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## Downtown hotel work ahead of schedule

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Cape Coral's first hotel in 20 years could open as soon as Christmas and in time to throw a New Year's Eve party.

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More than three weeks ahead of schedule, the 75-room, business-class hotel will wait until September to finalize plans for a possible Cape Coral Chamber of Commerce gala, investor Elmer Tabor said.

"We have been lucky and we are very happy with our contractor, Pinkerton and Laws. We were also lucky that the subcontractors were able to come in ahead of schedule," Tabor said. "We hope to continue ahead of schedule, but of course we will have the rains to contend with. We'd like to have the chamber party and we're talking to them."

If Florida's summer rains don't interfere, the city's Community Redevelopment Agency could have its first major project. Originally planned for Pine Island Road, the Inn's franchisee, Cape Hotel Suites LLC, decided that the redevelopment area in the downtown looked like a better bet.

The district runs two to three blocks deep along both sides of Cape Coral Parkway from the Caloosahatchee River to Palm Tree Boulevard and up Del Prado Boulevard to about Southeast 44th Street.

"The hotel is the first out of the ground of a prototype by Hilton/Hampton Inns," Tabor said. "It is also the first built with the new CRA codes."

The CRA codes, which have yet to be formally adopted, feature buildings right on the sidewalk lines, rather than with setbacks. The construction went ahead under a Planned Development Project procedure.

The rules are meant to give the CRA a more urban look as befits a downtown area, Tabor said. The hotel could set the tone for the neighborhood and its growth.

The more-than-\$6-million hotel is under construction at 619 S.E. 47th Terrace. Plans call for four conference rooms. Although the Inn will have no restaurant it will serve the Hampton Inn continental breakfast.

Visitors to the Hampton Inn will be within a hop, skip and jump of Sun Splash Family Waterpark, Eco Park Nature Preserve and Greenwell's Bat-A-Ball Family Fun Park, Mike Jackson, the city's economic

development director previously said.

"These kinds of things are almost turning points for the city," Jackson said.

Once the hotel is up and running visiting family and friends would also have a place to stay, Tabor said. Once the CRA area begins building up, it will also become a destination.

CRA board members have toured other cities such as Boca Raton where warehouses were replaced with restaurants, bookstores, offices and a multiscreen movie theater.

There are about 39,000 units available for guests in Lee County, including everything from campgrounds to full-service resort rooms, said Nancy Hamilton, a spokeswoman for Lee County's Visitors and Convention Bureau. Of those, there are 370 hotel rooms in Cape Coral. The Hampton Inn would increase the room count by about 18 percent.

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