

THURSDAY, JULY 3, 2014 ■ THE SUN TIMES

■ GREY HIGHLANDS

Plans for Talisman outlined

DON CROSBY

Sun Times correspondent

Kimberley residents have an invitation to attend next year's July 1 celebrations at a restored former Talisman resort.

"Next Canada Day you can come onto our front lawn to celebrate," Brian Ellis, one of the new owners of the property, said during Canada Day celebrations in Kimberley.

Ellis heads a Toronto development team of partner Wayne Levy and realtor Phil Calvano who purchased the 200-acre former family-oriented resort and skiing and snowboarding destination in May for \$1.8 million.

They plan to re-open it as a wellness centre and spa.

Ellis invited local residents to help in the selection of a name for the Beaver Valley property — for legal reasons it won't be called Talisman.

Sun
7/6/14

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No plans to reopen ski hills

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The resort closed in the spring of 2011 and two tax sales were held by Grey Highlands, which was owed more than \$2 million in back taxes, fees and interest. There were no bidders for the main resort facilities.

During the signing of the purchase agreement in mid May, Ellis estimated the buildings and grounds — including the nine-hole golf course, convention facilities and day lodge — need upwards of \$7 million in renovations. That doesn't include reopening the ski hills.

He told people at Kimberley's Canada Day celebration that damage from water and mould was so extensive the buildings were almost unsalvageable.

"How disappointed I was going through the buildings and seeing the condition they were in. A few more weeks and the buildings would have had to come down," said Ellis, with his grandson Liam Ellis by his side.

He expects restoration of the buildings will ensure their use for another 50 years.

"Hopefully Liam and other grandchildren will be running the Talisman property," he said.

Mould has been removed from one building, work will begin on a

second this week, followed by the day lodge, which will eventually become the spa.

Ellis said he recently learned the buildings need a major electrical upgrades. They plan to re-open the golf course, but not to expand it beyond the nine holes.

Calvano said he has a nostalgic attachment to the former resort, where his kids learned to ski, but he is also attracted to the peace and serenity of the Beaver Valley.



ELLIS

"It's a place for people to go and relax. That's

the direction we would like to go, make it the type of resort," he said.

Ellis said the plan is to open the hotel, restaurants and the golf course by the summer of 2015 and then develop a major spa, with outdoor hot tubs and waterfalls similar to the Scandinave Spa near Collingwood. The hotel will have about 85 rooms. There are plans for two restaurants.

"We're very positive about what is happening at the new Talisman, or whatever it's going to be," said Viv Nelles, who lives next door to the former resort.

"We've had a long period of uncertainty but these people seem to have a very clear plan. They seem to be well supported financially and they seem to be very deeply committed to working with the community. This is all very positive, we're very happy with that."

There are no immediate plans to bring back skiing. Ellis said he was told it would cost \$10 million to restore the lifts and snow-making equipment.

Ellis and his partners discussed constructing a longboarding facility, but ruled it out.

"It's just not in keeping with the market we're going after. We're looking at more of an adult market, more of a wellness centre," he said.

Calvano said he and Ellis have worked on several projects during the past 25 year and plan to add this one to a long list of successful ventures.

"We always like a challenge... I believe we will be very successful and that is why we have to plan it properly, put the right people in our organization to make sure we make the right decisions," he said.

Anyone with an idea for a name for the resort can send the suggestion to Ellis at Breholdings@Rogers.com

Thanks

Reed