

First Chino Hills hotel breaks ground

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CHINO HILLS - A South Carolina-based developer will build the first hotel in this nearly 15-year-old city and plans to open the three-story facility next summer.

OTO Development will build a 104-room Hampton Inn on 2.5 acres on the northwest side of Chino Avenue and the Chino Valley Freeway.

This is the first San Bernardino project for OTO, which has worked nationwide, said David Ward, operations director in the Orange County office of OTO.

"We just think San Bernardino County is a huge demand source," Ward said. "With all the construction and development going on here, this is a huge opportunity."

OTO was attracted to the area because of factors such as Chino Hills' Big League Dreams sports park and the per capita income of the city's residents, Ward said.

While Chino Hills residents won't use the hotel, their income level generates more interest for traveling to the area, Ward said.

"Whenever there is a high per capita income, we find there is more interest in that area," he said.

City officials and Chino Valley Chamber of Commerce staff held a groundbreaking Wednesday at the hotel site. Construction crews have already begun to grade the site where the hotel will be built.

The hotel will be near Crossroads Entertainment Center, which will open next year at roughly the same time as the hotel. The Entertainment Center will feature an 18-screen Harkins Theater and three restaurants: Joe's Crab Shack, Outback Steakhouse and TGI Friday's.

The nearby theaters and restaurants are an attractive draw for the hotel, Ward said.

"We call it great livability," Ward said.

City officials have sought a hotel for several years, said Doug LaBelle, city manager.

Out-of-town residents visiting Chino Hills for tournaments at Big League Dreams can stay at the Hampton Inn and be five minutes away from the sports park, he said.

The hotel will also generate revenues for the city through its hotel taxes, LaBelle said.

"We expect it to be a big revenue generator," LaBelle said.

Chino Hills officials have sought a hotel since the city was founded in 1991, said Gwenn Norton-Perry, councilwoman.

The city is getting a hotel now because the hotel industry put many of their plans on hold in the early 2000s because of the business environment, she said.

"The hotel industry was flat for so long," she said.