

From Smithereens to Green

The Story of One Hotel's Environmentally Friendly Comeback from Natural Disaster

On the evening of May 4, 2007, a level F5 tornado, with winds in excess of 220 miles per hour, touched down in Greensburg, Kansas – and the Best Western J-Hawk Motel stood helpless in its path.



The desk clerk on duty, **Lois Moorehead**, a former employee at the hotel, took on full responsibility for vacating the occupied rooms, darting from door to door until each guest responded and directing them to the property's large basement.

She even directed nearby highway travelers to the basement.

Ultimately in her quest to assure the safety of the guests, she was caught in the front office at the moment of impact. The entire office area, as well as the hotel rooms, collapsed around her. Moorehead was the only one injured at the property. Although not hurt badly, she did require medical attention.

Twelve Greensburg residents died from the tornado that evening, with approximately 94 percent of the community totally destroyed.

"I was in shock," says the property Owner and District 1, Region 17, Governor **Ron Wright**. "My wife, son and I could not comprehend what had happened to the motel,

The front office and canopy of the Best Western J-Hawk Motel and the last guest room standing after the May 4, 2007 tornado raced through Greensburg, Kansas.



Top left, the new swimming pool area is currently used for storage; center, the exterior is ready for siding; top right, the lobby area; and bottom right, the new Greensburg, Kansas sign proclaiming the rebuilding of the town and their commitment to rebuilding Green.



or, for that matter, the community of Greensburg. I had experienced damage to other properties over the years, but a tornado of this level was beyond comprehension. There was really *nothing* of any value to save. It was all gone!”

After waiting two years to be sure that the town would rebuild, Wright and his family decided they also would rebuild their Best Western hotel. But this time around, they would construct it with the environment in mind, heeding the town’s challenge to residents to rebuild “green” in the spirit of the new town motto: “Greensburg: Better, Stronger, Greener.”

“We did not have a real idea what building green meant when we started this project,” Wright says, “but we’ve received a very quick education from our contractor and the new construction and design teams at Best Western.”

Wright is working with Best Western Design Services on this Green Project and expects to reopen his leaner-running, greener hotel in the first week of August 2010, under a new and referential name: Best Western Night Watchman Inn & Suites.

Here are some of the green features it will have:

- **Enduring design.** The design concept for the hotel was developed keeping classic and enduring design and colors as well as durability in mind to ensure all of the interior selections will provide the longest life-cycle possible.
- **Insulated walls.** The interior and exterior walls are being constructed of structural insulated panels called SIPs, which are prefabricated with a foam core. The result is a building system that is extremely strong and energy efficient.

- **Wind power.** Wright says he likely will use a wind generator at the property, which he estimates could provide as much as 60 percent of the hotel’s electrical needs.
- **Green finishes/furnishings.** Many of the finishes and furnishings, such as paint, flooring, carpet tile, fabrics, furniture and tub surrounds were selected to provide as many green attributes as possible. Selections with low volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and GREENGUARD certification will help ensure the healthy indoor air quality of the hotel. Furniture with replaceable components and carpet tiles that can be replaced individually will keep unnecessary waste out of landfills. Many interior items also have recycled content and/or are recyclable at the end of their product life.
- **Energy-efficient lighting.** Energy efficient fluorescent lighting is being used throughout the property wherever possible.
- **Recycle bins.** Each guestroom will contain a recycle bin, enabling guests to be a part the hotel’s commitment to recycling.

“It’s our hope that in addition to supporting the green initiative of Greensburg, we also will be driving additional revenue to our property with the increasing number of guests seeking green lodging,” Wright says. “I believe we are building for the future.” ◀

Interested in making your property more green? Visit the Best Western for a Greener World page on mybestwestern.com under Operations, contact Design Services in the United States at 800-528-3601 option 4, or in Canada at 800-297-8775 option 4, or contact **Daryl Preece** in Regional Services at 623-780-6504.