

Hotels & Boarding Houses

Beachfront lodge no longer Dream Inn

BY JOHN WOOLFOLK
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What? Change that catchy, kitschy name? You must be Dream Inn.

But alas, it's true. The new owners of Santa Cruz's landmark beachfront resort have opted to drop its whimsical moniker in favor of ... drumroll please:

Smn. 6 23 97
WestCoast Santa Cruz Hotel.

The move by Northwest Hospitality Group, the Idaho-based organization that took over the Dream Inn resort a year ago, is part of a franchise agreement with WestCoast Hotels that took effect this month.

The idea is to improve market-

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Beach hotel gets new name

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ing potential and efficiency through the shared use of the WestCoast Hotels' identity, said Patty Carta, general manager at the former Dream Inn.

"It will definitely help the hotel to grow and market itself in ways it wasn't able to," Carta said.

But many longtime residents and loyal customers are aghast, likening it to the new 3Com title of the former Candlestick Park, the legendary San Francisco stadium where the Giants, the 49ers and the Beatles played.

"The Dream Inn is just the perfect name," protested Gena Bergstrom, 11, as she sought relief from the noon sun under a parasol at Cowell Beach below the towering 10-story hotel.

"When you say 'The Dream Inn,' it gives you an idea, a little mystique," added Charles Heil, a 30-year Santa Cruz resident, as he and his wife, Belle, soaked up some rays nearby.

Name too plain, some say

"WestCoast Santa Cruz Hotel is a corporate name," he said, wincing. "It has no mystique."

In coming weeks, the inn's turquoise emblem, which resembles a surfer riding the hollow curl of a breaking wave, will be history, along with signs, letterhead and other items bearing the Dream Inn name, Carta said.

Even the name on its popular Web page, a joint venture with the University of California-Santa

Santa Cruz's Dream Inn is now a franchise hotel owned by an Idaho firm.

Cruz that boasts live video images of the beach, will change, she said.

"I think it's crazy," said Patty Ekizian of Contra Costa County as she checked out of the hotel she has been fondly returning to for 10 years.

Carta admitted the new name hasn't exactly rolled off locals' tongues with the grace of the old one, but said the change is for the better.

Now a franchise

"Oh, there's been mixed emotions," Carta said. "A lot of people like it, some people don't, just because The Dream Inn has been part of the community for so long. It's not that we wanted to change the name. It's that we're now part of a franchise. We feel good about it. It's been a positive move."

The Dream Inn was built in the early 1950s as a four-story motel, with a six-story addition in the 1970s, Carta said. It boasts an exclusive beachfront location in Santa Cruz, with all 163 rooms sporting a magnificent view of the ocean, wharf, beach and Boardwalk amusement park.

Though the inn has changed hands often over the years, it has

done well, with occupancy rates in the 70-percent range, Carta said.

"It's not that business has been unsuccessful," Carta said. "The change wasn't because the hotel wasn't performing. But just because we're doing 70-percent business doesn't mean we couldn't do more."

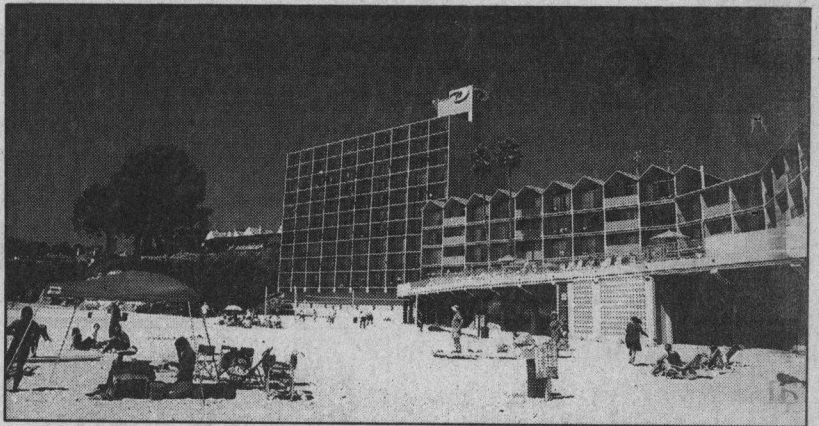
Changed hands last year

Northwest Hospitality Group took over the Dream Inn in May 1996 and now manages seven hotels in the western U.S., including the 500-room Inn at the Park across the street from Disneyland, now called the WestCoast Anaheim Hotel.

WestCoast Hotels now markets 29 hotels. Its first franchise agreement was with WestCoast Bellevue Hotel in Washington in 1993, also a Northwest Hospitality hotel.

Meanwhile, Santa Cruz residents say they may never get used to the new name of their landmark hotel.

"It's going to be weird," said Lindsey Randall of Club Ed surfboard rentals at Cowell Beach. "Usually, we say we're by the wharf in front of the Dream Inn. We'll still always call it the Dream Inn."



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