



Lake County hotel operator sees room for more rooms

Lake County gets hotels' attention

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A Libertyville hotel operator is banking on business and hoping enough travelers come through to support a new venture.

Sandy Sun, who built and has operated the Holiday Inn Express on Route 137 near Milwaukee Avenue since 1999, sees a need.

"We have a shortage of rooms in Libertyville. I have to turn away a lot of people," she said.

Sun thinks there is untapped demand, a thought apparently shared by other developers. Two hotels are under construction along the Tri-State Tollway in Mettawa, and the huge KeyLime Cove Water Resort in Gurnee is scheduled to open in March.

Hotels also have been floated as possibilities or are in the planning process in Lincolnshire, Waukegan, Grayslake, Lake Zurich, Fox Lake and Zion, according to Maureen Riedy, president of the Lake County Convention & Visitors Bureau.

"There hasn't been any (hotel) building here in a couple of years, and the occupancy is up, so the developers start looking," she said.

Sun is proposing a four-story Hampton Inn in the northwest part of the village, just east of Route 45 and south of Peterson Road. The village board is scheduled to vote Tuesday on Sun's request to build the hotel one story higher than allowed in that zoning district.

The site is near the Libertyville Sports Complex and Libertyville Township soccer complex, which each can draw thousands of participants and spectators for various tournaments. But it is the corporate presence, including several smaller businesses, that Sun sees as generating customers.

"Typically, people don't travel more than five miles" from the hotel, she said. "Besides Motorola, Libertyville has a lot of little corporations, so they use rooms a lot."

The hotel would be Libertyville's fourth. Sun's 73-room Holiday Inn Express is the smallest.

"We know there's not a lot of hotels on that side of town to serve the businesses," said Heather Rowe, the village's economic development director. "We've been working with her for several months."

The village has an incentive to do so as it levies a 5 percent tax on hotel rooms. Revenue from that source generates about \$240,000 per year.

The funds have been used to promote the sports complex as a tournament site, and for financial support of MainStreet Libertyville, a downtown group, for example. It also is the source of the village's \$10,000 annual contribution to Riedy's organization.

The occupancy rate in the 7,300 Lake County hotel rooms increased slightly to 63 percent through July, compared with 61.4 percent through July 2006. The average daily rate of a room jumped from about \$80 to \$87 for the same period, according to Riedy.

Whether that trend continues remains to be seen.

"There's actually quite a few (hotels) proposed across the county -- you never know if they're going to go or not," she said.