

A grand opening, indeed, for the Ritz-Carlton

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Published:
December-23-2009



Riders on horseback carried the American, Arizona and Ritz-Carlton colors into Friday's grand opening ceremony at the Ritz-Carlton, Dove Mountain.

The colors — flags of America, Arizona and the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company — were carried into the moment by three people on horseback.

Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer spoke on a sunny, cool Friday morning in the Tortolita Mountain foothills to a crowd of 200, among them first guest and Olympian Amanda Beard and her family.

After a lavish ribbon was cut by David Mehl, the man who had the idea with his brother George for the resort more than 20 years ago, 72 white doves were released from coops flanking the covered entryway. Each gleaming bird represented one of the 72 Ritz-Carlton properties worldwide.

The birds flew out, assembled, and then, as if choreographed, flew in formation back above the gasping crowd.

Finally, when the audience walked through the doors of the nation's newest resort, the assembled "ladies and gentlemen" — that's how the Ritz-Carlton always refers to its employees — gave the

first official visitors a standing ovation. The 250-room hotel, spa and golf resort on 850 acres opened to the public Friday evening.

"It's show time, ladies and gentlemen," said one gentleman working at Cork, the downstairs restaurant where the kitchen is fully visible to the guests.

The Ritz-Carlton, Dove Mountain is intended to be "a truly unique, authentic Southwestern experience," Ritz-Carlton Senior Vice President of Operations Hank Biddle told the assembled crowd.

Allan Federer, the "very proud" resort general manager, called it "what we think is the finest Ritz-Carlton resort in the world." And, he said, the Town of Marana, Tucson and Dove Mountain are collectively "surely a world-class destination.

"This day is a landmark event not only for the town of Marana, but for the state of Arizona," Federer said.

Brewer described the hotel as "absolutely spectacular," and said "it even smells good up here." The spacious lobby features to a towering wall of glass opening to Wild Burro Canyon and the Tortolita Mountains.

Brewer called Ritz-Carlton's decision to partner with Mehl at Dove Mountain "a confident sign, and it shows the path forward as we work to revitalize Arizona's economy during these tough economic times." The resort, with its more than 300 jobs and economic impact, is "precisely the right prescription" to turn Arizona around economically, she said.

Mehl, the property's owner and developer, was given a standing ovation. He thanked many people, among them his wife Bonnie and sons Wesley and Carson, partners Tim and Casey Bollinger, and his friends who "know what a dream this is for me. ... So many talented people have come together to create this resort."

Mehl is pleased, in particular, that the Ritz-Carlton, Dove Mountain celebrates Southern Arizona and the Sonoran Desert. "We have an appreciation for just how unique this environment is, how gorgeous the Sonoran Desert is," Mehl said.

At Dove Mountain, "we think we have a magnificent location," Biddle said. Ritz-Carlton always strives for the best location, the best business partner, and to hire "the very best ladies and gentlemen in the market to bring a project to life."

Three hundred "ladies and gentlemen" joined the staff this month. They've been trained by 50 other ladies and gentlemen from around the world.

"We are ready to go," Federer said.



Arizona Governor Jan Brewer.



The Ritz-Carlton, Dove Mountain includes a special one-foot-deep chaise lounge pool.



With a southern view of the Tortolita Mountains, guests make their way down stairs where waits a coffee shop and restaurant.



Marana Mayor Ed Honea beamed as he walked into the lobby of the new Ritz-Carlton.

The Ritz-Carlton, Dove Mountain has:

- 206 deluxe guest rooms, 450 to 600 square feet;
- 44 individual and casita suites, 900 to 1,300 square feet, with the Ritz-Carlton Suite at 2,100 square feet;
- Multiple-bedroom casita options, 1,700 to 2,600 square feet;
- 44,000 square feet of indoor/outdoor function space, including three ballrooms at 9,000, 5,000 and 2,100 square feet. There are four meeting rooms and an executive board room, with outdoor venues;
- 27 holes of Jack Nicklaus Signature golf, with golf instruction and a 12-acre practice facility, a golf and retail shop and a 45,000 square foot clubhouse;
- A 17,000 square foot spa and fitness center with 14 treatment rooms, two oversized suites, a full-service salon, a fitness center, private fitness instruction and strength and cardio equipment;
- An executive business center, with in-house audio visual services;
- 20 miles of hiking and biking trails;
- 4 restaurants;
- 3 swimming pools.

For David Mehl, opening comes after a 25-year run

A crowd assembled Friday morning at the entryway to the Ritz-Carlton Dove Mountain, described as a world-class resort before it even opened, was there because of one person.

"We're here today because of David Mehl," said Hank Biddle, Ritz-Carlton senior vice president of operations.

It was Mehl who brought the "vision, guidance and leadership" to the project in the Tortolita foothills, Biddle said. "We are so proud to be his business partner."

In the lobby after Friday morning's ceremony, Mehl acknowledged the day's emotions, "when you work on a dream for so long," and it finally comes to pass.

Mehl and his brother George began assembling the land in the foothills of the Tortolitas in 1984. The brothers had been developing real estate in Tucson for years, including the landmark La Paloma in the Catalina Foothills. George, his wife and their three children died in a 1991 plane crash. After that crushing loss, and much personal searching, David Mehl moved forward. There have been countless steps along the way.

The Dove Mountain project has been difficult. It has not been immune to economic struggles. Overall, though, it has been "a joy," Mehl said. "It represents everything I ever hoped it would be. ... Hotels like this will be here forever."

His association with the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company began simply enough.

"I picked up the phone and called them," Mehl said. "They were our first choice."

It's "unusual," Mehl said, for the Ritz-Carlton to be a partner and major investor in one of its hotels. "They've taken a major position," Mehl said. "The key is how much they respect their employees, how much they encourage their employees."

Mehl said the town of Marana has had "incredible approvals and detail requirements," and yet throughout has been "very supportive."

Mehl was asked what was next.

"Enjoy," he said. "Sit on the patio. It's margarita time."