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## Renovated Larkspur Hotel Mill Valley opens

### \$3 million transformation of inn; goal was to 'keep with natural settings'

BY DAN VEREL

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MILL VALLEY – The Larkspur Hotels and Restaurants group last week celebrated the opening of its most recent acquisition, converting an old Holiday Inn Express at Richardson Bay into an upscale boutique now dubbed the Larkspur Hotel Mill Valley.

After purchasing the roughly 60,000-square-foot property in 2007, the hotel group undertook renovations totaling \$3 million in an attempt to reposition the property as a “premium hotel,” said Karl Hoagland, chairman of Larkspur Hotels and Restaurants.

“Our goal and vision was to better meet the needs of the Mill Valley market and community, so our goal was to reposition it and keep with the natural settings,” Mr. Hoagland said.

Before the acquisition, the hotel was “way under profile for the community and the setting,” Mr. Hoagland said of the new flagship location. “It’s important because we’re based in Larkspur.”

The group, which from 2003 to 2007 acquired 11 hotels on the West Coast, operates a total of 23 similarly upscale hotels throughout the Pacific region, from Portland to Manhattan Beach. The group operates three different brands among those hotels – Larkspur Landing, The Larkspur Collection and Larkspur Hotels.

The Mill Valley location is the second property under the emerging Larkspur Hotels brand, with the original located at Union Square in San Francisco. The extensive renovations at the 100-room Mill

Valley location included gutting the guest room, adding fire places, updating technology and media, new windows and revamped architecture, Mr. Hoagland said. It contains approximately 2,000 square feet of meeting space as well.

Given the location and proximity to both Mt. Tamalpais and San Francisco, Mr. Hoagland said the hotel will target

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Karl Hoagland, chairman of Larkspur Hotels and Restaurants



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the outdoor enthusiast demographic as well as corporate retreats.

“That was our vision. Our hope is that the community will really embrace it,” Mr. Hoagland said. “People in Mill Valley have a lot of pride in the community. The tired old Express Inn really was not keeping with the community and setting, so we made it more upscale with a bungalow feel.”

He also said the group was attuned to potential concerns in the area as it sought to expand. “It was a concern. Anytime there’s something new, we know there will be a lot of scrutiny and focus.”

The expansion for the Larkspur Group comes amid much financial duress for the hospitality industry, a point not lost on Mr. Hoagland. “The operating environment and economic cycle over the past year were both really challenging. We’ve been in the mode of hunkering down and getting through it and not expanding. But we’re hoping to start growing again,” he said.

Such growth plans potentially include expanding the number of hotels and restaurants from 23 to 50 within the next five years, with possible expansion into Sonoma and Napa counties and possibly destinations on the East Coast, Mr. Hoagland said.

“We’d love at some point to grow in the North Bay,” he said.

Rates for the Mill Valley location will range from \$129 to \$179 per night for rooms that average approximately 280 square feet.