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New owner spending millions on Talisman in Grey Highlands

Chris Fell



Brian Ellis, the new owner of the former Talisman Mountain Resort, expects his new hotel/spa/golf course development on the site to be open and operating by Canada Day 2015.

Ellis gave local media a tour of the Talisman construction site on Dec. 6. Ellis and his business partners purchased the former ski resort from the Municipality of Grey Highlands several months ago and work commenced immediately to get the property back on its feet.

For several years Talisman was bankrupt and abandoned. It existed in a ghost-like state of limbo as the receivership and tax sale processes dragged on. Significant damage had been done to many of the property's buildings by flooding and squatters.

Ellis told reporters the old resort was in much better shape than what would have been expected when his company took ownership.

"Surprisingly enough, it was not in bad shape. It actually looked a lot better than it does today. Right now it's a construction site," he said.

Ellis did admit he and his business partners knew they were buying a major renovation project with the property. A project outside their comfort zone - they usually build new buildings.

"We knew what we were buying. We knew there were issues. Nothing we have found has shocked us very much to be honest," he said. "This is by far the largest project of this nature for us. This is a full restoration."

The scope of the re-development of Talisman is huge. Ellis said the budget for the project is \$5-6 million. It includes a brand new drainage plan for the property, re-doing the majority of the hotel rooms on the site, constructing a spa facility, new pools, restaurants and re-building the golf course.

The new entity will not feature skiing when it re-opens in 2015. Talisman was once famous for its skiing facilities. Ellis said skiing just isn't a viable business for the property and replacing the lift infrastructure would be too expensive.

Talisman will be reborn under a new name to be announced (with community input) soon.

"Look at the views. They are incredible," Ellis said while standing in one of the second floor conference rooms of the main Talisman building. "These are some of the best views in all of Ontario."

Ellis and his wife Therese have a personal history with the resort. Therese learned to ski at Talisman and she recalled their first weekend away without children being at Talisman.

"It's all coming back to me now," she said during the tour. "There is a lot of work ahead. Brian and his partners have really worked hard on this project."

Some parts old aspects of Talisman will be preserved, while others will be fully modernized. The spa will have a Nordic feel to it and will feature a waterfall and grotto. When finished there will be 95 fully modern hotel rooms on site.

"I keep calling it a heritage building. It's not really old enough, but it is a heritage building to this region," Ellis said. "The way we're fixing it up it represents renewal. It will be a hub of Beaver Valley."

When complete the development will employ between 100-130 people.

Ellis is reaching out to local organizations to develop partnerships. He plans to meet with Georgian College in Owen Sound soon in an effort to develop a program for college students to come to the new Talisman for culinary and massage programs.

"We would love to be able to mentor a lot of students," he said.

Ellis also hopes that guests will have the option to ski when visiting the new Talisman. He said he hopes to develop a relationship with the nearby Beaver Valley Ski Club to allow visitors to ski at the neighbouring resort.

"It will be beautiful when finished," he said. "We're all thrilled it's going to come back to life."