USA

VOLUME 40, ISSUE 9

FEBRUARY 21, 2022

NEWS

Galveston's Grand Galvez Being Restored to Historic Glory

By Grant Broadhurst

Mark Wyant's family was in the hotel business when he was younger—brands like Holiday Inn and Ramada—but his passion for the Grand Galvez in Galveston, Texas, is something deeper.

"I've always been fascinated by grand dame hotels that have been around for years and years," Wyant told *USAE*. "How they looked, how they felt, and the era they were placed in."

Many of those old, great hotels have passed into history, so when Wyant got the chance to purchase the 220-room Grand Galvez in his own Galveston backyard, he jumped on it. His company, Seawall Hospitality, purchased the hotel back in spring 2021.

They operated it as-is for a few months during the busy summer season before beginning renovations in earnest in September. The renovation, planned to finish by the end of the year, has a budget between \$40 million and \$50 million. While that amount of money could build a luxury hotel from the ground up, Wyant said it couldn't build the one-of-a-kind Grand Galvez.

Built after the 1900 hurricane that devastated Galveston, the Grand Galvez opened in 1911 with rooms going for \$2 a night. In its long history, the hotel has hosted notable figures such as Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Frank Sinatra, and Dean Martin. During the 1930s and 1940s, Wyant said the hotel was home for gambling

rackets run by the Maceo crime family, which operated out of the hotel and in the surrounding area.

"It made for a kind of interesting backstory for the hotel," Wyant said. "You have the Jazz Era and you have Prohibition and you have the gambling rackets and all that thing, and maybe some shady characters, but it seems like a fun time to kind of encapsulate, to take a read on for ongoing renovations."

Over the years, the original flavor of the hotel was lost to an extent, though the previous owner had brought back some of it. Much of the renovation design centers on bringing back elements of the original look.

For example, a 16-foot fountain is being carved in Italy for installation on the Great Front Lawn later this year. Other new details include a 44-foot x 17-foot mosaic with thousands of Murano glass tiles, a 1915 Ford Model T Roadster for the East Loggia, a new lobby bar featuring artifacts and photos from the hotel's opening and founders, and the return of Peacock Alley—a walkway from the lobby to the spa and ballroom that is being restored after 70 years of absence. The renovation also includes the hotel's 10,000 square feet of meeting space.

"Basically every meeting room will have a full refresh or a partial refresh, but we won't be doing anything to damage or change the historic elements in the rooms," Wyant said.

The renovation will also redo all guest rooms and all public areas.



A rendering of the Grand Galvez with its upcoming Italian fountain, which is set to debut later this year. Credit: Grand Galvez/Seawall Hospitality LLC

A new entertainment venue will be added to the hotel, which Wyant said planners will be "very pleased" by—though he declined to give more details on it.

The renovation is also adding new internet, new television systems, and other technologies as well as improving the infrastructure of the hotel. Wyant said this is important because he wants to set the hotel up for the next hundred years and they're "definitely not just polishing an apple here."

Because of the renovations, the hotel is playing a more low-key role in

Galveston's Mardi Gras celebration. In the past, the Grand Galvez has participated in floats and the parade, but this year the hotel is sticking with decorations. Wyant said the Grand Galvez plans to have a float and host events and balls.

Compared to the wild times of New Orleans, Wyant said Galveston's Mardi Gras is more family-friendly and controlled.

"I believe Galveston is actually the more fun one to go to if you have families and things because it's not crowded and so frenetic that you feel you can't move," Wyant said.

USAE's Pets Pix



The Sofitel Washington DC Lafayette Square recently welcomed one-year-old Louis, a 12-pound terrier mix, as the hotel's first Canine Ambassador. He was adopted from Lucky Dog Animal Rescue by the hotel's General Manager Karla Eralles.

POWER OF PURPOSE



DESTINATIONS INTERNATIONAL + pcma

2022 DESTINATION SHOWCASE

MARCH 25, 2022

Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center
National Harbor, Maryland, USA

Join us for North America's only one-day event that connects business events strategists with CVBs so they can better understand how CVBs are the key to making meetings and events successful.

REGISTER AT:

destinationsinternational.org/2022-destination-showcase

Publication of your pet's photo is a special benefit of being a *USAE* paid subscriber. Become a paid subscriber; then email us at petspix@usae-e-mail.com a favorite photo of your pet, and we'll try and run it in a future issue of *USAE*.