

SPOTLIGHT Business Travel

"There is not enough inventory in this market." — Leila Campisi, director of sales and marketing, Embassy Suites by Hilton



Room to grow

Embassy Suites in Berkeley Heights aims to capture untapped market

BY JOSHUA BURD

With more than two decades in the hospitality sector, much of it in the business and travel hub of Atlanta, **Leila Campisi** knows a crowded hotel market when she sees one.

That's not what she found last year in Berkeley Heights, the site of her latest assignment.

"I was shocked," Campisi said. "(In) Atlanta, we've got a hotel every 10 feet.

"There is not enough inventory in this market."

It's why she sees a wealth of potential for the new **Embassy Suites by Hilton** that will open in Berkeley Heights this fall. As the director of sales and marketing for the hotel, she is eager to tap into an underserved market at the confluence of central and

northern New Jersey — an affluent area with well-known corporate destinations such as Short Hills, Summit and Bridgewater.

To do so, the new 174-room facility will focus heavily on business travelers and meetings. It will have more than 14,000 square feet of flexible meeting and event space, including a solarium, along with a stylish new restaurant, a **Starbucks** and a nightly two-hour "evening reception" with complimentary cocktails and light appetizers for hotel guests.

Campisi also pointed to other details that will cater to professionals, such as bedside USB ports in each suite, and a layout that separates the work and living area from the bedroom in most of the rooms.

"It's the little simple things that make it so much more pleasant for a business traveler," she said.

See **EMBASSY SUITES** on page 23

Christene O'Neill, director of events, and Leila Campisi, director of sales and marketing, Embassy Suites by Hilton Berkeley Heights.

—AARON HOUSTON

EMBASSY SUITES

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

The new Embassy Suites is being built in the heart of the 185-acre Connell Corporate Park, which sits along Interstate 78 in the Union County township. For the developer of the hotel and owner of the park, **Connell Real Estate & Development Co.**, it will be a new amenity on a campus that includes five office buildings totaling 1.5 million square feet, housing nearly 3,600 employees.

And the area is not seeing the surge in new hotel construction being felt farther north and east in New Jersey, near the Meadowlands and cities such as Newark and Jersey City. According to **STR Inc.**, data and analytics firm tracking the hotel industry, the newest hotel to open in Union, Essex, Morris and Somerset counties is the **Homewood Suites by Hilton** in Branchburg.

The hotel opened last year and is about 20 miles away, roughly the same distance between Berkeley Heights and the **Hampton Inn Parsippany Suites North**, according to STR. And that property is the most recent hotel to open in Morris County, despite having started operations in 2009.

But the market may in fact be catching up. STR found a development pipeline of 17 hotel projects in the four counties, including five that are under construction.

Until then, the Embassy Suites in Berkeley Heights is looking to get out in front of that pipeline and outshine the older hotels in the surrounding towns. It will do so with a design that is modern and upscale, such as with the 2,000-square-foot solarium that will be part of the meeting space, as well as an outdoor area with fire pits that could serve as pre-function space.

"It's something that's in high demand, because people get tired of just four walls and a ceiling," Campisi said. "They want something different, something varied."

The hotel at the same time will pay homage to history. For instance, the wallpaper in some suites will feature Thomas Edison's designs for the lightbulb, along with light fixtures that are inspired by the famed inventor.

But any acknowledgements of the past will perhaps be most pronounced in the restaurant, known as **Grain & Cane Bar and Table**, which will pay in tribute to the Connell family's history. The 90-year-old, fourth-generation **Connell Co.** at one point was the largest nongovernmental rice trader in the world and a major broker of sugar and sugar products, according to its website, while managing a host of other businesses that still continue today.

As such, the New American-style Grain & Cane will have an interior that resembles a 1920s commodity exchange warehouse, with a brick interior, vintage photos and solar boards akin to **New York Penn Station**. And a private dining room will be designed like company founder Grover Cleveland Connell's office from nearly a century ago.



The pre-function area, above. The exterior, right. The restaurant, below, known as Grain & Cane Bar and Table, will pay tribute to the Connell family's history. —COURTESY EMBASSY SUITES BY HILTON

The marketing team also plans to bring that theme into the meeting spaces, perhaps by naming those rooms after different Connell rice and sugar brands.

"We're playing with different, fun ways to do that, because in a lot of hotels you see, meeting rooms are typically named after rivers, counties, presidents, towns," Campisi said. "It gets old. ... We want to stand out and we want to be unique, so that's one of the things we're looking at doing."

E-mail to: joshb@njbiz.com

On Twitter: @joshburdjr



Destination hotel

It might be first new hotel in the area in years, but the team that will open the **Embassy Suites by Hilton** in Berkeley Heights this fall hopes it will amount to far more.

In fact, they hope to make it a destination that both adds to and feeds off of the other segments of the 185-acre Connell Corporate Park. For instance, **Connell Real Estate & Development Co.** is also building a 5,600-square-foot, Wi-Fi-enabled park and amphitheater nearby, an amenity that will be available to both hotel guests and office tenants around the complex.

The hotel, meantime, will be have a 24-hour fitness center, but also happens to be within walking distance of a 110,000-square-foot **Life Time Fitness** on the campus.

It's why **Leila Campisi**, director of sales and marketing for the hotel, has no qualms about adding this simple phrase to her pitch for business: "It's much more than just a hotel."