

## Debut of 1,000-Room Sheraton Hotel

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When Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon snipped a ribbon to commemorate the debut of the Sheraton Phoenix Downtown on Wednesday, he officially set in motion a chain of grand openings that will dramatically alter the urban core of America's fifth-largest city.

"It's a welcome addition to the skyline," Gordon said as he stood in front of the 31-story, 1,000-room hotel. "And we aren't stopping here."

Indeed, Phoenix's mayor best get used to wielding oversized scissors, because the Sheraton's debut is just the first of three monumental ribbon-cuttings scheduled downtown during the next three months: Phoenix's METRO Light Rail network will begin gliding across the city Dec. 27, and the new Phoenix Convention Center will open its doors five days later.

Leo Percopo, general manager of the new Sheraton, called the trifecta of grand openings "the perfect storm."

Word of that storm has reached the meeting and convention market, which will supply the Sheraton Phoenix Downtown with most of its guests. The hotel's sales team has already booked 400,000 room nights, far surpassing its goal of 314,000.

Many of the Sheraton's guests will attend meetings at the hotel and many more will come to town for conventions and tradeshow scheduled at the nearby Phoenix Convention Center.

"Located only a block away from the Sheraton, our fully expanded convention center will feature nearly 900,000 square feet of meeting and exhibit space and be able to accommodate more than 80 percent of the conventions in the United States, beginning in January 2009," explained Steve Moore, President and CEO of the Greater Phoenix Convention & Visitors Bureau.

About 400 groups representing 1.8 million attendees have already reserved space at the new center. More than 60 groups are booked for 2009 alone, including the National Basketball Association, National Cattlemen's Beef Association and Veterans of Foreign Wars.

The NBA is bringing its 2009 All-Star Game to Phoenix in mid February in what will amount to a coming-out party for the city's downtown additions: The league will set up its Jam Session fan experience in the convention center, All-Star players will lodge at the Sheraton, and many of the 100,000-plus fans and visitors who attend the week's worth of activities will ride the new 20-mile light-rail line.

"Downtown Phoenix is shaping up to be the epicenter of both day and night life," said Doug MacKenzie spokesperson for the Greater Phoenix Convention & Visitors Bureau. "With the NBA All-Star Game headquartered here in February, a vast selection of sophisticated meeting space, and a mix of dining and entertainment connected by light rail, Phoenix will be able to showcase a vibrant urban nucleus worthy of the nation's fifth-largest metropolis."

### DOWNTOWN PHOENIX GRAND OPENINGS AT A GLANCE

#### Sheraton Downtown Phoenix

The Sheraton is the first new hotel to be built in downtown Phoenix since 1976. In addition to its 80,000 square feet of flexible meeting space, it features the District American Kitchen and Wine Bar, a Microsoft-engineered "Link@Sheraton" communications lounge, an outdoor pool and sundeck, a fitness center developed by a company that trains Olympians, and an underground parking structure that can accommodate 500 vehicles.

#### METRO Light Rail

This \$1.4 billion light-rail system will link Phoenix to the neighboring communities of Tempe and Mesa, and include stops at attractions such as Phoenix Art Museum, the Heard Museum, Chase Field and US Airways Center. The system's quiet, air-conditioned trains will operate 20 hours per day, seven days a week. Fares will be \$1.25 per ride or \$2.50 for an all-day pass. The system will have 28 stations, and trains will stop at those stations every 10 minutes. Opening date: Dec. 27, 2008

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