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LEGACY REBORN THE LANDMARK US GRANT HOTEL UNDERGOES A HISTORIC FACELIFT

By Nicole Quiroz
May 1, 2006

One of San Diego's most historic hotels, The US Grant, is making history. With \$52 million in renovations, the hotel has positioned itself to reclaim the city with its rich history and astonishing achievements — thanks to a grand reopening set for this fall. 944 rediscovers the hotel's beginnings while looking at its transformation into 21st century modern regal opulence.

The US Grant's colorful history begins thousands of years ago, when the Kumeyaay Indian tribes lived on land that stretched from Baja Mexico to just north of Escondido — including Downtown San Diego. In 1542, Juan Cabrillo sailed his ship to San Diego Bay, where Europeans started to populate Southern California. By 1848, tragically, the Native American population had decreased from 30,000 to 3,000.

In 1875, President Ulysses S. Grant granted the Kumeyaay tribes with 640 acres of land in Dehesa Valley, located in East County — where Sycuan Casino now sits. On April 15, 1867, Alonzo Horton, a San Francisco merchant, came to San Diego and fell in love with the empty land that was filled with “sagebrush and fleas.” His vision of the future cost him \$265, which bought 960 acres of downtown. Horton opened San Diego's first luxury hotel, The Horton House, in 1870. The hotel was, and still is, located on D Street (now Broadway), between Third and Fourth avenues.

In August of 1885, Fannie Chaffee Grant, wife of Ulysses S. Grant Jr., purchased the hotel for \$56,251 and drew a deed for ownership to her husband. With encouragement, she convinced her husband to tear down the building and rebuild a luxury hotel to honor his father — the 18th president and a Civil War hero. Grant agreed and invited Horton for the ceremonial removal of the first brick on the day the hotel was going to be demolished. After 35 years, The Horton House came down.

Work to rebuild the hotel went through major mishaps that eventually took five years to complete. The 1906 San Francisco earthquake sidelined many construction projects on the West Coast. In addition, financial problems ate through the project, causing a stop in construction; however, it resumed in 1908 when Louis J. Wilde provided financial stability. After five years and an earth-shattering \$1.9 million later, The US Grant Hotel

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had its grand opening in 1910. During that time, the hotel was the largest cement and steel-reinforced building on the West Coast and the largest luxury hotel south of Los Angeles.

The US Grant was 11 stories high with 437 rooms. The hotel boasted lavish amenities and features that were state-of-the-art for its time, which astonished San Diegans and visitors alike. The grand ballroom encompassed the entire ninth floor, which was accented by two large rooftop gardens. Above the lobby of the hotel was the Palm Terrace — one of the largest outdoor public spaces on the West Coast attached to a hotel. The lower level housed the Bivouac Grill, as well as indoor saltwater swimming pools, highlighted by skylights above that provided natural light (the hotel still uses them today). The architect behind the hotel's remarkable features was Harrison Albright, a designer who worked across the country and who also designed Spreckles Theatre and the former Hotel San Diego. Unfortunately, Grant's wife died one year before the hotel's grand opening; however, Grant remarried and lived in the hotel with his second wife until he passed away in 1929.

The hotel had many notable guests such as Charles Lindbergh, who stayed at the hotel before his historic flight from New York to Paris on May 21, 1927. President Franklin D. Roosevelt also stayed at the hotel when he opened the California Pacific International Exposition in Balboa Park. He also recorded a national radio broadcast from the hotel's 11th floor radio station, which owned the largest antennas on the West Coast. In all, 13 U.S. presidents have stayed at The US Grant.

During the 1980s, the hotel closed its doors for the first time to undergo an \$80 million-plus facelift. The hotel reopened in 1985 and had 285 rooms. The infrastructure of the hotel and all its internal components are still working as they did almost 100 years ago.

In 2003, the Sycuan Band of Kumeyaay Indians purchased The US Grant for \$45 million, receiving back part of their ancestral land. Many of the current renovations are paying homage to the Kumeyaay tribal heritage, in part because President Grant protected their tribe and gave them the land they live on now. Artwork throughout the hotel — in the rooms, lobby and ballrooms, and noted restaurant the Grant Grill, which will have Native American touches in its cuisine — will include elements of the native Kumeyaay heritage.

The hotel's current \$52 million restoration project is headed by an international team of designers, architects and craftsmen. The main lobby is being restored to include the original grand entrance on Fourth Avenue, the refurbishment of the travertine floors of the main entrance, installation of seamless handwoven carpet in the lobby, the addition of wrought iron exterior lights, and the enhancement of the third-floor rooftop gardens.

The US Grant will presumably become San Diego's ultimate destination for weddings, birthdays, business meetings and other special events, offering 35,000 square feet of event space. The hotel will house three main ballrooms: the Crystal Ballroom, the Presidential Ballroom and the Celestial Ballroom; as well as 22 separate event rooms that will feature state-of-the-art technology with distinctive features.

The US Grant's award-winning Grant Grill will reopen with contemporary architecture and atmosphere. The restaurant will concentrate on market-fresh California cuisines that will incorporate Native American influences. A separate outside entrance will be

featured, and the Grant Grill Lounge will open into the Grand Lobby.

Each of the 270 rooms will aim to accommodate every guest like a V.I.P. Each room is lined with crown moldings and custom-made, imported Persian-inspired wool carpet. King-sized beds are fitted with white-on-white Italian linens. Artwork by French artist Yves Clement and Native American murals will be hand-painted on the walls above the beds — making every piece of art different in every room. Modern technology will also be available in the form of 32-inch flat-screen plasma TVs, cordless phones, high-speed Internet access and more. Bath features include stone counter vanities, basin sinks and large showers. Chocolate brown bathrobes and slippers along with imported bathroom amenities are among the fine details that will enhance each visitor's stay at the hotel.

The hotel will house 45 specialty suites, including some that are designed to have the latest technological advancements and rooms that are custom-designed for specific in-room spa treatments. In addition, the hotel will have San Diego's Meeting Planner Suites, with separate sleeping and business accommodations, including a conference table and technical enhancements.

The reopening of The US Grant will be its grand debut as a member of Starwood's prestigious Luxury Collection, which includes only 80 hotels and resorts around the globe as members. The Luxury Collection is a compilation of properties that require three main criteria: The properties must be indigenous, historic and experiential. The restored US Grant promises to meet these criteria and then some.

History in the remaking ...

What: The US Grant Hotel

Where: 326 Broadway, Downtown San Diego

When: Reopening Fall 2006

Info: Call 619.232.3121 or visit www.usgrant.net



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