



Flowood Conference Center stays busy

By
Charles Bailey

Journalist
Rankin County News



FLOWOOD- It's safe to say the sprawling Conference Center that sits next to the Sheraton Flowood Refuge Hotel was a good investment for the city and for Rankin County.

The approximately 30,000 square-foot facility has yet to go a full week without hosting an event. It is owned by the City of Flowood and leased to the hotel developer and management company.

The 200-room Sheraton Refuge offers white tablecloth dining, a resort-style pool and Lazy River, an outdoor event area, a 15-acre lake, a rooftop bar, and soon, a culinary school and spa. It is located immediately adjacent to the recently refurbished 18-hole Refuge Golf Course.

"We did a study years ago that showed that there was a need for a hotel and conference center combination, something of this nature," Flowood Mayor Gary Rhoads said. "We had about five different sites in Flowood we were looking at, and then we decided to add the amenity of the golf course that we already owned. From the (hotel's) rooftop bar, you overlook the whole golf course and downtown Jackson."

"They're holding a lot of

banquets and conferences there, more than we expected," he said. "A lot of them are pre-booked, which is a good thing. Then they pick up other conferences as they come about, with people needing meeting space."

Casey Callais is the general manager of the hotel and Conference Center.

"We might get two to three days between events to reset, but there have been times when we've had events not only back-to-back, but overlapping," he said.

"The Conference Center is just under 30,000 square feet. There's a Grand Ballroom that is about 14,000 square feet, and we can seat up to 800 people there. We have a Junior Ballroom that is right around 8,000 square feet. There are large pre-function areas, two smaller meeting rooms that are about 1,200 square feet, and a boardroom that's about 700 square feet.

"We've been busy, and it's certainly exceeded our expectations. The whole idea of the hotel and Conference Center was to bring more business back to Central Mississippi and to Rankin County, but also to let other businesses benefit from it, including other hotels. That's why we don't have 600 rooms there; it's only 200 rooms. The idea that we can overflow into some of these other hotels in the area to me is a benefit. I hope that they see it the same way, too."

Mayor Rhoads says the

combination of the hotel, Conference Center and golf course draws folks not only from throughout the state, but from Flowood and Rankin County as well.

"There are a lot of locals coming to the hotel just for 'staycations', he said. "The husband can play golf and the kids and the mother can do the Lazy River and hang out

at the swimming pool. May 13 will be a year since it's been open, and between COVID and (shipment delays), we just now got all the spa equipment in. So they'll have that opera-

tional soon. They keep adding the finishing touches. It's amazing that we're fortunate enough to have something like this in Rankin County."

