

Old man winter big part in building of Comfort Suites

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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Hotel opening date delayed by a month.

Two days shy of the first day of spring felt like spring as construction crews sawed, drilled and hammered on Gothenburg's newest hotel Thursday.

Later that night, a blustery cold front slammed into the community bringing snow and ice.

Par for the course, Diana Unterscher and Terry Jessen would say about the building of the Comfort Suites hotel on west Platte River Drive since the beginning.

Weather has pushed back completion of the 42,000 square-foot, 74-room motel from May 1 to June 8.

"I've been told it's been the worst winter in 12 years," said Unterscher who is a partner in the project with Jessen.

That explains all the extras the Scottsbluff couple, who own two homes in Gothenburg, have had to do to keep construction moving.

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For example, Unterscher said, they had to:



buy a ground heater to thaw the ground to pour concrete for the foundation after a foot of snow blanketed the community in October.

buy a large tent to cover the concrete and a special heater to cure it.

After the sides of the motel were constructed, they had to shovel snow from the top stories because there was not yet a roof.

To complete the roof, the general contractor—Paulsen Inc. of Cozad—worked through a weekend, Unterscher said.

As the ground began to thaw, along with more snow and ice, mud has been a problem.

Workers have had to shore up a dirt road through the property which is supposed to be paved this week or next.

For days, the motel was surrounded by giant puddles and unforgiving mud.

“The week before last, we were up to our knees in mud and Terry had to pull me out when I got stuck,” Unterscher said with a laugh.

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On-site superintendent Randy Weatherly of Paulsen Inc. described construction as in “probably the worst” weather conditions he’s seen during his 13 years in the building business.

Another challenge, Jessen said, was the breakdown of equipment when earthwork began.

“It was our equipment and we averaged about one breakdown per hour,” he said.

The motel is the first commercial building of its size the couple has ever constructed.

“I wasn’t gray-haired until we started,” Unterscher quipped.

In addition to rooms, the hotel will have a lobby with a curved wall and also a fireplace.

A breakfast area, exercise room and an area for guests to do laundry will also be included.

There will be an indoor pool and an outdoor, fenced-in spa.

Stairs, an elevator and three handicapped accessible rooms are also part of the plan.

Despite the challenges, the project has been worth it so far.

“Last night we saw the lights on in the motel,” Jessen said. “It was neat.”

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Jessen noted that the couple tries hard to recycle leftover construction materials.

“If you notice, there’s not a dumpster because what little trash we have we take to the dump,” he explained. “The rest is recycled.”

Jessen said they’ve also tried to hire local subcontractors whenever possible.

Unterscher said she’s heartened when she receives e-mails from people in the community who send positive comments about progress on the motel.

She said she’s accepting applications for the following jobs and plans to interview prospective employees starting the first of May.

Jobs available are for the front desk, maintenance, housekeeping and breakfast.

The Gothenburg Area Chamber of Commerce has applications for the positions which can be returned there or dropped off at the office—a freestanding metal building west of the motel at 301A Platte River Drive.

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