



WHERE WILL WE STAY?

Hotel Madison and Shenandoah Valley Conference Center beckons

BY JANET SMITH ('81)

For years, the Festival Conference and Student Center at JMU has regularly filled its capacity to accommodate campus and community events, including academic conferences. And family and friends of the university have encountered “no vacancy” when booking accommodations for major events such as commencement, Homecoming and Family Weekend.

The spring opening of the Hotel Madison and Shenandoah Valley Conference Center at the corner of Main Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Way addresses both issues. In addition to providing well-appointed lodging and event space, the new facility will provide an educational opportunity for students in the university’s Hart School of Hospitality, Sport and Recreation Management as they learn through hands-on experiences about the intricacies of hotel, conference center and restaurant management.

More than a decade ago, community and campus leaders, along with Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance and Chamber of Com-

merce officials, realized that a center to attract medium-sized conferences and events was needed by the community and JMU. “The desire, the will was there. The question was how to structure a plan to get partners on board and find a developer to take the project from an aspiration to reality,” says Eddie Bumbaugh ('73), director of public relations for Hotel Madison and a Harrisonburg native who previously served as executive director of HDR.

Once Paul Gladd ('87) became involved in developing the hotel and conference center, he began to focus on creating a conceptual plan for the project and a financial structure that would support it. His solution was to form a unique public-private partnership among JMU, the JMU Foundation, the city of Harrisonburg and his investment group, dpM Partners LLC.

With his educational background in accounting and finance—he double majored—and his three decades of experience in hotel development and the hospitality industry, Gladd was well-positioned to

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manage the intricacies of bringing the parties together to respect each other's interests and responsibilities. Gladd previously led the development team that renovated and expanded the Stonewall Jackson Hotel in Staunton, Virginia.

As a student at JMU, he learned and embraced “the matching principle,” which in business extends to a variety of situations, including matching the right people to a specific challenge. “My skill set in hospitality and my development experience aligned well with the ‘hospitality gene’ in this community and their desire to have a first-class facility in downtown Harrisonburg,” Gladd says. “I thought us getting together was a really strong match.”

“This project enabled the university, city and foundation to work together to bring a facility to Harrisonburg that otherwise would not have been financially feasible,” says Charles W. King Jr., senior vice president for administration and finance at JMU. “This facility meets many needs of the university while providing the city with long-term economic benefits. This was an excellent example of how the city and the university can work together for the benefit of all.”

Several years later, the dream of a 230-room hotel and 21,000-square-foot conference center emerged as an oasis of comfortable elegance ready to welcome the community as well as guests from elsewhere. The project was intentionally designed to draw from the exterior architecture of JMU and Harrisonburg to create a unique look respecting its location. The sense of place is further reflected in interior spaces, with custom-made carpeting reflecting the outdoor colors of the Valley and suggesting the movement of area rivers and streams and the Skyline Drive.

Artwork in guest rooms features images of President James Madison and important founding documents from the nation's history. The 180-seat Montpelier Restaurant and Bar, which is scheduled to open early

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this fall, will feature a private dining room named for Dolley Madison.

Two classrooms, office space and a meeting room were designed into the hotel's core area to make a first-class experience in hospitality management and related careers possible. “This facility provides our Hart School students with an on-campus laboratory to practice and experience what they are learning in their classes,” King says. “It also will provide many of these students with the opportunity for jobs and internships.”



The complex became a reality through the vision of (L-R) Andy Perrine ('86), president of the board of directors of Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance, Paul Gladd ('87) and Eddie Bumbaugh ('73), among others.

The students will learn from top professionals committed to ensuring the best in guest accommodations and services, such as farm-to-table dining supported by the Shenandoah Valley's abundant local sources of high-quality produce, meat and poultry.

Gladd believes the opportunities available at the hotel and conference center are imperative for the education of Hart School

students. “My college days were extremely important in my overall development, and the idea of giving back to JMU as it emphasizes an engaged learning experience for students is very appealing. Supporting the nationally recognized hospitality school was an interest of many involved and an integral part of the deal structure.”

Imparting JMU's and Harrisonburg's hospitality DNA to emerging leaders in the field is as important to Bumbaugh as it is to Gladd. “A key part of Hotel Madison's mission is to attract people to our area who may not otherwise be here,” says Bumbaugh. “That can come about through conferences and events and through our promoting the attractions, events and outdoor recreation—the whole series of amenities that make the central Shenandoah Valley a special place to visit.”

“We want to encourage people coming to the Hotel Madison and Shenandoah Valley Conference Center to arrive a day early and to stay over,” he says. As guests come to the area for conferences and other events, they are informed about campus and community opportunities such as the Forbes Center for the Performing Arts, Appalachian Trail, local vineyards, breweries, art galleries and museums, and downtown restaurants and shopping.

For Bumbaugh, the new complex is a shining icon to the possibilities created when people with vision come together. “I saw Harrisonburg's downtown decades ago when it was thriving and vibrant and then I saw the decline with the trends toward suburbia and the implications for downtown businesses and downtown in general.” Now he's proud to be part of downtown's revival. “It has been personally very satisfying.”

“I am lucky that what I do ends up being something physical that everybody can enjoy for years and years,” says Gladd. “You think, too, that you're creating a place where people are going to make memories. That's a special gift.”