

City Center hotel owners seek Best Western brand

By Jeff Bollier
of The Northwestern

The investor group renovating the former City Center Hotel has applied to brand the hotel a Best Western Premier property.

Rich Batley, of RB Hospitality, said said the evaluation process will take several months and require an on-site inspection before Best Western decides whether to brand

the hotel. According to its website, Best Western Premier locations feature stylish decor, on-site dining, premium amenities, a fitness center, free Internet and meeting rooms.

“But we’re going to keep working with Best Western to do what we can to achieve the Best Western Premier status,” Batley said.

Batley, Appleton hotelier John Pfeifferle and the

University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh Foundation purchased the 176-room hotel for \$2.3 million on Feb. 14 and have spent the last seven months gutting the rooms, restaurant and conference space.

During the foundation’s seventh annual Community Breakfast Tuesday, UWO Foundation President Arthur Rathjen said the project cost is now estimated at \$15 million. Batley said

“everything has been ripped out” of the property to pave the way for the build-out of rooms, a Ground Round restaurant and other improvements.

The hotel project was a central focus of the Community Breakfast as Rathjen presented the city of Oshkosh with the Collaboration in Action Award for its financial support of the project.

The Oshkosh Common

Council approved the creation of a tax incremental financing district, or TIF, that would provide \$2 million in up-front assistance, another \$1 million in ongoing support as the property starts to generate property tax revenue and a potential \$1 million in infrastructure improvements in the surrounding area.

Mayor Burk Tower accepted the award and said the ownership group, uni-

versity and community leaders all share credit for the award considering the city’s investment will leverage \$10 million to \$11 million in private investment in the hotel alone.

“You’re all part of the core group that really drove this project,” Tower said. “We consider you co-recipients of this award.”

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Annette Morales-Rodriguez sits next to her attorney in a Milwaukee court for the start of her trial on Monday. She’s accused of killing a young mother by cutting her full-term fetus from her womb last October. CARRIE ANTLEFINGER/AP

Lawyers argue intent in deadly fetal abduction case

By Dinesh Ramde
Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — A woman accused of killing a pregnant Milwaukee woman and trying to steal her full-term fetus never meant for the mother or her unborn child to die, a defense attorney said Tuesday.

In opening statements, defense lawyer Debra Patterson acknowledged that evidence shows her client, 34-year-old Annette Morales-Rodriguez, found a young woman in the late stages of pregnancy and used a blade to slice out the fetus. But Patterson said the key legal question was whether Morales-Rodriguez intended to kill 23-year-old Maritza Ramirez-Cruz or her unborn son.

“We submit to you that Annette engaged in criminally reckless conduct, but she did not intend to kill Maritza,” Patterson said.

Morales-Rodriguez has pleaded not guilty to two counts of first-degree intentional homicide, including homicide of an unborn child. A conviction on either count carries a mandatory life sentence, although a judge could allow for of parole.

Last week, her lawyers switched from an insanity defense after a court-appointed doctor did not find evidence to support such a plea.

Prosecutor Mark Williams sketched a grisly summary that he said explained how Ramirez-Cruz died in 2011.

Prosecutors allege Morales-Rodriguez was so desperate to have a fourth child that she lied three times about being pregnant. The first two times, she fabricated stories about miscarriages. The third time, she plotted to steal a baby by kidnapping a woman in the late stages of pregnancy, Williams said.

The defense acknowledged many of those details. But Patterson argued Morales-Rodriguez

was blinded with desperation as her supposed due date approached.

Patterson acknowledged that Morales-Rodriguez offered Ramirez-Cruz a ride, thinking about stealing her baby but feeling so petrified during the car ride that she considered just taking the young woman home.

Investigators say Morales-Rodriguez bludgeoned Ramirez-Cruz with a baseball bat, choked her until she passed out, and then bound her with duct tape before cutting out the baby with an X-Acto knife.

The boy wasn’t breathing, and in a panic, she called 911.

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Police: Driver in fatal crash drunk, texting

By Samantha Strong
Gannett Wisconsin Media

A Campbellsport man charged with killing two people in a head-on crash last week told investigators he had at least eight drinks in the hours leading up to the crash.

Daniel M. Shea, 24, also admitted he was texting on his phone at the time of the crash, according to the criminal complaint.

Shea was charged Tuesday with two counts of homicide by intoxicated use of a vehicle and one count of injury by intoxicated use of a vehicle.

Shea posted \$50,000 bail Tuesday and was released from jail.

Shea was traveling south on U.S. Highway 45 in the town of Auburn near the Washington County line at 5:34 p.m. Sept. 13 when he crossed the center line and collided with a northbound car. Paul F. Grahl, 73, and Joanna M. Grahl, 59, both of the town of Eden, were killed in the crash and their daughter, Esther, 13, was seriously injured, according to Fond du Lac

County Sheriff’s Office reports. Esther Grahl was taken by ambulance to Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin in Milwaukee.

Shea told investigators he visited bars in Slinger, West Bend, Hartford and Rubicon between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. that day, consuming about five beers, two rum and Cokes and two shots of whiskey. A preliminary breath test produced a blood-alcohol result of .20 percent, nearly three times the legal limit.

Shea told investigators said he was on his way to a baseball game in Kewaskum that started at 6 p.m.

He was taken to a hospital in West Bend with serious injuries.

Deputy District Attorney Kimberly Tenerelli argued for a high cash bond, but did not request a specific amount.

“This is a situation where there are two people dead, one injured who has basically had her family taken away from her,” Tenerelli said.

Shea’s attorney, Kirk Everson, argued for a signature bond.

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