

Gloria and Emilio Estefan to open hotel in Vero Beach

By Nadia Gergis
Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers
Posted June 23 2007

Vero Beach The Treasure Coast's newest luxury hotel, Costa d'Este, will have the name of a South Florida celebrity couple attached to it when it opens in January.

International singer Gloria Estefan and her producer husband, Emilio Estefan, will be present at their beachside hotel when it opens this winter during the height of the season in Indian River County.

"We fell in love with the Old World Florida ambience, beautiful beaches and warm people," said Gloria Estefan, who co-owns Costa d'Este with her husband. "We discovered Vero Beach when we were looking for a vacation home that was close to Miami but gave us a different feel than what we were used to."

The resort will have 94 guest rooms including four suites, a spa, state-of-the-art in-room entertainment, oversized bathrooms with organic round showers and wireless Internet access in all public and private areas. The hotel's design is modeled after urban sophisticated architecture.

Benchmark Hospitality International, which manages 30 hotels, conference centers and condominium resorts nationwide and in Japan, will manage the property.

"We hope to increase the awareness of Vero Beach by highlighting the many wonderful things that made us fall in love with it," Estefan said. "We want the rest of the world to realize what a gem this place is."

The Estefans purchased the five-story hotel situated on 2.4 acres for \$12.5 million in July 2004 just months before it sustained millions of dollars in damages from hurricanes Frances and Jeanne.

In addition to its spa and other amenities, the Costa d'Este will house an 85-seat restaurant called the Oriente that will feature Cuban cuisine with Spanish, Latin, and Creole influences. The house signature will be tapas, which means little plates in Spanish.

Estefan said the family already spends a lot of time at a vacation home in Vero Beach and plans to be "very involved" in the hotel once it opens.

"We hope to welcome our friends from the entertainment world at the opening as well as members of the community," she said. "It will be a warm, special and intimate event. We will open our doors the same way that Vero Beach opened its doors to us."

That's music to the ears of community leaders.

"They are bringing a first-class hotel to the area so, of course, it's wonderful," said Mayor Tom White. "It's going to create jobs and have a great economic impact on the oceanside business community."

Rip Tosun, chairman of the Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association and a Vero Beach resident, said the hotel will bring Vero Beach to the forefront of being a destination for luxury hotels and celebrity sightings.

"Who knows, maybe other celebrities will follow her lead," said Tosun, who owns Rip's — The Place for Ribs and Monte's restaurant. "Look at what Don Shula did for his restaurant and everything Dan Marino does."

Others are excited about including the Estefans in local events.

"We have a huge Hispanic population that have a special affinity for Gloria Estefan so it would be great if they came out to the Fellsmere Frog Leg Festival in January," said Beth Mitchell, executive director of the Sebastian River Area Chamber of Commerce.

Nadia Gergis can be reached at nadia.gergis@scripps.com.