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FRENCH LICK & WEST BADEN · INDIANA

NEW SUPPORT CENTER IN CLARKSVILLE AND A WORKFORCE HOUSING INITIATIVE DRIVE RESORT'S PLAN TO ADAPT TO NEEDS

FRENCH LICK, Indiana (May 9, 2022) — French Lick Resort is gearing up for another big summer, and as travel continues its return to normal after the pandemic, the Resort is taking some proactive measures to meet the challenges of the current business and labor market.

One is a workforce housing initiative representing the first new subdivision built in the French Lick/West Baden community in more than 60 years. The other is the launch of the French Lick Support Center, an off-site office opening in Clarksville, Indiana.

“These two projects go hand-in-hand in addressing the recruiting challenges we’ve faced,” said Chuck Franz, Vice President of Cook Group, the parent company of French Lick Resort. “And everybody faces it. The resort is not alone. We’re thinking outside the box and trying different things in terms of trying to re-engineer the business.”

Clarksville office slated for July opening

Franz expects it will be an enticing prospect to job-seekers in the Clark and Floyd county area: working for a world-class resort, while doing so with the convenience of staying close to home.

The Resort’s new Support Center will be located in the Green Tree Plaza, and staffing efforts are already ramping up. Interested candidates can attend a job fair and open interviews Saturday, May 14 from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. inside the Green Tree Mall near JCPenney.

The immediate need is for Reservations Agents who will work from the Clarksville office once it opens. The Resort is also hiring for marketing positions including a marketing coordinator and video producer. Franz’s hope is that casting a wider recruiting net into the Louisville area will yield results when it comes to hiring for more specialized positions.

“With this move, we’re pulling from an applicant pool of a quarter million people,” Franz said.

Franz figures French Lick Resort already has a pretty good head start in establishing itself in a community 60 miles to the east.

“The idea is trying to build a presence. The resort has a good reputation down there through the myriad of people I talk with. French Lick Resort has been a destination to them for most of their lives as somewhere they go for a vacation or a stay-cation,” Franz said. “We have a good following in the Clark

and Floyd County area — let's create a presence there, which will not only help build our remote office, it could also help with our efforts to fill on-campus positions as well."

When it opens this summer, the new Support Center will start with about 10 associates, Franz said. Over time, that's likely to expand.

"We should be able to accommodate up to 25 for growth," Franz said.

Building Dozens of New Homes in the Community

For a community that hasn't had a new housing development built in more than a half-century, this is an initiative that's been a long time coming. Not since the early 1960s has a substantial housing development been build in the French Lick/West Baden community.

"If you look at the homes around here, most of them were built in the 1920s and 30s when the heyday of the hotels was," Franz said. "We've been at this project for 4-5 years, trying to get somebody to come in and build new homes, because we saw the need. While our population in Orange County has remained steady, it hasn't grown. You've got to be showing some growth. If you don't address it, your school enrollment will decrease and the local business community will struggle."

Cook Group decided to take the lead in [addressing the critical need for workforce housing](#), especially during the ongoing housing price spike. Locally in French Lick and West Baden, the Cook-owned French Lick Resort has built its own team of local contractors who are invested in and live in the community. The idea was to build the first round of new and affordable houses, and re-invest those revenues to build the next set, and the next set, and so on.

So far, the first four homes have been completed on resort-owned land along Abbeydell Pike on the outskirts of West Baden Springs. Ground has been broken on the next three houses. The first three-bedroom, two-bathroom houses sold for \$155,000.

New homes are going up "about as fast as we can go," Franz said. Between the main area on Abbeydell Road and another on Klondike Hill, Franz envisions more than 100 new home constructions long-term.

"We've got enough land out on Abbeydell to build 75, and land behind the Resort on Klondike for about 25 homes," Franz said. "The demand is there. The goal for 2022, if we can get through home number 12, that will be a heck of a year to have eight more transacted."

The resort has partnered with Orange County Economic Development to get the word out and identify eligible homebuyers. The only requirement is the owners must work in Orange County. Buyers are determined by a lottery system. The first four houses went to people from four of the community's major employers: French Lick Resort, Boston International, Pluto Corporation, and the Springs Valley School Corporation.

"In typical Cook fashion, we've streamlined the process and we're doing better as we go," Franz said. "There's a different style home going up now; the first four were ranch, the next seven will be two-story. The interest level just continues to grow."

The French Lick/West Baden initiative is part of a larger initiative by Cook Group to bring desperately needed workforce housing to the communities it serves — particularly rural areas. Earlier this year, Cook announced plans for 90 new homes in Owen County, not far from Cook’s headquarters in Bloomington.

“Addressing the shortage of workforce housing within our region will be a multi-year effort,” said Steve Ferguson, chairman of the board for Cook Group. “We believe in making our communities stronger and investing in workforce housing is one way we will continue to help our employees and communities reach their full potential, including a dream of home ownership.”

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ABOUT FRENCH LICK RESORT

French Lick Resort is a \$600 million historic restoration and casino development project that includes West Baden Springs Hotel, French Lick Springs Hotel and French Lick Casino. This premier Midwest resort destination features 757 guest rooms and suites; a 51,000 square-foot, single-level casino; 45 holes of golf including the fully restored 1917-designed Donald Ross Course at French Lick and the 18-hole Pete Dye Course at French Lick; two world-class spas; meeting and event space totaling 169,000 square feet; and an array of dining and entertainment options.

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