

Wyndham breaks ground on Margaritaville

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ST. THOMAS — The ground was officially broken Wednesday on the Wyndham's newest timeshare resort on St. Thomas, set to open in 2015.

The Margaritaville Vacation Club by Wyndham will take over the former Renaissance Grand Beach Resort property in Smith Bay. Wyndham announced the partnership with Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville brand last year. The resort will be the first of its kind — a Margaritaville-themed timeshare resort.

Gov. John deJongh Jr., government officials and tourism industry representatives joined Wyndham executives and contractors for the groundbreaking ceremony, although contractors already had begun demolition work at the property.

Wyndham hired St. Croix contractor J. Benton Construction in conjunction with the stateside contractor Moss & Associates to do the demolition and reconstruction on the resort.

The property has been abandoned for years, and the buildings are in rough shape.

Many of the concrete walkways and brick steps are crumbling and the buildings themselves are essentially concrete shells. Workers were busting up concrete flooring and facades of buildings Wednesday in preparation for construction. Most of the existing buildings will remain, but they will get a complete renovation from the inside out. A few structures will be demolished completely and replaced with new construction, according to Wyndham officials.

The project, which will cost more than \$100 million, will have two phases, completed over a three-year period. The 290 hotel rooms on the property will be turned into 262 condo units.

The first phase will focus on the 70 beachfront units, along with the pool, pool bar, restaurant, marketplace, front desk, dive shop, retail shop, fitness center, game room and on-site sales office.

The second phase will convert the hillside hotel rooms into the remaining condo units.

Lisa and Chris de Roulet, owners at the neighboring condominium complex, Pineapple Village, were thrilled as they toured the site Wednesday.

Pineapple Village is nestled almost in the middle of the Wyndham resort.

Lisa de Roulet, who is on the condo association's board, said they bought their unit four months before the former Renaissance Grand Beach Resort closed its doors. Once they had access to a beautiful resort with a manicured white sand beach, bars,



Above, Gov. John deJongh Jr., center, government officials and tourism industry representatives joined Wyndham executives and contractors Wednesday for a tour of the site of the new Margaritaville resort in Smith Bay, St. Thomas. Wyndham officially broke ground on the site Wednesday. Right, contractors look over the pool area of the former Renaissance Grand Beach Resort in Smith Bay. Work began Wednesday to demolish the site to make room for new construction.

Daily News Photos
by DENA FISHER

pools and restaurants, then all of a sudden, they were living next to a derelict, blighted and abandoned resort.

Chris de Roulet said with Wyndham coming in to take over the property, "It feels like we're marrying up."

He said all the owners at Pineapple Village are thrilled and love to hear the sound of construction equipment.

"If we hear jackhammers and

cranes at 3 a.m. we say, 'Yes!' " he said.

"For all the owners of Pineapple Village, this is a blessing," Lisa de Roulet said.

Wyndham has received tax benefits under the Economic Development Commission, and currently is waiting for approval on a few modifications to the project, V.I. Economic Development Authority Chief Executive Officer

Percival Clouden said.

The project is creating about 250 to 300 construction-related jobs — everything from plumbing to landscaping.

"It's great to be bringing construction jobs to the property," Wyndham Vice President of Project Management Rob Landry said.

Later this year, Wyndham Vacation Ownership will send a recruiter to the island to begin hiring for the

resort staff. The resort will need approximately 125 full-time jobs once it is up and running.

People interested in working during the construction phase can email jbmossjobs@mossemail.com. Those interested in jobs at the resort once it is opened can go to www.wvojobs.com.

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