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## **Wilderness Resort Grand Opening**

Site features 52,000 - square-foot-indoor water park

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**Sevierville, TN** Sevierville's billion-dollar highway has received a multimillion dollar upgrade thanks to the Wilderness at the Smokies Events Center Hotel and Waterpark.

Several hundred people, including Sevier County officials and tourism developers, are expected to attend the resort's grand opening today at 10 a.m. in the hotel's lobby.

The four-story, 234-room resort hotel comes complete with a 52,000-square-foot indoor water park and represents a new trend in the tourism industry, according to developers.

"Water park destination resorts is a relatively new thing in tourism," said Matthew Seaman with Ackermann Public Relations, who is handling publicity for Wilderness, the Wisconsin-based company that built the resort.

The upscale water park will be available exclusively for hotel guests, a fact that Seaman said makes the resort different from other water park hotels.

"It's kind of like going on a cruise ship," he said. "You could stay there and never have to leave. That is what makes the destination unique."

The 26-acre property is adjacent to the Sevierville Events Center and sits just off of Highway 66 near the corner of Old Knoxville Highway and Gists Creek Road.

The eight-mile stretch of road earned the nickname "billion-dollar highway" because the area is projected to be the future home of more than \$1 billion in development.

While the tourism industry in Sevier County typically has developed along the Pigeon Forge strip, The Bridgemont Group, a Sevierville-based real estate company, has made the area around the events center a key part of Sevier County's future growth along Highway 66.

The hotel and water park are major components of the 1,000-acre Bridgemont development.

Seaman describes the relationship between the hotel and events center as "mutually beneficial."

"The water park and hotel are part of a much bigger story that is happening here," Seaman said.

"The developers are creating an environment that is a whole destination in itself. It is starting to feel real."

Developers have invested more than \$200 million in the site and the resort is expected to employ more than 1,100 people in both full-time and seasonal positions.

The hotel is open and taking reservations and the water park is operational. A 234-unit, eight-story condominium building also is part of the development. Condominiums are for sale and for rent, with nearly 80 percent of the condominiums already sold, according to developers.

Other planned growth in the Bridgemont area includes retail stores and restaurants.