

Ultra-luxury St. Regis hopes to open by Dec. 15 on Fort Lauderdale beach

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After six years of construction, Broward County's contender in the ultra-luxury hotel market, the St. Regis Resort Fort Lauderdale, is within weeks of opening.

Developer Fred Bullard said Monday that the 166-room hotel is expected to open on Dec. 15.

Although there is a lot of work left to do on the 24-story project, all of the materials and interior furnishings have been delivered.

Bullard said finishing the hotel relies on scheduling enough workers at the right time to hit the mid-December deadline. "It's a manpower issue," Bullard said.

The St. Regis expects to charge around \$800 a night this winter for rooms, a rate that Bullard said customers are prepared to accept. Although the average rate for a night in a Broward hotel was about \$100 last year, that figure is rising and set to rise even more with the completion of a number of new upscale hotel projects in the pipeline.

Work is under way on a 333-room Hilton hotel, a 517-room W Hotel, and two lodgings that will bear the name of casino magnate Donald Trump.

The St. Regis project, which also will have a condominium and a condo-hotel component, has gone from \$140 million when first proposed in 1999 to about \$210 million today, Bullard said.

He said design changes were the biggest obstacle to getting the hotel open.

"We're on our third interior designer," said Bullard, who operates a food and real estate conglomerate in Clearwater.

Bullard stepped in to complete the project started by the principal developer, John McDonald, who died unexpectedly of heart failure in December 2004.

Opening the hotel by mid-month would let the property, managed by Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, reap the premiums associated with holiday travel.

Bullard said the hotel has already sold out its rooms for the Super Bowl, which is set for Feb. 4 at Dolphin Stadium.

Bullard has a special interest in the game, having once owned the Jacksonville Bulls, part of the now-defunct U.S. Football League.

The St. Regis, designed by the Miami firm Arquitectonica, will include a spa, a 12,000-square-foot ballroom, and a pool on the seventh story.

It is terraced so that the shadow thrown by the building during the winter doesn't reach the beach.

A second-story pedestrian bridge will extend to the beach, allowing guests to cross State Road A1A without braving traffic.

St. Regis is asking the City Commission tonight for a design modification that will let the bridge be built without glass, as a hurricane precaution.

When it opens, the Fort Lauderdale property will become the seventh St. Regis in North America and the 12th worldwide.

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