

Local hotels' owners seek to engage Tucson residents



A “body positive” pool party co-hosted with Brunch Babes Tucson is held at Hotel McCoy, 720 W. Silverlake Road. A national trend of older motels getting rehabbed and creating venues where locals gather is gaining momentum in Tucson.

In the not-too-distant past, a date at one of the long-standing motels along the freeway or south of downtown likely involved something shady ... and cash.

But a national trend of older motels getting rehabbed and creating venues where locals gather is gaining momentum in Tucson.

Several motel properties along the I-10 frontage road, between Speedway and Silverlake Road, have been bought by investors looking to capitalize on this trend.

The mid-century designs, coupled with their proximity to downtown and to entertainment venues on the west side, make them appealing.

Business partners Sunny Patel and Vishal Patel (no relation) recently bought the former Motel 6 at 960 S. Freeway and are converting it into The Tuxon, a hotel for guests with a welcome center for locals to also enjoy.

The duo plan a community-focused programming schedule that features live music, local art, movie screenings, tastings and cooking workshops.

“If you look at how hospitality is emerging, the connection to the community where they travel is important to guests,” Sunny Patel said. “You shouldn’t have to leave the hotel to experience the local community.”

The concept is fairly new in Tucson.

“You certainly see it happening at other places where the bars are crowded with locals,” Vishal Patel said. “Guests want to stay where the locals want to be.”

The Tuxon’s renovated 112 rooms are expected to open by the end of the year. The “welcome building” is due to open by next summer.

The rooms will include amenities such as walk-in rain showers, 50-inch high-definition TVs and craft beers in minibars.

The hotel’s name is a nod to the Old Pueblo’s often mispronounced name.

“For a lot of folks that aren’t familiar with Tucson, they pronounce it with a hard “C” instead of soft,” Sunny Patel said. “So it’s just a little play on words to get the buzz out there, especially outside of Tucson.”

Just south of downtown, at 485 S. Stone Ave., the Downtown Clifton is adding 22 new rooms and a kitchen and lounge for future events to welcome locals from neighboring Armory Park and Barrio Viejo, said Kate Kretschmann, the general manager.

The new amenities will be used for vintage fairs and mixers for the community, along with a new restaurant and bar.

“It’s an amenity for our guests and our neighborhood,” Kretschmann said. “We absolutely want to be a hotel for locals.”

The emergence of attractions for locals at hotels is the “next big thing,” according to Hotel online.

“When a property engages locals at a high level, it adds a steady stream of revenue that can help the property’s bottom line during slower times of year,” the hospitality industry site says. “The more locals that have positive interactions with your brand, the more likely you are to receive positive feedback on review sites, which we all know lead to more interest in your property.”

Having locals patronize a hotel property can also lead to more local stay-over guests.

“This strategy captures not only a traveler who wants a massage, but also a local user who has the potential for higher frequency of use.”

A local pioneer of engaging locals to its hotel is the former drug-dealer-frequented Silverbell Inn at 720 W. Silverlake Drive, which has been rebranded as Hotel McCoy with local murals, artwork for sale and weekly events open to Tucson residents.

“The community response has been great,” said Nicole Dahl, creative director and general manager at Hotel McCoy. “Guests are always happy to arrive and find a community event is occurring during their stay and not just another boring happy hour in the lobby.”

The hotel’s commission-free art program is one which Dahl is most proud of introducing.

“When I came up with the concept, it sounded good on paper, but I wasn’t sure if it would work,” she said. “Now, I find myself calling about five Tucson artists a week and telling them, ‘One of your pieces sold, come get your check’ and it’s honestly one of the best feelings.”

Sunny Patel said the success of Hotel McCoy’s engagement with Tucson residents is something The Tuxon hopes to emulate.

“We have followed some of the work the Hotel McCoy has done and hope to build on their experience,” he said. “They’re a great model and a great neighbor.”

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