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HISTORIC HOTEL BEGINS LIFE AS CONDO

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HOLLYWOOD -- For a time, it was the place to go in **Broward** County. New York City could have its Plaza, Chicago its Palmer House. But **Hollywood** in Florida had the **Hollywood Beach** Hotel, the proverbial playground for the rich.

For a while, anyway. First, the Great Hurricane of 1926 took some of the glitter off, less than a year after the hotel opened. Then came the Great Depression. One of its victims was Joseph Young, the founder of **Hollywood** and builder of its most famous hotel.

The **Hollywood Beach** Hotel -- which opened only during the season, from November to April -- went through a succession of proprietors after the stock market crash in 1929, one of them the U.S. Navy during World War II. An indoctrination and training school taught the latest in scientific warfare: radar.

After being the **Hollywood Beach** Hotel again in the 1950s and '60s, another organization bought the peach-colored building in 1971 for teaching purposes. The Florida Bible College held classes in the hotel until 1980, when a developer bought it for \$16 million in an attempt to develop a time share **resort**.

Now another group of developers, who bought the hotel last year, is trying to bring back the glamor of the 1920s, converting the palatial building at the eastern end of **Hollywood** Boulevard into a combination shopping mall and condominium **resort**.

It will be called The **Hollywood Beach**. A **Resort** Condominium. The shopping mall will take up the first two floors, while 360 residential units will be scattered on the five floors above. ``All the units were sold in three months,`` said Warren Rapkin, one of the new developers. The prices ranged up to \$175,000.

Residents are scheduled to start moving in later this month, a process expected to be completed by December, Rapkin said. The shopping mall should open in the spring of next year.

A parking garage and perhaps a set of movie theatres will be built in the building just west of the hotel in what was once a gymnasium for the rich. The tower building south of the main hotel will remain a time-share **resort**.

While machines carve out the insides of the old pleasure palace, veteran residents and prospective tenants have stopped by to reminisce about the hotel's glory days. Rapkin, who is developing the hotel together with Diane and Harvey Birdman and Samuel Rappaport, said he once saw a woman in the lobby literally overcome with emotion.

“The woman was sitting here crying,” Rapkin said. “Her son was conceived in this hotel.

“We must have had hundreds of people coming in here who had only nice things to say about years past,” Rapkin said. They were years that began in 1926 with the completion of what was called Joseph Young’s Ninety Day Wonder.

“I remember seeing them pour the foundation,” John Causey said, noting that in the early days the only way to get across the Intracoastal Waterway to the hotel was by barge. Considering that the hotel opened in the pre-air conditioning era, Causey came to perform a valuable service for the owners: “I used to sell them ice.”

The grand debut was in February of 1926. “I was there the night they opened it,” said Myrtle Gray, who was one of Young’s bookkeepers.

“At that time it was very glamorous, very beautiful,” said Gray, now a member of the historical society. “There wasn’t another like it in this area.”

Causey said the hotel enjoyed an international reputation. “Fine food, and, as I recall, they claimed they had one employee per guest. So they gave good service.”

The ballroom featured some of the great entertainers of the day, such as Sophie Tucker and Eddie Cantor. Speaking of Cantor, Causey said, “I remember being told he was paying \$80 a day for a suite and people said, ‘Boy that’s a lot of money.’”

The hotel, which featured a direct wire to the New York Stock Exchange, was built well enough to survive the hurricane of Sept. 18, 1926.

“They had mule teams up in the lobby with shovels, shoveling the sand out,” said Robert Anderson, who went on to become vice president and controller of the hotel after the war.

Anderson, a Barnett Bank official whose wife Cathy is a City Commissioner, said he especially remembers the war years, when the hotel was made an outpost of the U.S. Navy.

There was fear that the Germans might attack from submarines, and secrecy about what the Navy was up to. “The word radar was a word you couldn’t use, couldn’t even mention,” Anderson said.

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