

Opinion: Ocean Resort joining Hyatt is a huge positive for Atlantic City

Ten days ago Hyatt Hotels Corp. and AC Ocean Walk announced that the redeveloped Ocean Resort Casino in Atlantic City would be part of Hyatt's Unbound Collection of international hotels. That might turn out to be the year's biggest Atlantic City story that drew the least attention.

Missing such good news is kind of understandable with all of the attention, justly deserved, to Hard Rock International's redevelopment of the former Taj Mahal just a little farther south on the Boardwalk. Local officials had courted Hard Rock for years, and the corporation is creating a new distinctive destination.

And as hopes that stalking-horse-buyer Glenn Straub would redevelop the former Revel casino hotel were repeatedly frustrated for more than two years, many decided they would believe in the property's rebirth when they see it.

Well, it's time to start believing.

Hyatt Hotels is a global hospitality leader. It has 777 properties in 54 countries. Ocean Resort Casino becoming a franchise of the corporation's Unbounded Collection means it will have Hyatt's high standards for quality and management.

Look at the company that Atlantic City's biggest casino hotel will have in that Hyatt collection. Among the seven Unbounded hotels in North America are distinctive properties in British Columbia, Miami Beach, Phoenix, Nashville and Austin, Texas, with the nearest the historic, sophisticated and luxurious Bellevue Hotel in Philadelphia. Others are in Paris and Uruguay.

In August, Hyatt acquired the Exhale spa and wellness brand with 25 locations in the U.S. and Caribbean, including inside what Hotel Business called "upper-upscale and luxury hotels." The first Hyatt hotel to offer the Exhale experience — 32,000 square feet of it — will be the Ocean Resort Casino.

Becoming part of Hyatt's Unbounded Collection will cure one of the fundamental weaknesses that led to the failure of the original \$2 billion Revel casino hotel. It was a freestanding mega-resort, without the support of or beneficial connections to a group of other casinos or hotels. Ocean Resort Casino now will be part of the Hyatt family and its global reservations system.

The agreement announced this month makes clear that Atlantic City's biggest, tallest and most recently constructed resort is aiming very high indeed.

The opening of Ocean Resort Casino and Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City will transform the city's northeast section. And if the state and city respond appropriately to the opportunity, the new resorts could be a catalyst in the general revival of Atlantic City.