

# Kalahari Resorts on tap for early summer opening



Artist rendering of the planned African-themed resort.

Nine months from now, visitors are likely to take their first steps inside a massive \$350 million resort project in the Poconos that began construction last fall.

Construction on the first part of the project should be finished and ready to open by early summer, said Travis Nelson, spokesman for Kalahari Resorts & Conventions. The company, which owns African-themed resorts and water parks in Ohio and Wisconsin, is bringing its first destination resort to the Pocono market off Interstate 380 at Exit 3 in Tobyhanna Township.

Kalahari Resorts & Convention Center – Poconos will be built in two parts and include a safari outdoor adventure park, hotel with more than 800 guest rooms and suites, convention center, spa and salon, golf course, retail shops, three full-service restaurants and indoor and outdoor water parks.

“We went through a nice spring and summer season, which is nice for construction,” Nelson said. “We caught up after a long winter.”

All eight floors of the hotel are built, with walls and ceilings up and workers completing framing and drywalling some of the guest rooms. Workers are installing walls for the indoor water park, which will have a retractable roof that Nelson plans to have in place soon so workers can begin on the interior.

“That’s a big milestone, that’s a heavy roof,” Nelson said.

The lobby for the hotel is almost enclosed, with workers starting to drywall the interior and the layout of the three restaurants is starting to be visible, with workers starting to frame some of the walls, Nelson said.

Kalahari Resorts used American Millwork and Cabinetry of Emmaus as the millwork contractor for the entire project, according to George Reitz, president of AMC.

Kalahari will also build a 65,000 square foot convention center off from the hotel wing, Nelson said.

By the first half of next summer, three full-service restaurants, a spa and fitness center will all open and the hotel will open with 457 guest rooms, Nelson said.

Kalahari Resorts is taking reservations for as early as July 15 for the hotel and some have already started trickling in, Nelson said.

The company has hired about 10 associates so far, but will hire about 1,000 by the time the first part of the resort opens. Out of these 1,000 employees, about 600 will be full-time and about 400 seasonal and part-time, Nelson said.

Guests and visitors can also expect to see authentic African artifacts displayed throughout the resort. On Oct. 1, the Nelson family and several Kalahari marketing associates will take a trip to several African countries to purchase and bring back authentic African coffee, stonework, woodwork and beadwork made by the people the company visits. A film crew will document their journey and interactions and these stories will be shared with guests and visitors through videos shown at the resort.

“Everything we do really starts with the African theme and how rich the culture is,” Nelson said.

Though the harsh winter called for overtime on the project, Nelson said the construction has moved forward at a good pace and the land looks a lot different now from when it was a golf course last October when the company made a formal groundbreaking announcement.

“From what it was then to what it is now, it’s pretty incredible,” Nelson said.

The second part of the project will include building 400 additional guest rooms to the hotel, bringing the total number of rooms and suites to 857. Also in the works are a 100,000-square-foot addition to the indoor water park space and a planned expansion of the outdoor water park by two to three acres.