



French Lick Springs Resort and Spa restoration announced

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FRENCH LICK -- Two companies with deep roots in Indiana announced at a press conference at the French Lick Springs Resort and Spa on April 12 their plans for the formation of a joint venture to acquire and renovate both the French Lick Springs Resort and Spa and the West Baden Springs Hotel.

Blue Sky Casino LLC was formed by CFC, Inc., an affiliate of Cook Group Inc. in Bloomington and Lauth Group, Inc., a national real estate development and construction company headquartered in Indianapolis. The companies plan to develop Orange County in conjunction with the casino expected to open by the beginning of 2007. The purchase of the French Lick Springs Resort and Spa from the Boykin Lodging Company of Cleveland closed April 13.

"Our vision is to develop the Midwest's finest destination resort and conference facility by bringing together two of the most historically significant grand hotels in the Midwest and linking them with the casino approved by Orange County voters in 2003," explained Cook Group chairman Steve Ferguson.

While the French Lick Springs Resort and Spa has been in continuous operation for more than 100 years and continues to be open to guests, the West Baden Springs Hotel has not been open as an operational hotel since the early 1930s. Approximately \$37 million has already been spent by CFC restoring the public areas at West Baden and regular public tours are currently scheduled daily.

Blue Sky will completely renovate the French Lick Springs Resort & Spa. Restoration costs are estimated at approximately \$30 million for the West Baden Spring Hotel, and up to \$80 million for the French Lick Springs Resort and Spa, which will include restoration of the hotel and the historic golf course.

The plan calls for restoring the area's dramatic Donald Ross-designed golf course. It will be returned to the original design that hosted the 1924 Professional Golfers of America (PGA) Championships, one of the sport's major championship events.

"The joint venture ensures the historic preservation and restoration of two of the most significant historic assets in Indiana, the French Lick Springs Resort and Spa and the West Baden Springs Hotel," said Ferguson. "Orange County has a rich tradition of tourism and gaming. We look forward to partnering this new gaming facility with the area's existing landmarks and recreational attractions to create a total vacation experience we believe will be unmatched in this part of the country."

With more than 3,000 acres available for additional development, long-term plans include a second championship golf course and world-class instruction academy, plus numerous other amenities aimed at drawing visitors to this secluded, beautiful and historic community. CFC has been involved in projects in French Lick and West Baden for more than eight years.

Benchmark Hospitality International, one of the nation's top hotel and conference facility management companies, has been selected to manage the French Lick Springs Resort and Spa. Based in The Woodlands (Houston), Texas, Benchmark has more than 25 years of experience operating award-winning luxury resorts, hotels and conference centers.

"We intend to bring back this under-valued region economically by providing jobs and a wealth of new economic development," Ferguson said. "By establishing a close working relationship with

(the Towns of French Lick and West Baden), the county, the state and existing attractions such as the (Indiana Railway) museum, Ski Paoli Peaks and Patoka Lake we believe we can achieve this vision and benefit all parties."

CFC is a real estate development and management company with special emphasis on preserving architecturally significant buildings in south central Indiana. Since 1977, Lauth has developed billions of dollars worth of facilities throughout the United States. A licensed general contractor in 49 states with projects completed from coast to coast, Lauth is one of the nation's leading development and construction firms.

"We are pleased to partner with the people at Cook Group on this important economic development project for French Lick, West Baden, Orange County and the State of Indiana," said Robert L. Lauth, Jr., chairman and CEO of Lauth Group, Inc. "We are both committed to making Orange County the premier vacation and tourist destination in the Midwest, and this team is uniquely qualified to make that happen."

Benchmark Hospitality International operates resorts, conference centers and hotels both domestically and internationally. The company manages 29 projects in 13 states and Japan, including Turtle Bay Resort in Hawaii, Scottsdale Resort and Conference Center in Arizona, The Chattanooga in Tennessee, Cheyenne Mountain Resort in Colorado, Del Lago Resort in Houston, Landsdowne Resort in Washington, D.C. and the Founders Inn in Virginia Beach, to name a few.