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THE STRIP: They won't dream of genie anymore

Aladdin officially becomes Planet Hollywood Resort

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REVIEW-JOURNAL



Liquid-crystal displays above the casino floor are an improvement OpBiz made while converting Aladdin to Planet Hollywood Resort.

Photo by [Jane Kalinowsky](#).



A chandelier glistens Monday near a door to the newly christened Planet Hollywood Resort.

Photo by [Jane Kalinowsky](#).



From left, former boxing star Sugar Ray Leonard, tennis star Pete Sampras, actor Bruce Willis, baseball pitcher Roger Clemens, magician Hans Klok and actress Carmen Electra pose Tuesday at a press conference announcing the arrival of Planet Hollywood Resort.

Photo by [K.M. Cannon](#).

The 2,430 nights of the Aladdin -- give or take a few -- are history.

With high-profile celebrities on hand and owners in high spirits, a Strip property dropped a name Tuesday and leapt into the future. With an event termed a soft opening, the once-Arabian themed hotel officially became the Planet Hollywood Resort.

"(Tuesday night) will be the first day the resort will turn on the lights in the evening and be known as Planet Hollywood," said Robert Earl, co-chairman of OpBiz, the hotel-casino's ownership group. "If you look around now you won't find Aladdin's name anywhere."

Actor Bruce Willis attended Tuesday's name-change-over ceremony, as did a mixture of Earl's friends from the restaurant and entertainment business, the property's business partners and media from around the world attended. Bold-type-worthy attendees included actress Carmen Electra, retired tennis player Pete Sampras, former boxer Sugar Ray Leonard, and semiretired pitcher Roger Clemens, who played last season for the Houston Astros.

The soft opening was a milestone for Earl and OpBiz, a partnership between Planet Hollywood restaurant founder Earl, investment firm Bay Harbour Management and Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide. OpBiz bought the property in 2004 for \$496 million.

Earl and Bay Harbour Management have a joint venture with an 85 percent interest in the property; Starwood holds the remaining 15 percent.

"We love the destination," said Bill Feather, who oversees the hotel operations for Starwood. "We're thrilled to be part of this project which we believe will be the epicenter of the Strip. We would not have gotten into this partnership if we didn't feel it was going to be a home run."

Earl promised Tuesday wasn't the hotel-casino's last coming out party; a grand opening would come Sept. 28-29. Meanwhile, work progresses.

Construction crews have been busy since February stripping the desert-stonelike features from the front of the property and replacing it with a more modern "Times Squarelike" look including large light-emitting-diode screens and better access to the property.

In a note to investors, Deutsche Bank analyst Bill Lerner suggested the changes look good so far.

"We believe that the new owners of the resort have made significant improvements to the ingress and egress of the facility," Lerner wrote.

Inside the property, which opened Aug. 18, 2000, and declared bankruptcy a little more than a year later, hotel-room renovations have begun. Earl said the plan is to have 1,000 of the 2,500 rooms completed in a movie-memorabilia theme by the grand opening. Earl also used Tuesday afternoon to announce a series of new restaurants and nightclubs scheduled to open in the months leading up to the grand opening.

Meanwhile, the hotel-casino's mall, which has been called the Shops in Desert Passage at the Aladdin, will become the Miracle Mile Shops on May 1.

And, to complement the changes at the hotel-casino, construction workers on Monday poured the first concrete for the \$750 million time-share project Planet

Hollywood Towers by Westgate. The 50-story, twin-tower, mixed-use project is scheduled to open in late 2009.

Planet Hollywood Resort will raise its new profile through promotional deals signed with high-profile companies.

A sponsorship agreement with Pepsi will have the property appear on 12 million soda cans to be distributed in Nevada and California.

Electronics manufacturer Panasonic has agreed to use the hotel as its base during the International Consumer Electronics Show and other conventions and to promote its new technology there. Panasonic already has 5,000 high definition plasma televisions in the property's public areas and guest rooms.

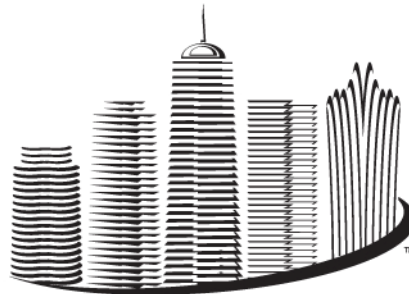
Also, the televised entertainment newsmagazine show "Extra" will have its own cocktail lounge in which correspondents can conduct interviews.

To live up to its Hollywood name, Earl said his hotel-casino will focus on bringing new entertainment to the Strip. There's progress there, too. "Stomp Out Loud," a spinoff of the Broadway production "Stomp," begin performances on Tuesday and had its grand opening Tuesday night. An old storage space for slot machines was renovated into 30,000-square-foot, 1,568-seat theater at a cost of \$28 million.

A new show by European magician Hans Klok will be housed in the 7,000-seat Theater for the Performing Arts. Previews run for three days beginning Friday; the regular engagement will start May 12.

Even if work is still in progress, fortunes are already improving at Planet Hollywood Resort. Feather said hotel rates have grown 30 percent since OpBiz took over. The hotel's occupancy is now in the 90 percent range, he added.

Star turns are only starting for Planet Hollywood, Earl suggested. He promised the fall's grand opening will be the biggest "Hollywood opening" the Strip has ever seen.



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