

CRDA approves \$3.6 million toward makeover of Claridge hotel in Atlantic City

By DONALD WITTKOWSKI Staff Writer | Posted:
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ATLANTIC CITY — A state agency that oversees Atlantic City development projects approved \$3.6 million Tuesday for the restoration of one of the few historic hotels that have survived the modern casino era.

Money from the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority will help refurbish the red-brick exterior of the stately Claridge hotel, which was known as the “skyscraper by the sea” after it opened in 1929.

“Go directly to Park Place and the Boardwalk, where the Claridge celebrates the glory days of the past and serves as a revitalized symbol for the future of Atlantic City,” CRDA Chairman James B. Kehoe said in a statement.

The Claridge, one of the posh Boardwalk hotels during Atlantic City’s heyday as the “Queen of Resorts,” began a second life in 1981 as a casino and is now part of the Bally’s casino complex owned by Harrah’s Entertainment Inc.

Bally’s plans to give the Claridge a nearly \$20 million facelift, including restoration of the building’s facade and upgrades to all 500 hotel rooms. The rooms will be spruced up with new furniture, bedding, carpeting and bathroom fixtures in a design that Bally’s General Manager Joe Domenico called “modern cool.”

Exterior work will help restore the luster of the 24-story building’s brick, steel, cupola and other historically significant architectural features. Special care will be taken to preserve the classic neo-Georgian design, the CRDA said.

The Claridge is one of only three historic hotels incorporated into modern casinos. The old Haddon Hall was transformed into Resorts Atlantic City, while the Victorian-era Dennis Hotel became part of Bally’s. Other old Boardwalk hotels were demolished to create space for new casino construction.

CRDA funding for the Claridge’s exterior work will come from the agency’s Boardwalk revitalization program, a \$100 million makeover of the buildings that front the city’s famed wooden promenade.

As recently as last year, there were fears that Bally’s might abandon the Claridge. Bally’s closed two of the three floors of gaming in the Claridge as business lagged in the recession. However, the Claridge now becomes the latest part of the sprawling Bally’s casino and hotel complex to be freshened up.

Domenico called the Claridge “this great icon of the city.”

The Claridge’s design was patterned after New York City’s Empire State Building. The hotel, crowned by a distinctive, dome-like cupola, overlooks Brighton Park and its historic “Fountain of Lights” designed by inventor Thomas Edison.

The Fountain of Lights was the first project to be restored in the Boardwalk revitalization project. The program, which began in 2005, helps beautify casino projects and noncasino buildings, as well as open space areas such as Brighton Park.

So far, the CRDA has spent nearly \$35 million on noncasino projects and another \$31.5 million to refurbish casino projects, including the Claridge, the agency said.

“The Boardwalk revitalization program is a grand success,” CRDA Executive Director Thomas D. Carver said. “It started with the restoration of the Fountain of Lights in Brighton Park between the Claridge and the Boardwalk and we return to contribute to the renovation of the Claridge.”

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