

## Putting More Heads in Their Beds

-Laramie Boomerang: Garren Stauffer

Laramie, Wyoming (June 7, 2008) - By the time the dust settles on all of the new hotel construction and remodeling, Laramie is projected to have more than 1,800 rooms for guests, visitors and tourists. A lack of hotel capacity has hampered tourism in the past, according to some local officials. Now, the challenge will be to make sure the rest of the world knows that the Laramie community stands ready to welcome more guests.

Many of Laramie's hotel and motel owners and operators have decided to work together to keep the rooms full, forming the new Laramie Valley Lodging Association.

The association was formed to stimulate a greater interest in the local lodging trade, according to Wendy Row, general manager of the Hilton Garden Inn and newly elected president of the association.

"It is nice to have one central group that can represent the local hotel industry when we are working with government bodies or tourism groups," she said. "Together, we are a strong body. I'm very encouraged at the response to the association, so far."

She acknowledged that to some degree, all of the members of the association are actually competitors. But, she also echoed the words of the Hilton Garden Inn's owner, Ron Wilson, saying that the UW Conference Center and the new hotels in town create a big wave that should lift all ships. In other words, being able to host larger events and being able to accommodate more guests in Laramie should create an increase in business for all local hotels.

Wilson had previously said that the Hilton, with the attached conference center, was intentionally designed to be small enough that there would be overflow to other hotels in Laramie when big events are hosted in town.

According to Row, the lodging association has a number of goals and projects in mind for the next few years. Near the top of the list will be finding new ways to market the Laramie region to the outside world.

Laramie already has many great amenities to offer visitors, from the UW campus to the Laramie Greenbelt to the Territorial Prison to Vedauwoo and the Snowy Range. The community now needs to step up efforts to let the rest of the world know about those offerings, Row said.

The association will also be looking at ways for the Laramie business community to tap into more wintertime business.

"We need to try to attract more people here in the winter months," Row said. "I was amazed, this winter, when I went up to the Snowies and saw the number of people up there and all the snowmachines and skiers. Where are all these people staying? Not all of them are staying here in Albany County."

The association expects to attend snowmobile and winter sports conventions and expos to market this area to that demographic, and invite those winter visitors to stay in local hotels, eat in local restaurants and shop in local stores.

The association is working on developing other opportunities and activities for visitors to town, such as horse-drawn carriages or covered wagons, which would travel between hotels and the downtown business district. Some people in the community have already proposed the development of a shuttle bus from the east Grand Ave. area to downtown.

For the members of the lodging association, just about all local businesses depend on each other for survival.

"We want to see everyone succeed and we want all the local businesses to benefit," she said. "We want to continue to encourage business development downtown as well."

"I haven't been in Laramie very long, but I can see the changes that are taking place," Row said. "It is just going to be great. I'm very excited about the opportunities for this new association. I've been in the business for 30 years and it is nice to feel the excitement that is building here in Laramie."

All lodging facilities are encouraged to participate in the association so that all the properties in Albany County can be showcased at tradeshow and other events. For more information about the LVLA, contact the Laramie Area Visitor Center at 745-4195.

The officers for the Laramie Valley Lodging Association are: President, Wendy Row of the Hilton Garden Inn and UW Conference Center; Vice President, Regina Rhodes of the Holiday Inn; Treasurer, Debra Hinkel of the Ranger; Secretary, Dave MacIlrath of the Snowy Mountain Lodge.

### **About Hilton Garden Inn & UW Conference Center**

The Laramie Hilton Garden Inn and University of Wyoming Conference Center is conveniently located just two hours from Denver Colorado and 30 minutes from the Snowy Mountains. Offering access to Vedauwoo Recreational Park, the Snowy Mountains and just across the street from the University of Wyoming War Memorial Stadium and The Arena for sporting events. This brand new facility offers a premier location for overnight stays, gourmet dining, corporate conferences, weddings, receptions, executive meetings, charity galas, special events and golf outings. Our luxury hotel offers the finest accommodations. Just minutes from Jacoby Golf Course providing a relaxing respite from the daily pace. Our beautiful ballrooms and conference rooms make every occasion extraordinary. The Great American Grill serves delicious, distinctive cuisine. Flawless service makes every event remarkable.

For more information about the Hilton Garden Inn & UW Conference Center, please visit: <http://www.uwconferencecenter.com>

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