

# The Berkshire Eagle



The original reopening target for the Miraval Berkshires wellness resort in Lenox had been June 2019, and a mid-May opening was delayed by construction complications and the coronavirus pandemic.

STEPHANIE ZOLLSHAN - THE BERKSHIRE EAGLE

**After \$132 million investment, Miraval Berkshires rolls out red carpet**

**By Clarence Fanto, Eagle correspondent**

LENOX — The reinvented Miraval Berkshires wellness resort and its close cousin, the Wyndhurst Manor & Club, have just opened on the former Cranwell hilltop property overlooking October Mountain.

Delayed from a mid-May opening by the coronavirus pandemic and construction complications, the glamorous, 380-acre wellness retreat began hosting guests Wednesday, several weeks after the locally popular 18-hole golf course reopened.

For Hyatt Hotels Corp., it's a reported \$132 million investment, likely a record for the county's hospitality industry, including the \$22 million acquisition of the property from CampGroup LCC in January 2017.

Redevelopment, including 13 new buildings and 13 renovations, was handled by EDM Services, the Pittsfield-based engineering, architectural and design firm, under a \$110 million contract, according to EDM CEO Jeremy Richardson.

The resort's original reopening target had been June 2019. It's the third property flying Hyatt's Miraval banner, joining the original Tucson, Ariz., location opened 25 years ago and the recent Austin, Texas, site. Wyndhurst now is separately branded as a Hyatt Destination resort.

The property at 55 Lee Road (Route 20) includes 46 new rooms, for a total of 146. Miraval offers 100 guest rooms and suites, while Wyndhurst has 11 rooms in the historic mansion and 35 additional rooms in nearby cottages.

### **'Pent-up demand'**

Despite challenges facing the hospitality industry, General Manager Victor Cappadona, a Sheffield native and a three-decade industry veteran who signed on in September 2016, cited "a strong pent-up demand for travel" during a tour of the resort's "campus" Friday.

As a wellness resort, he pointed out, "We're not trying to `cure' anybody. What we're trying to do is give you the tools and resources to hopefully live a better life in balance by giving amazing experiences to help craft and change people's lives."

Current staffing of about 200 "colleagues," as Hyatt calls them, eventually should ramp up to about 400 full-time equivalents, including seasonal hires.

Now, with social distancing in place, the resort can accommodate 40 percent of what would be total occupancy in a non-COVID environment, Cappadona said.

"I think this is a great addition to the wellness destinations of the Berkshires," he said. "It's a delicate balance of making sure the colleagues are in the right place to provide an environment for people to deal with whatever life has thrown at them."

Whenever the state enters Phase 4 of the economy's reopening, Miraval and Wyndhurst aim to hit their annual year-round target of 70 percent occupancy. In peak season, with the resort completely filled, close to 300 guests would be on-site.

For Miraval, the goal for bookings, while flexible, is a two- to three-night minimum, while one-night guests can be accommodated in the Wyndhurst's 46 rooms. Rates are per person at Miraval, with meals and amenities included. A 23 percent resort fee is added to the bottom line, along with the 11.7 percent state lodging tax, half of which is returned to the town of Lenox. The Wyndhurst rates are per room, with a \$35 resort fee tacked on, plus tax.

All Miraval rooms and facilities are interconnected by passageways, Cappadona pointed out, so, in foul weather, guests "never have to go outside. You can live in your robe."

Safety for guests and "colleagues" are a top priority for Hyatt, he emphasized. Hyatt's corporate "Global Care & Cleanliness Commitment" includes collaboration with the Global Bio-risk Advisory Council "to develop industry-leading sanitation and experiential protocols designed to mitigate as much risk as possible."

For area residents and organizations, "there's an ingrained, long-term relationship with the community which will continue," Cappadona stressed. Day passes for locals to use the facilities, running from dawn until 4 p.m., including breakfast and lunch, will be available. Prices are to be determined.

At the Wyndhurst Club & Manor, local memberships are available for individual or family golfers and for use of a separate fitness facility, including an indoor and outdoor pool.

Miraval's high-end, all-inclusive experience includes three daily meals in the Harvest Moon restaurant and a "grab and go" snack bar, plus a long list of programs and amenities.

### **'Digital detox'**

For guests, Miraval's, "digital detox" wellness approach emphasizes outdoor programming — it includes hikes and equine activities — as well as smaller group settings to encourage social distancing for indoor programs such as yoga, fitness, culinary and meditation classes, which also are offered outside.

Guests even have access to the resort's private beach on nearby Laurel Lake, where programs include stand-up paddle, paddle yoga and kayaking, as well as meditation.

Miraval describes itself as a "digital device-free environment" in its public spaces. When guests check in, they receive a cellphone "sleeping bag" and are encouraged to store their devices in the locked safe in their rooms.

Digital-use zones are scattered around the campus, and guests who want to document their stay with phone cameras are asked to be mindful of others on the property.

"We know that in order to be `mindful' as part of the Miraval experience, the greatest distraction we have in society is digital," Cappadona said. "Getting separated from that to be able to be invested in yourself is the goal. The majority of our guests are extremely ecstatic when they can do that."

Miraval promotes a "Life in Balance" theme, "focusing on mind, body and spirit" through spa, equine, fitness and nutrition experiences.

Wyndhurst Manor & Club, offering less-expensive stays, aims to offer "a step back into the Gilded Age, a true-to-place experience for multigenerational families, golfers and those simply wanting to escape."

Wyndhurst's new restaurant, the 1894 Fireside Bistro and Bar, will offer classic American cuisine in a historic environment, while Sloane's Tavern remains a casual dining spot.

The resort has a no-tipping policy. It's currently offering a variety of introductory reduced-rate package specials.

As a well-known "wellness" destination, Lenox and the Berkshires made for a "very enticing location" when Hyatt decided to plant its flag at the former Cranwell resort, Cappadona noted.

"Wellness is something we've never needed more than right now," he said.