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OCALA, FLORIDA, USA, October 9, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Hilton Garden Inn at 120 E. Silver Springs Blvd. got its certificate of occupancy on Wednesday, 2½ years after city officials and then-Gov. Rick Scott turned over the first shovelfuls of dirt at the ground-breaking.

Since that time, the country went from a vibrant, growing economy to one shocked by the COVID-19 pandemic. [Danny Gaekwad](#), who owns the hotel, hoped to open earlier this year, but with the economy largely shut down by the state, there was little demand for hotel rooms.

"I put everything into this," Gaekwad said. "When you put tens of millions of dollars into something, every night you sit at the dining room table, and you worry. You start doubting. This was totally unknown. There was nothing like this I had ever seen."

Business returned slowly. Today, Gaekwad says his two other hotels routinely have 50% occupancy. Not great, but better than occupancy rates of 20% to 30% reported by some at the height of the pandemic.



Trump Hai Toh, Safe Hai"

Danny Gaekwad

But things are not back to normal. Grand opening

festivities are lower-key due to the continued concerns over the virus.



"I would have done an extravagant opening. I would have looked to pack the downtown," Gaekwad said.

Instead, the hotelier hopes to hold a weeklong celebration. He will offer residents the first shot to be guests at the hotel as part of a package, including a room and meals. The hotel will open to the public for breakfast, afternoon tea and dinner service at its second-floor dining room and terrace. A cocktail hour also is on tap. The hotel will follow social distancing guidelines and plans to check the temperatures of those entering the facility.

"I think people want to celebrate," Gaekwad said. "It's like a dream come true for me." The six-story hotel is the first in downtown in decades and sits on roughly the same spot where the historic Ocala House Hotel operated for more than 100 years. The Ocala House first went up in the 1840s and later rebuilt in brick after the 1883 Thanksgiving Day fire destroyed much of downtown. The city tore down that three-story building in 1966.

The hotel's 107 rooms all include floor-to-ceiling windows, most with big views of the area. There are no interior rooms, so each has plenty of natural light. Many include large balconies.

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