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Marriott booked as HarborCenter hotel

Dan Miner, Business First of Buffalo

Shortly after they won the construction bid for the downtown Webster block in August 2012, the developers of Buffalo

HarborCenter reached out to an internationally recognized company for the project's anchor hotel.

Eleven months later and the deal is done.

Marriott International will bring an anchor brand to the 18-story building, with 205 rooms and suites, 5,000-square-foot of meeting space, fitness and business centers and a Marriott Great Room where food is served. It is scheduled to open in spring 2015.

[Kip Vreeland](#), Marriott's chief officer of full-service franchising, said the company was sold on the potential of the growing Canalside district. He said Marriott seeks to place its full-service hotels in areas with retail and recreational presence.

"It enhances the whole guest experience for the brand," he said this afternoon at a news conference announcing the deal.

Vreeland said the Marriott Buffalo Harbor Center will have a different scope from the nearby Courtyard by Marriott, a 96-room hotel scheduled to open in early 2014 in the One Canalside building, a \$30 million project by Benderson Development that will also be Phillips Lytle law firm's new headquarters.

Pennsylvania-based Shaner Hotels will partner with Marriott in running the Harbor Center hotel.

Finalizing the hotel deal was a vital piece of the \$172 million project, which is being financed by **Buffalo Sabres** owner [Terry Pegula](#), with the help of about \$28 million in tax breaks from the **Erie County Industrial Development Agency**. The building will house a pair of hockey rinks, a hockey-based training center, an 800-plus spot parking garage, sports bar and other amenities. Everything but the hotel is scheduled to open in fall 2014.

[John Koelmel](#), president of HarborCenter LLC, said vigorous work is being done to finalize other key details, such as the operator and scope of the sports bar. He said there is not yet a time frame on that announcement.

Koelmel said that, despite its obvious hockey theme, the goal will be to make HarborCenter a year-round destination.



“The goal is to take the seasonality out of it,” he said.

Both Koelmel and Vreeland also faced questions about adding more lodging downtown, given the spate of recent hotel projects. Both said they saw the Marriott and HarborCenter project as generators of economic activity that will bring new business into the region.

“We don’t develop our hotels and build our hotels in markets that they can’t support,” Vreeland said.

The news event, held at the **First Niagara Center**, featured a range of high-ranking officials, including executives from Shaner, Sabres Chief Development Officer [Cliff Benson](#) and Buffalo Mayor [Byron Brown](#).

Brown lauded Canalside’s progression. The district includes four major construction projects, including Harbor Center, One Canalside, the East Canal urban park and construction of replica Erie Canal waterways.

Brown said the momentum in the region has allowed the city to begin talks with other potential developers, though he wouldn’t specify the companies or their plans yet.

“This project is a magnet, we believe, to attract other world-class investment partners,” he said.