

# Conrad Coming to Town

## Luxurious Alternative for Travelers, Gatherings

By Rebecca Patrick

**T**his spring, Indianapolis will stand alongside such world-renowned cities as London, New York, Bangkok and Cairo as one of only 22 destinations for a Conrad Hotel, the luxury brand for Hilton.

With the Conrad name comes a reputation for first-class style and service – which was exactly what Indianapolis Mayor Bart Peterson had envisioned for the city, says Al Kite, chairman of the Kite Realty Group, whom the mayor enlisted to steer the project.

For his part, Kite couldn't be more pleased with the attention Conrad has focused on the local property.

"Conrad has recently made a push for a larger presence in North America. The Indianapolis hotel will be the first one in the U.S. built from the ground up as a Conrad," he notes. "With that distinction, we are benefiting from a variety of branding efforts for the hotel's world-class spa, French restaurant and (all-day) lounge." Each will be models for future Conrad properties.

Adds Conrad Indianapolis General Manager Jan Chovanec, "We are a pioneer in the luxury hotel business for the city and for the state ... we will be creating something totally different for local and state business and leisure travelers."

### The X Factor

The Conrad Indianapolis will have 243 guest rooms and 22 suites, which in comparison to many other downtown hotels would be considered small – but that's the idea.

"Everyone who enters the property needs to feel like they are being treated as an individual. That is going to be a very, very important component; we are creating a world that celebrates individuality in every sense," Chovanec offers. "That is so important because often when you walk into any hotel, especially in big cities, you are treated as one of the many guests who are coming to see the property."

Chovanec acknowledges that, at times, there are "good reasons for this because most of the big hotels are convention hotels," but that description doesn't fit the Conrad.

This "individual" approach is all about service and starts when a guest makes the reservation.

"It is my responsibility to start communicating to you then – to create a relationship with you as a guest in order to accommodate your needs much better – and find out information about your future stay. 'Why are you coming? What are your needs as a traveler?' Based on that, we will somehow create your experience," Chovanec explains.

"We are going to arrange the transportation, have someone who is going to greet you in the hotel and someone who is going to escort you to your room. That is how we will do things, and I personally believe that's the difference between our hotel and the rest of the hotels in this market."

Along with this approach, Chovanec intends for the traditional check-in process to disappear. "You didn't come here because of check-in – you would like to come to the hotel to experience everything. So we are trying to eliminate all those unnecessary steps for you and make the trip from the airport to the room very seamless, very painless, without wasting too much of your valuable time.

"You deserve everything that you need. You will have somebody here who will take care of you," he offers.

"It's so easy to say, 'Oh, there's going to be a plasma TV in every room,' or whatever. But our mission is to be the server; my job is to serve. My job as the general manager is to serve the guests, the community and my employees."

Conrad Indianapolis Manager Jan Chovanec believes the finished hotel will more than meet expectations.





**A change in the downtown Indianapolis landscape: the corner of Washington and Illinois streets before construction began** (photo courtesy of Indianapolis Convention & Visitors Association) **and a computer rendering with the Conrad Hotel in place.**

Like any new hotel or business that opens, expectations run high, but Chovanec is confident of winning over even the most discerning patron.

"I guarantee you that there will be people coming in saying, 'Oh, I don't like that color. My expectations were very different,' but I honestly can say that when you walk into our property, all of your senses start to vibrate," he states. "And that is a total experience. It's not just smell and taste. Maybe you don't like the color of the interior or something; however, there are many, many other senses that are going to override that one."

### **Audience and atmosphere**

When it comes to describing the Conrad customer, Chovanec sees it as "whoever reaches a certain income level" – be it from the corporate, leisure or social/event markets.

He believes, however, the hotel will be able to carve out several niches in the business community.

"With Indiana's politicians going to China and Japan (and elsewhere), they are bringing international business to the city. When those international businessmen come here, that is our opportunity. We definitely see that as a major market for us."

Keeping in line with corporate executives' expectations, the hotel's technology features "top-of-the-line-everything and it's the latest available," Kite states.

The hotel rooms offer complimentary high-speed Internet and wireless Internet connections. Additional connectivity can be found throughout the hotel, in the public areas and meeting spaces. While that's hardly new, the free aspect may be.

"We want you to feel comfortable here. We believe asking you to pay \$9.95 or whatever for 24 hours of Internet service doesn't make sense," Chovanec declares.

In the banquet and meeting rooms, convenience is also the name of the game. "We will have all the necessary equipment

right here for your meeting. If any technical problems do arise, we have our information technology butlers who are there to help you with any PC, software or hardware challenges you have," Chovanec explains.

As for the actual meeting areas, the second floor has more than 10,000 square feet of meeting space, plus six smaller meeting rooms and a board room that will hold 400 people.

"Our meeting and banquet facilities will be smaller than many hotels, so we will have the opportunity to create a unique experience. And really, we don't want to be perceived as one of the many banquet hotels – not at all. You will have your own unique experience in our own small banquet rooms," Chovanec surmises.

The hotel's restaurant and lounge also promise to be selling points.

"We have one of the best chefs – Jonathan Wright; he's a great personality and will be visible during the day, talking to the guests. They are going to be able to create their own menus, whatever they like," Chovanec announces. "But the atmosphere is still going to be home feeling. We don't want to create a kind of fine dining, fru fru food place. It's going to be a very homey, comfortable experience here in our restaurant."

Meanwhile the lounge will have food available from early morning until well into the night. In the afternoons, high tea will be served with an entertainment backdrop.

There will also be relaxing options for the business executive to pursue during his/her leisure time. The Spa at Conrad will have 11 treatment rooms and a variety of services, plus saunas and steam rooms. Also, there is a state-of-the-art fitness center with an array of cardiovascular equipment and weight machines, with personal trainers available.

### **Doors open**

Guests will first set foot in the Conrad Indianapolis in

mid-March during a soft opening, but the doors officially open two weeks later, just in time for the NCAA Men's Final Four basketball tournament.

As the property nears completion, interest from other Indianapolis hotels, media and the general public has increased Chovanec says, with "everyone wanting a sneak peak."

While he acknowledges that due to the mere fact that the Conrad is another hotel, it is competition for the existing establishments, he believes that all the area hotels will ultimately benefit from its presence because it fills a niche that was "missing from the city."

"Our property is positioned for a certain market; yes it's a local market, but it's also a national and international market that is looking forward to staying in a luxury hotel. When you

bring something totally different and of quality into the marketplace I believe it enhances the experience of the city and enhances the experience of the hospitality business," Chovanec explains.

"If we do our job correctly, we will push the (industry) bar to a much higher level, push the service to a much higher level, and all the hotels will take advantage of that."

Kite's ultimate vision for the property is straightforward. "I want it to become the "social center of Indianapolis – a place where people gather for the hotel, restaurant, lounge, etc.

"We want to overhear people say, 'Meet me at the Conrad.'"

#### INFORMATION LINK

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