

Rolling out the carpet for the arts at The Main

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At The Main in Norfolk, 33 is one of the smaller numbers that define the newly constructed, soon-to-open, Hilton-branded hotel and conference center.

Thirty-three is the number of different types of finishes – wood, stone metal and concrete – featured in the new structure, the property's developer, Bruce Thompson, told a group of about 200 invited guests at a Feb. 7 luncheon.

The gathering was a formal announcement and introduction of "The Main Event: A Celebration For The Arts," set for March 24 to 26 ahead of the hotel's scheduled April 3 opening. Amid the chatter of the gathering guests, music performed by a Virginia Symphony Orchestra brass quintet was punctuated by workers using power tools just outside the doors. Work to put the finishing touches on the new building is at full tilt.

Located downtown at 100 E. Main St., at the corner of Main and Granby streets, "this facility, in my mind, is art," Thompson said from the podium in one of the hotel's ballrooms. The CEO of Gold Key | PHR Hotels & Resorts has pledged that all funds received during the opening weekend fete will flow to local arts organizations. The goal is to raise \$1 million for the arts.

A \$1,500 guest package will include a Friday night dinner at one of the hotel's restaurants, Varia or Grain; a private reception with Gov. Terry McAuliffe and his wife, Dorothy McAuliffe; a Friday night big band-style bash; Saturday breakfast and lunch; Sunday brunch; and all-access passes to all of the weekend's daytime events and exhibits.

With a cost of about \$150 million, The Main is nearly 500,000 square feet of total construction. The building, one of Norfolk's newest and tallest, has 21 floors, 300 guest rooms and two ballrooms, the larger of which can accommodate between 1,500 and 2,000 people, depending on the room's configuration. The luncheon convened in the hotel's smaller ballroom, which, although occupied by 200 people, had plenty of room to spare.

While leading reporters on a post-luncheon tour, Kurt Krause, The Main's managing director, said the hotel and conference center will employ nearly 500 people. Asked if he expects to meet the hotel's announced public opening date, Krause said, "I feel really good" about meeting that deadline.



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Guest amenities include a two-bedroom, 2,200-square-foot presidential suite with a nightly rate of \$2,500. The Main also has a rooftop bar with patio views of the Elizabeth River and Granby Street, private dining rooms, a swimming pool and a ground floor bar that will serve craft cocktails.

At the luncheon, Rob Cross, executive director of the Virginia Arts Festival, announced that Kelli O'Hara – a Tony Award-winning Broadway star, singer and actress – is the headline performer at the arts weekend's Saturday night main event. She'll join the Virginia Symphony Orchestra performing in the hotel's largest ballroom. Rob Fisher, who is a leading Broadway music director, is also slated to participate in the event next month. His accolades include serving as a regular guest conductor for the New York Philharmonic.

If \$1,500 is beyond your means, for \$50, participants will receive one admission to the opening weekend's Saturday and Sunday daytime events and exhibits along with lunch or brunch that same day with an opportunity to enjoy performances from regional artists.

At 1 p.m. on March 26, Thompson and other dignitaries will formally present a check for all the proceeds raised through the opening weekend event.

Cross said participating organizations "are really bringing their best of the best," for the arts festival weekend "as a way to showcase this venue and to raise money for their organizations and the great work they do, day after day, year after year."

In opening remarks at the luncheon, former Norfolk Mayor Paul Fraim expressed confidence that the opening weekend celebration will set the stage for The Main's long-term success and positive contributions to the city's tourism, cultural and economic scene.

"This is a spectacular venue, and it is the result of many years of thought and planning by the city of Norfolk, and more recently the execution of that vision and his own plan by Bruce Thompson, who has exceeded every expectation that anyone could have for this facility," Fraim said.

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