

Hotels hoping to boost mid-week business

By MA NEFF

Special to the Business Times

The recovering tourism industry depends more than ever on regional business bookings, and in order to lure locals, many hotels and conference centers are undertaking significant renovation projects.

The first few months of 2004 are showing promise, according to Tim Bridwell, general manager at Fess Parker's Doubletree Resort in Santa Barbara. "Transient occupancy tax receipts are in double digits over last year, which indicates tourism is on the upswing," he said. The city of Santa Barbara has seen monthly increases of 10 percent to 14 percent in transient occupancy tax over 2003 figures for the same period.

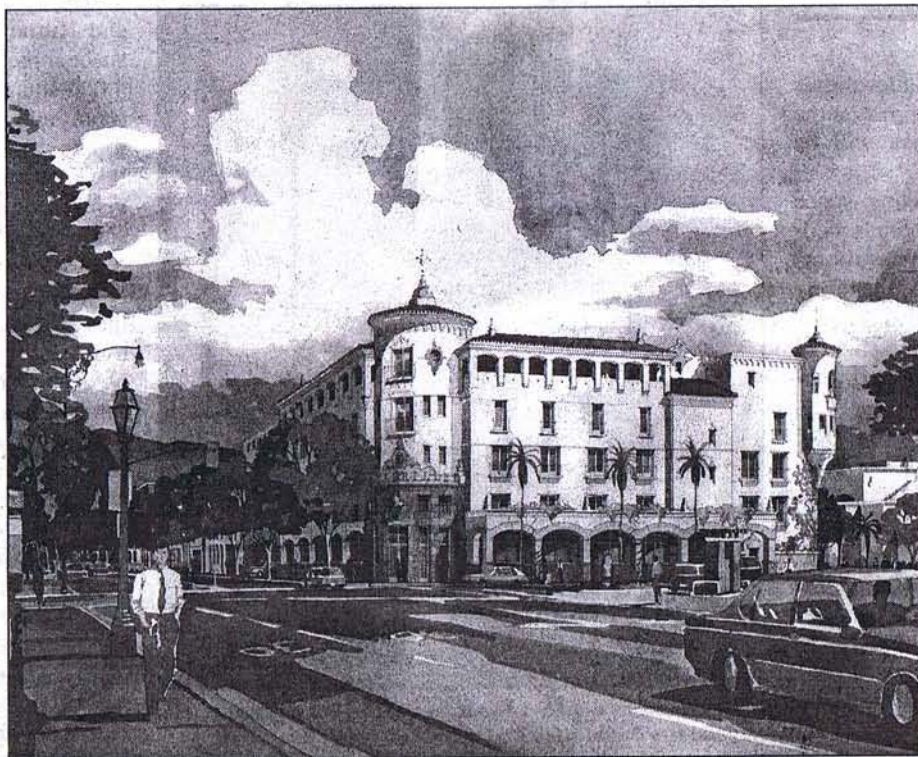
Much of the market driving the tourism increase comes from elsewhere in California, especially Los Angeles and San Francisco. "L.A. will always be a primary source of business groups," said Merrill Williams, public relations director at the Ojai Valley Inn & Spa.

The area's "drivability," or proximity to other California destinations, kept it from experiencing major fallout from the post-Sept. 11 tourism decline.

In addition, cities like Santa Barbara are popular due to what Hotel Carrillo developer John Tynan calls "sex appeal."

That appeal is bringing new weekend tourists, and more importantly, mid-week business for hotels.

After all, Williams said, "there's not



The Hotel Carrillo will be five stories tall and feature a rooftop pool and 5,000 square feet of meeting space when it opens in downtown Santa Barbara at the end of the year.

much reason to book a resort if you're going to sit in a meeting room all day."

Here is a look at how several tri-county hotels are revamping their properties.

OJAI VALLEY INN & SPA

The sprawling, \$70 million remodel and construction project at the Ojai Valley Inn & Spa is moving full-speed ahead. The 31,000-square-foot spa, its

café and 61 rooms have remained open during the construction on 166,000 square feet scattered throughout 15 building enclaves.

The 15-month time frame calls for the inn to reopen the entire lower campus, including 125 guest rooms, another of four planned restaurants and the entrance on Route 33 in June or July. It will open its new conference center and 207 guest

rooms in late August.

By mid-September, there will be two conference centers/ballrooms for corporate retreats, business meetings and social events. Between the two adjacent halls a group dining facility is being designed to serve each side separately or simultaneously.

Another addition at the Ojai Valley Inn & Spa is the Paseo luxury suites, which enclose a flagstone patio and central fountain. Echoing a 1920s classic Spanish style tinged with California élan, the suites feature patios, pergolas, balconies, corner gas fireplaces, and hallways and baths with Saltillo tiles.

FOUR SEASONS SANTA BARBARA

Situated on the shore of Montecito's Butterfly Beach, the 220-acre Four Seasons Santa Barbara Resort is a work in progress. Not that you would notice, sitting at the poolside watching the plasma screen tucked inconspicuously beneath the shade canopy.

Owned by Ty Warner, the hotel is undergoing a \$61 million renovation. And this comes on the heels of the 2002 spa construction that cost \$26 million.

Clusters of 20 and 60 guestrooms are discreetly undergoing architectural and interior design transformation led by Thomas Bollay Architects of Montecito and San Francisco-based Brayton+Hughes Design Studios.

Nine cottages, which contain reception areas and separate bedrooms, are

See **RENOVATIONS** on page 4

IMAGE COURTESY OF CERNAL ARCHITECTS

RENOVATIONS

Continued from page 3

also being renovated.

This fall will see a third cluster of 80 guestrooms remodeled and by the end of the year renovations on the main building, lobby, restaurant and kitchen will be completed.

The resort's 15,000 square feet of meeting space includes six boardrooms and the Logia ballroom, scheduled for remodeling in the fall while the guestrooms overhead on the second floor are remodeled, including the bridal suite with a curved staircase.

The La Pacifica ballroom, located across the street at the Coral Casino, isn't expected to be redesigned until 2005.

HOTEL CARRILLO

When the new Hotel Carrillo opens its doors sometime in December, Santa Barbara will have its first four-star urban hotel.

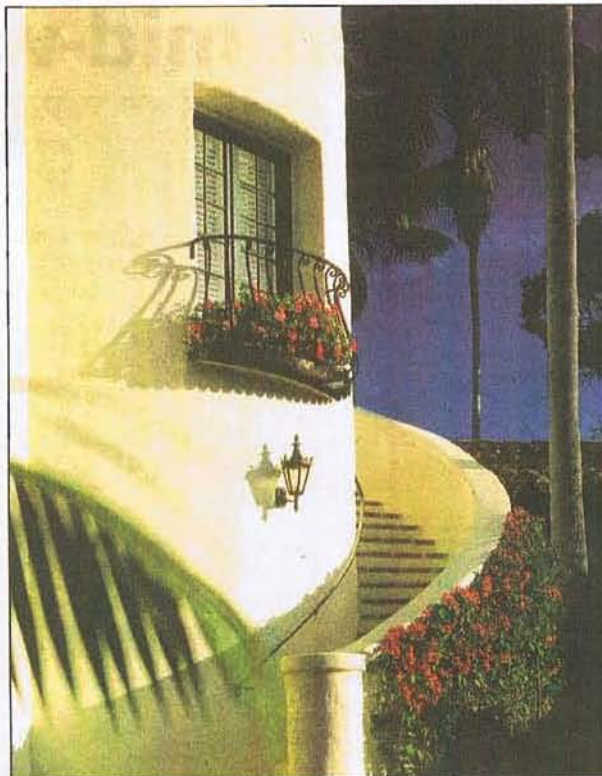
At five floors crowned by a 3,000-square-foot bi-level deck edging a rooftop pool, it promises to stand out as the third-highest building in the downtown skyline.

According to Brian Cearnal of Santa Barbara-based Cearnal Architects, the building's design is reminiscent of the Barcelona and Madrid styles.

The 75,000 square-foot-hotel is a joint project between landowner Richard W. Sanders Investments LLC and the Tynan Group at a cost of approximately \$31 million. Denver based J. G. Architects and Isabel Griswold Interiors of Beverly Hills are also on the project.

Tynan said that while the hotel plans to attract weekend leisure tourists, the developers are also counting on mid-week business. "Small-business groups are the key in terms of programming the hotel," he said.

Plans call for 5,000 square feet of meeting space that



Renovations at the Four Seasons Santa Barbara Resort include the bridal suite and the staircase leading to it.

include a large conference room with a seating capacity of up to 130 people, a midsize meeting room that holds up to 83 people and three smaller meeting rooms that each can hold 40 to 50 people.

FESS PARKER'S DOUBLETREE RESORT

Starting this July, Fess Parker's Doubletree Resort Hotel plans to spend \$2 million to update its meeting rooms, conference space and ballroom.

The summer brings an upsurge in vacationers, but fewer corporate events, so it makes sense to replace the

carpets and wall coverings in one fell swoop, according to Mark Erickson, director of rooms operations.

The beachside resort, jointly owned by Fess Parker and Hilton Hotels, has 44,000 square feet of function space, including a 12,000-square-foot ballroom, a 4,000-square-foot ballroom, an ocean-view banquet room and two 1,000-square-foot ocean-view boardrooms.

In business meetings that use sophisticated audio-visual equipment and digital capability, occasionally some of the Doubletree's low-hanging chandeliers obstruct sight lines.

So in seeking a more contemporary style throughout the hotel, as evidenced by the already remodeled executive conference rooms and spa, the chandeliers in the ballroom are being replaced with new fixtures at the same time as the carpeting and walls are re-covered.

The hallway and meeting area refurbishing is expected to be completed in September. Further remodeling is expected for the lobby café and bar areas in 2005.

RONALD REAGAN LIBRARY

This fall, the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley will open a new meeting and conference facility called the Presidential Learning Center.

In addition to a kitchen, serving area and café with indoor and covered patio seating of about 930 square feet, there are two open areas on the ground floor. One is a multipurpose room that can accommodate 350 seated and up to 450 people standing. A new auditorium is replacing the previous auditorium.

There is a 2,849-square-foot atrium on the second floor with a capacity of about 200 people. Also on the second floor are the Roosevelt and Jefferson meeting rooms, which both hold about 50 people seated.

In addition to the Ronald Reagan Library's main courtyard and previously-existing terraces, the Presidential Learning Center has its own 10,000-square-foot outdoor terrace on the north side called the Peace Plaza, which has room for approximately 700 people.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FOUR SEASONS