

Talisman owners committed

THE SUN TIMES D7

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The owners of the Talisman Mountain Springs Inn are still living the dream of a fully restored resort. But when that will happen remains uncertain.

Brian Ellis and Phil Calvano, two of the three partners, say they have stopped trying to predict a precise date for a grand opening due to the uncertainty of ongoing renovations.

"I don't want to disappoint or give anybody any unrealistic expectation," said Ellis. "Our plan is the summer of this year but our plan could change."

The most recent challenge surfaced last fall when it was learned that all of the drywall in the rooms had to be torn out and replaced with newer material.

"We found that the drywall in all of the rooms didn't meet the fire code... it didn't even meet the fire code of the 1990s... we found wood paneling behind the drywall. And the drywall itself wasn't the right thickness or the fire rated drywall."

This latest setback has added another \$100,000 to the cost of renovations and delayed completion by another three months.

"Hence my apprehension with setting a date for the opening," Ellis said.

When Ellis and his partners bought the resort they knew there was a lot

of work to be done. But they weren't prepared for the surprises they uncovered.

"For example in the attic of Building 1, I've never seen so many extension cords in my life. It was like a spiderweb. ... The fact that place did not go up in flames years ago is beyond me."

The good news is the renovated resort will last generations.

"It will definitely outlive me. I don't even know if I'll live to the end of this renovation," Ellis joked.

Most of the plumbing and wiring have had to be replaced. Virtually all of the insulation windows, doors, and flooring are new.

All of the trim was replaced. The kitchen and restaurant were completely gutted and redone. The exterior of the buildings had to be redone particularly the back areas where the pools and other amenities are located.

More public bathrooms have been added and especially handicapped bathrooms which didn't exist in the original building constructed in 1960.

Rooms will be reconstructed to a five-star hotel standard with new furnishings, spa-like bathroom and elegant finishings. The convention rooms are getting a face lift and the second floor room above the restaurant will become an upscale ballroom. There will be also be several lounges.

The restoration of the golf course is complete including greens and irri-

gation and will open this spring. During the winter a new club house was built.

The makeover of the resort is geared to an adult market rather than a family ski resort as in the past.

Even without a fixed opening date calls are coming in every week for bookings.

"We're getting a huge amount of interest. There are a lot of people who feel an attachment to the place. And for the conferences a lot of the people love the idea that Talisman is tucked away in the valley; there's not a lot of distraction... we're one with nature... great place to think and unwind," Ellis said.

Renovations are new to Ellis and his partners. They have a long and successful track record of new builds which are much more predictable.

"You can budget and you are usually within budget unless there's some major site issue but you are usually fine and not into it for that much money. But here it just goes on and on and on. It's hard to keep a sense of humour," Ellis quipped.

The inn has three buildings. Two of them will be ready in time for the opening.

By the time the renovations are completed the project will be about \$3 million over budget. That doesn't include work on Building 3 which is to be the spa facilities.



Phil Calvano, left, and Brian Ellis, two of the owners of the Talisman Mountain Springs Inn.

By June Ellis is hoping the municipality will come up with a plan to deal with the exorbitantly high water and sewer rates that have plagued the Kimberley and surrounding area since the water delivery system was built.

The system was "overbuilt" in anticipation of residential and commercial growth in the Beaver Valley. Instead the few homes and businesses on the system continue to divide the high cost of operation.

"It's not an issue just for Talisman, it's an issue for everybody in that area. When you are paying much more for your water than your property taxes there's something wrong especially if you're a business," said Ellis, who applauds the efforts by council to find a

solution.

"The municipality seems keenly aware of that... they are taking this issue seriously and they are working towards a solution. I'll hold my applause to the end," he said.

Ellis is looking forward to hosting the Mudmoiselle again this year. It's a mud run fundraiser which features a 5-kilometre obstacle course winding up and down over the former Talisman ski hills. Last year's event raised more than \$98,500.

"We want Talisman to be the place where people can come and raise money for different charities... they get to enjoy the Talisman while raising money for a good causes like the cancer society," he said.

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