

BUSINESS CAMEOS

Lunch Served After Marriott Hotel Announcement



Blake Benson, left, with the Fort Smith Chamber of Commerce, Deputy City Administrator Ray Gosack and Judge Jim Spears sip soup following the Hammons hotel announcement.

CIVIC LEADERS GATHER AFTER HAMMONS TELLS OF PLANS

TIMES RECORD STAFF

John Q. Hammons announced Friday plans to open a new 150- to 160-room Marriott Courtyard hotel near the new Fort Smith Convention Center.

The hotel should open in early 2005.

Construction on the \$20 million to \$25 million hotel is planned for spring 2004 but could start as early as November.

The hotel will employ 80 to 120 people, Hammons said.

"This is a tremendous facility, but it needs rooms to support it. ... You need two hotels to sup-

port the Convention Center," Hammons said.

The planned addition will mean about 38 percent of Fort Smith's about 2,265-room inventory will be within walking distance of the Convention Center, Convention and Visitors Bureau Executive Director Claude Legris said. Currently, about 18 percent are in the downtown area, and 14 percent, or 314 of the total number, are new within the past year, he said.

The city served lunch to Hammons and area business and civic leaders in the north rotunda of the Convention Center after the announcement.



James Reddick, from left, with Guest Reddick Architects, Carl Corley, a member of the Central Business Improvement District and Bennie Westphal, a downtown Fort Smith property owner, talk downtown issues Friday morning.



Richard Griffin, center, gestures while talking to Deputy City Administrator Dean Kruithof, left, and Wally Bailey with the city of Fort Smith. Griffin is a member of the Central Business Improvement District.



Ted Frerking and Dana Taylor with the Holiday Inn City Center, and John McIntosh with NKH&W The McIntosh Group sit down in the Fort Smith Convention Center rotunda following the new hotel announcement.

Innovative Day-Care Centers Catering To Busy Parents

HEALTHY GOURMET MEALS AVAILABLE FOR TAKEOUT

By Lisa Cornwell
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MASON, Ohio — When Tina Mueller picks up her daughter at day care in the afternoon, she can also grab a gourmet takeout meal of roasted ginger pork loin, or perhaps burgundy beef stew or lemon-pepper chicken.

The Little Leprechaun Academy day-care center also offers free Starbucks coffee for parents, and a dry-cleaning drop-off service, too.

Nowadays, some day-care centers are literally catering to busy parents.

"It's great to know that you don't have to worry about preparing a

meal or having to resort to fast food at the end of a hectic day," said Mueller, a morning traffic reporter whose 3-year-old daughter, Alana, attends the day-care center near Cincinnati. "And it leaves me more time to spend with my children."

T.J. Corcoran, who owns the Little Leprechaun center and another in the Cincinnati suburb of West Chester, began the takeout service 2½ years ago after parents began complimenting the dishes he was serving to their children.

His centers also offer dance, martial arts and foreign language classes for the children. Next month, he plans to have a hair stylist start coming in once a month

to provide haircuts for the children.

About 280 children are enrolled at Corcoran's two day-care centers, where parents pay from \$150 to \$190 a week for full-time day care.

"I was determined to provide something much healthier than the usual chicken nuggets or hot dogs," he said.

He hired chef Andy Jacobs, who had owned his own restaurant.

"I understood immediately what he was looking for," Jacobs said. "I love kids, and I find it a challenge to gear healthy food to children and their families and help educate them about nutrition. A lot of the parents tell me their kids are eating better here than they do at home."

Mark Ginsberg, executive director of the National Association for the Education of Young Children in Washington, said he expects more and more day-care centers around the country to offer services for the entire family.

"We believe there has to be a strong partnership between schools, child care centers and parents," Ginsberg said. "Services like take-home meals are another step in creating one-stop shopping and would be a big help to families that are increasingly strapped for time in today's society."

On a recent afternoon at the Little Leprechaun, preschoolers dug plastic forks and spoons into paper plates brimming with Cincinnati chili over pasta, with cheese, mixed fruit and garlic bread.



PHOTOS BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Little Leprechaun Academy director Sherri McCrossen checks on her daughter Kali, 4, with the use of a video camera on Dec. 5 at the day care center in Mason, Ohio. The day care center has burgundy beef stew and lemon-pepper chicken on the menu, and parents are also offered free Starbucks coffee and a dry-cleaning drop-off service.



Chef Andy Jacobs cooks up a pasta dish in the kitchen at the Little Leprechaun Academy on Dec. 5 in Mason, Ohio.

Judy Hively, a teacher at the center, said the 5- and 6-year-olds in her class were reluctant at first to try anything that wasn't a chicken nugget or something else that looked familiar. "But I talked them into trying a bite or two, and then they realized they actually liked it," she said.

In addition to entrees such as Hungarian goulash and Sicilian

chicken, meals include imported pasta, fresh fruit and vegetables and a variety of breads. Individual servings are priced around \$5.50. Julia Kurtz, whose 2½-year-old son, Conrad, attends the day-care center, said the food is better than anything that she could pick up in most restaurants.

"It's unbelievable," she said. "They use fresh ingredients and

offer nutritious dishes that my children really want to eat."

"During the school year, I have to work until late in the day and that doesn't leave me much time to prepare good meals," said Kurtz, 38, who teaches reading at an elementary school. "Now, at least two or three times a week, I can just pick up a complete meal that I can quickly warm up at home."