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High-rise developer brings strengths to Vegas

Condo builder teams with locals casino on Koval Lane project

By Liz Benston

In the 15 or so years that Ellis Island Casino & Brewery executive Karen Dorsey has worked for owner Gary Ellis, several developers have approached the casino with plans to redevelop the 36-year-old property.

But it wasn't until Ellis met with Michael Peterson, an owner and developer of restaurants and condominiums in Chicago and Wisconsin, that the property decided to get into the high-rise business.

"We really felt that he had the strength and integrity to make this project happen," Dorsey said.

Peterson, a relative unknown in Las Vegas, is building two major condominium high-rises at Koval Lane and Flamingo Road. Both are condo-hotels -- a relatively new concept in Las Vegas that has been gaining popularity in other vacation markets in Florida and the Midwest. Such units are owned like condos but can also be put into a rental pool for a certain number of days each year, earning rent money for owners and managed by a hotel company.

Unlike many recent transplants participating in the high-rise boom, Peterson says he has a track record of condo-hotel projects stemming back more than a decade. Those projects, with names like Timber Ridge Lodge, Mill Creek and Harbor Cove, are rustic-looking waterfront developments at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin and a world away from the modern glitz of the Las Vegas Strip.

"He is one of the most informed condo-hotel developers in Las Vegas," said Maryann Haberman, a commercial real estate broker with Coldwell Banker Premier Realty in Las Vegas. Haberman helped secure the site for the Platinum and has worked with Peterson for the past couple of years.

"He's done it before, he knows how to do it and he's doing it again. That's a tremendous selling point," she said. "And his attention to details is unsurpassed with any other developer I've worked with in 31 years."

Peterson also has a trump card in basketball star Michael Jordan, a friend and colleague who has signed on to license a namesake athletic center and two restaurants in the tower.

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of the project is the partnership with Ellis Island. The nondescript building, down the street from low-budget apartments and across Koval from vacant lots behind the Strip, seems an unlikely neighbor for an ultramodern high-rise. The local casino has a loyal following among area casino workers and is known for bargain meals, dollar drinks and homey entertainment like karaoke.

By contrast, the 255-unit Platinum, at 211 East Flamingo Road, has sold units from the \$300,000 range to just over \$1 million. The 825-unit Aqua Blue, which will be built where the Super 8 Motel stands next to Ellis Island at 4178 Koval Lane, sells units from \$399,000 to \$1,125,000.

McCarthy Construction Co. representatives say they expect to begin construction on Platinum this month, while Aqua Blue is expected to start in the fall. Platinum, which sold out in six weeks, is anticipated to open in spring 2006. Aqua Blue, which has sold more than 426 units so far, is expected to be open by fall 2010.



The Platinum, a 255-unit condo-hotel complex at Flamingo Road and Koval Lane, is scheduled to open in spring 2006. Aqua Blue, an 825-unit condo-hotel complex adjacent to The Platinum is scheduled to open in fall of 2007.



Indoor / Outdoor Pool Terrace

