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## Cranwell prepared to move forward

By **Scott Stafford, Berkshire Eagle Staff**

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LENOX -- After a difficult winter punctuated by fire and ice, Cranwell leadership is fully involved in preparing for the high season and designing a new building to replace a 19th-century carriage house that was lost to a massive blaze in December.

Since 1993, the Cranwell resort has been gaining ground as a luxury resort boasting 380 acres, nine buildings, 96 guest rooms, an 18-hole golf course, a full-service, 35,000-square-foot spa, four tennis courts, a retail operation and four restaurants.

The spa alone features 16 treatment rooms, indoor pool and full fitness center. Of the resort's peak employment of 340 employees, about 110 of them work in the spa, according to Lewis M. Kiesler, president and general manager at Cranwell.

Of the 45,000 guests that stay at Cranwell annually, about 40 percent of them come in as part of group functions or conferences.

As for the lost carriage house, Kiesler said it was "sad to see such a charming building leave our resort, but we are very relieved that nobody was hurt. And the community and all the fire departments were absolutely tremendous."

With the fire behind them, Kiesler and his team are looking to find an opportunity in the ashes of the past.

"We are planning a building that will be harmonious with what we've got here, and still be something people will want to stay in with fantastic views," he said.

The new building will not be a re-creation of the carriage

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house, but will institute some of the architectural details that distinguished the carriage house, Kiesler added.

"We're hopeful we'll come out of this with a special new place for our guests to stay," he said.

Designs are under way, and construction on the roughly \$3 million project could begin in the fall, Kiesler noted, with an opening anticipated for summer 2012.



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The main mansion was built by John Sloane, owner of a furniture firm, in 1894. In 1925, it became The Berkshire Hunt and Country Club. In 1930, Edward Cranwell bought the property and deeded it to the Jesuits for use as a school in 1939. The school closed in 1975.

In 1993, New York real estate developer Dan Burack bought the property from the bank with an eye to creating a world-class luxury resort in the famous Berkshire hills.

Today, the resort has found a place locally as one of the most successful venues, and a formula that includes a remarkable percentage of returning patrons.

"I'm sure it was scary in the beginning, but it kept improving," Kiesler said. "And adding the spa was a big step toward insuring that Cranwell is a destination unto itself."

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One of the reason Cranwell is so popular among families is the wide range of activities available at the resort and in the nearby communities.

"For families, we have everything they could want," Kiesler noted. "We have people that visit for a show at Tanglewood, young families with little kids learning to ski, leisure visitors and conferences. And most of them seem to be coming back."

According to Norma Probst, Cranwell's director of marketing, the resort gives every guest an opportunity to give feedback on their experiences.

"Generally we have a great response," she said. "We ask them about their dining experience, the spa, the rooms, whether the front desk staff is friendly. And I think that because of the breadth of our products and services, the guest experience is so satisfactory -- it's hard not to have fun when there is so much to do."

New mobile technologies have also played a part in sharing Cranwell's charms by giving customers the ability to book a room or a table at Cranwell, Probst said.

Rooms run from \$275 to \$475 per night depending on the time of year. A suite costs \$600 per night, and townhouses are available for \$1,100 per night. Included in the price is full access to the spa.

And the Cranwell Golf Club has more than 300 members, many of them local residents.

Although the loss of the carriage house reduced their capacity by 36 guests, it hasn't affect employment at the resort, and the focus hasn't wavered either.

"Our goal is to make the experience for our guests an exceptional one, so we continue to focus on the quality of our rooms and the service," Kiesler said. "Getting all the little things right is what we're all about, and we've got a huge percentage of returning guests. So we must be doing something right."

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