

Bringing people together



CALEB GILBERT | THE JOURNAL

Originally founded in South Africa in 2014, Delish Sisters opened in early August in the Shepherd Hotel in downtown Clemson, which is set to formally open on Sunday.

\$30M hotel opening with unique purpose in downtown Clemson

BY RILEY MORNINGSTAR
THE JOURNAL

CLEMSON — The construction of the Shepherd Hotel has undoubtedly caught the eye of anyone walking or driving through downtown Clemson over the past few years, and the more than \$30 million project is set to formally open Sunday.

Co-founders Rich Davies and Rick Hayduk guided The Journal on an extensive tour of the boutique hotel earlier this week.

Work on the project started nearly four years ago on College Avenue in the heart of downtown,

after Davies and Hayduk were connected by Clemson football coach Dabo Swinney.

HOTEL DETAILS

Hayduk said the 67-room hotel is a feat in and of itself due to the architectural challenges because of the size of the trapezoidal lot and various city ordinances. Davies said there is an 8-foot grade change on the 10,000-square-foot property between College Avenue and Sloan Street.

Visitors won't be overwhelmed by orange and purple colors in-



SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

Shepherd Hotel cofounders Rick Hayduk, left, and Rich Davies stand outside the hotel on Sloan Street in downtown Clemson. The more than \$30 million building will formally open Sunday.

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side — not that there is anything wrong with that duo, Davies and Hayduk said. The mission was to carefully curate the six-story building with a more neutral color and welcoming lighting throughout.

“We wanted this to be a community gathering spot,” Hayduk said. “We want this to be what the community needs. ... We’re going to start serving afternoon tea after the first of the year. That’s multigenerational (in bringing people together).”

Davies agreed, saying the concept of the hotel was to “bring people together,” and not just those spending the night.

“You’ll see people come in for lunch or brunch and they don’t leave,” he said. “From the standpoint of interior design, everybody knows the story of Clemson family. ... Clemson family, family tree, you’ll see a lot of trees in the design. That’s indicative of the Clemson family.”

The hotel has fielded concerns about outside noise, seeing as the hotel is smack in the middle of the city’s night-life scene.

“You can’t hear anything,” Hayduk said of questions about noise. “It was because we spent a truckload of money on the glass. It’s precast concrete, and the drywall and the gypsum that’s around the atrium, it’s 4X on the acoustical normal absorption of a piece of drywall. The entire atrium drywall is absorbing.”

Sleep machines are also in every room, along with blackout curtains.

Although the top roof has wide-ranging views of nearly all the downtown area, as well as Tillman Hall and Memorial Stadium, only guests and those attending sponsored events will be allowed access. Hayduk said casual receptions hosting up to 125 people will be open for booking. On the third floor and the end of the spiral staircase, special craft cocktails will be served at The Thomas, named after Clemson University founder Thomas Green Clemson. Davies said the cocktails are named after local influencers, such as university president Jim Clements and his wife, Beth, while barstools have replicas of brass military buttons running down the back of them. Unlike the college dives, Hayduk said he did not expect The Thomas to be a “volume drinking bar.” He also hopes alumni will eventually be saying, “We’ll meet you at The Thomas.”

CLEMSONLIFE CONNECTION

Arguably the most unique aspect of the hotel is its goal to hire ClemsonLIFE students and others with intellectual disabilities. The hotel carries the Christian faith at its core, with the name coming from a shepherd looking after his flock by loving it and tending to its needs.

The drive behind that mission originates with Hayduk, whose daughter, Jamison, has Down syndrome. In 2018, Hayduk adopted a son, Abe, who also has Down syndrome.

With that intimate and personal connection, Hayduk shared his vision with Davies, who bought the property in 2015, about employing LIFE students and alumni at the venture. A publicist for the hotel later told The Journal those with disabilities are paid a “competitive wage based on position and level of experience.”

Right now, there are 40 LIFE alumni and students working throughout the location.

In the lobby area, a retail area is set up highlighting local entrepreneurs and those with disabilities selling art. Inside rooms, guests will find special paintings done entirely by LIFE students over the course of the past year. The ClemsonLIFE program started at Clemson University in 2009 with just five students in hopes of providing them with a chance at a real college experience while also acquiring life skills and, eventually, jobs. Now, there are 44 students in the program.

RESTAURANT INSIDE

On the College Avenue side of the hotel, visitors can dine at Delish Sisters, which opened in early August. The cuisine restaurant was founded in South Africa in 2014, and the sisters — Katie, Becs and Jules — linked up with the hotel and LIFE program to join in the effort of hiring those with disabilities. Breakfast, brunch and lunch is served from 7 a.m.-3 p.m. daily, while there are plans to offer dinner in the near future. Restaurant doors on the left side of the lobby will close at 10 p.m., but hotel doors will stay open until 11 p.m., Hayduk said. After 11 p.m., people will only be able to get in with a key card or by a night manager allowing access.



Community gathering

The roof of the Shepherd Hotel in downtown Clemson has picturesque views of Memorial Stadium, Tillman Hall and the downtown area. The hotel will formally open on College Avenue on Sunday.

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