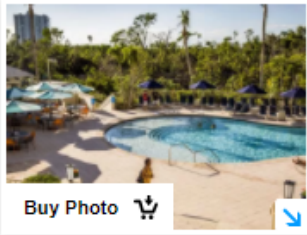


December 17, 2017

Naples Grande reopens with new look, following damage from Hurricane Irma



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(Photo: Dorothy Edwards/Naples Daily News)

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The Naples Grande Beach Resort looks a little grander after a multimillion-dollar makeover triggered by Hurricane Irma.

The waterfront resort quietly reopened for business Friday. Employees served up Champagne to the first guests at check-in.

The resort has been "renewed, revitalized and reimagined" with new flooring, new paint, new furniture and new offerings including Mantra, a lobby bar serving sushi and other Asian-inspired fare.

"It's like a brand-new hotel for us," said Frank Cavella, the resort's marketing and sales director.

While Irma hit other hotels and resorts across Collier County, [Naples Grande](#) off Seagate Drive near Clam Pass Park saw some of the worst damage — and remained closed for more than three months. It's one of the last properties to reopen after the storm, which hit Sept. 10.



6 Photos

Photos: Naples Grande Reopens since Irma



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"It's just nice to be back at work, to be open," Cavella said.

Irma battered the resort's roof, causing parts of it to crumble and allowing the storm — and its wind and rain — to get inside the high-rise tower that overlooks the Gulf of Mexico. There was damage from the top to the bottom, including flooding on the first floor.

With the destruction so extensive, the owners decided to renovate the hotel rather than just repairing the damage.

The 18-story hotel reopened with only 90 rooms available. All 474 rooms will be ready for occupancy by January, with more floors reopening every few days.

Construction crews are still working on the guest rooms and the ballrooms. New beds for the rooms were still getting delivered to rooms Friday, and the ballrooms were still being recarpeted, including Vista, offering 5,802 square feet of meeting space on the first floor in a contemporary setting.

"We're starting back slow," Cavella said. "We've been closed for a long time. All the energy from the staff is what's exciting."



The Naples Grande reopens on Friday, Dec. 15, after repairs from Hurricane Irma damage was completed. Parts of the hotel are still under construction from water damage. (Photo: Dorothy Edwards/Naples Daily News)

The improvements went beyond the inside of the tower. They include lush new landscaping and a resurfaced pool, surrounded by new patio furniture and umbrellas.

Though the resort was closed for months, it continued paying its staff, whether they came in or not. Many employees worked to get the resort back in shape, volunteering to help with painting, landscaping and cleaning throughout the property's 23 acres.

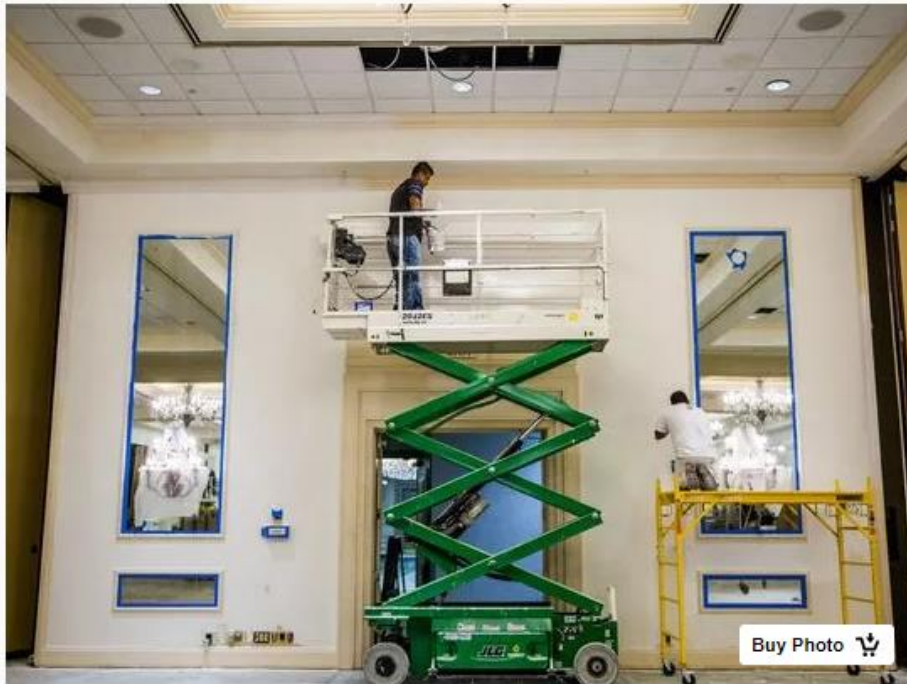
Staff helped relocate 80 groups that planned to stay at the resort from Sept. 11 to the end of the year. Much of that business went to other area hotels.

"We kept a lot of that here in our backyard," Cavella said.

The resort will host its first big meeting Jan. 3.

The storm brought employees closer together as they worked to get it reopened, encouraging more cooperation among different divisions, said Jacob Damouni, the resort's manager.

Having the resort closed was hard on everyone, and employees are ready and eager to serve guests, he said.



The Naples Grande reopens on Friday, Dec. 15, after repairs from Hurricane Irma damage was completed. Parts of the hotel are still under construction from water damage. (Photo: Dorothy Edwards/Naples Daily News)

"I love every second of it," Damouni said of his job.

The resort has 250 employees, not including managers or temporary workers with visas. Employees from the front desk to the bar were all smiles Friday.

"It's amazing how everyone comes together," Cavella said. "It's fun. It's exciting."

Asked how much the renovations will cost, Cavella said there's not a final tab yet.

"It's still to be determined — millions, multimillions," he said. "They're still running our bills."

There are also plans to upgrade the nearby one-bedroom Garden Villas, a project that will be completed next year.

Jack Wert, Collier County's tourism director, said the reopening of the Naples Grande is significant, considering it's one of the area's biggest when it comes to meeting space.

"It will sure be good to have them back on line. They're important for both group and leisure business. In terms of meeting space, they have significant space. They are probably second in terms of square footage," he said.

The owners' decision to take the extra time and to spend the extra money to renew the property is a good one for the destination, Wert said.

With the Hilton Marco Island Beach Resort and Spa expected to reopen next year and the JW Marriott Marco Island Beach Resort upgrading and expanding its meeting spaces there will be more new product to offer travelers, "a good message to have," Wert said.