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## Hotel room boom in Saskatoon

BY SCOTT LARSON, THE STARPHOENIX OCTOBER 10, 2013

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Homewood Suites Hilton is among the hotels being built near the Saskatoon International Airport

Photograph by: Richard Marjan , The StarPhoenix

The hotel building boom continues unabated in Saskatoon.

As many as 10 more hotels could spring up in the next few years, adding 600 to 1,000 rooms to the market.

Are we reaching the saturation point?

"I think we are getting close," said Steve Johnston, president of the Saskatoon Hotels Association and general manager of the TraveLodge Hotel. "I think we are getting to the point here where we are cutting it tight. How much more can we add?" Investors are putting their money on the market being able to absorb these newcomers, he added.

"The market and industry is telling us that we need more hotel rooms. As long as people are coming in here and willing to invest, that must mean

they see there is a market here."

Between 2007 and 2012, a total of 484 units were added, bringing the total number of hotel rooms in the city to more than 3,800. That will soon grow beyond 4,000 with the addition of a Hampton Inn set to open in early 2014.

The Courtyard, Mainstay and Hampton hotels have obtained permits to build near the airport, and a permit has been issued for a Best Western on Eighth Street.

Proposed hotels in the downtown, and one at the university, could add a few hundred more rooms.

Randy Fernets, director of industry development and sports tourism with Tourism Saskatoon, said people are still coming to check out the city in search of opportunities.

"It has always helped us when we have seen an increase in hotel rooms," Fernets said.

"It's never hurt. As long as our economy keeps rolling along the way it is, we'll see how these rooms get eaten up."

Johnston sees two sides to the equation.

"As an operator of a hotel, I say, 'Of course we don't need any more hotel rooms,' because I'm not full every night," he said.

"But on the flip side, being a leader with the hotel association with my other colleagues, we do recognize the fact that we don't have enough hotel rooms to service groups coming in. So maybe we are handicapping ourselves in getting bigger pieces of business."

Natalie Szankar, general manger at Best Western Royal Hotel and assistant president of the Saskatoon Hotel Association, said the city needs enough rooms to handle big events, but noted those only take up a few weeks out of every year.

"It is like a double-edged sword," she said. "Anytime there is a big event in town, the entire city is sold out and there is not enough room. But that only happens when there is a major event. The rest of the year is pretty competitive as it is. So to have all those extra hotels is going to make that tougher."

Szankar said she doesn't think Saskatoon has reached the saturation point, but she wonders who will staff these new places with the current labour shortage.

"If there is six or seven hotels going up in the next five years, who's going to run these places and who's going to work at them?"

Competition between cities Hotels aren't just competing with the inn down the block, they are vying with other cities such as Regina, Calgary and Edmonton for major events and conferences.

"We are seeing that it is becoming more competitive between the cities," said Steve Johnston, general manager of the Travelodge Hotel.

"We are all trying to get those same pieces of business - the big

conference convention business."

Randy Fernets said it's their task to bring in events and conventions, and having enough hotel rooms is paramount to landing those events.

"Having the capacity to host (these conferences) is big," Fernets said.

"When you get to a STEMfest where you possibly could have 5,000 delegates going in and out over 14 days, you need that capacity of hotel rooms to service that."

#### Major conferences booked for Saskatoon:

2014

International Food and Legume Research conference Western Canada  
First Nations Education Administrators (500 delegates) Canadian  
Pharmacists Assoc. (750 delegates)

2015

STEMfest 2015 (up to 5,000 delegates) 2016 Credit Union leaders (525  
delegates)

#### New hotels planned or under construction in Saskatoon

**Airport area:** Courtyard by Marriott, Homewood Suites by Hilton,  
MainStay Suites and Hampton Inn and Suites. Airport Authority has  
mused about a hotel attached to the new terminal.

**Downtown:** Victory Majors Investments Corp. and Cavalier Enterprises  
plans to build a \$250-million hotel-condo office project at River Landing;  
North Prairie Development's \$80-to \$100-million hotel/condo highrise,  
including City Centre Tower, slated to open in spring 2016.

**Eighth Street:** Best Western Hotel (just started construction).

**College Drive:** University of Saskatchewan is about to announce its  
plans for a hotel on College Drive.

**Hotels finished in recent years:** Comfort Inn & Suites (near Credit  
Union Centre) Four Pointes by Sheraton (Stonebridge) Super 8 West  
(22nd Street) Holiday Inn (downtown) James Hotel (downtown)

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