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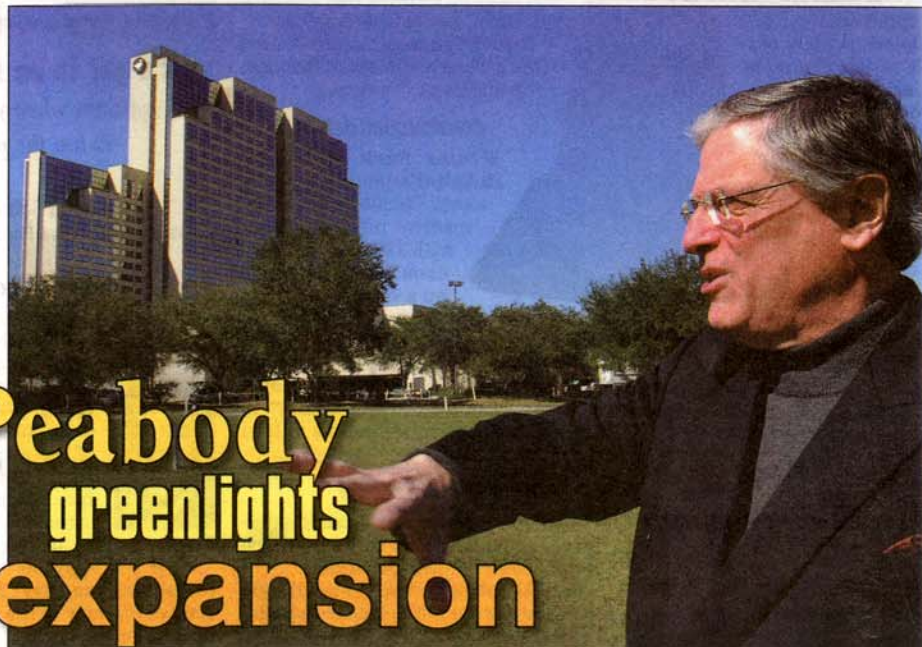
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Peabody greenlights expansion

PHOTO BY JIM CARCHIDI

Peabody General Manager Alan Villaverde says the expansion includes a new 35-story tower, meeting space and a parking garage.

\$420 million project to add 750 rooms

BY DAN PING | STAFF WRITER

ORLANDO — The Peabody Orlando's on-again, off-again expan-

sion is a go — really.

General Manager Alan Villaverde confirmed this week that the \$420 million expansion project will begin as soon as the Feb. 13-16 International Builders Show leaves town. (The Orlando/Orange County Convention & Visitors Bu-

reau expects 100,000 visitors for the housing industry's largest annual trade show.)

In fact, crews already have started staking out the property to begin site work for The Pea-

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PEABODY: Expansion will give hotel new meeting space, parking garage and spa

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body's new 750-room, 35-story tower, says Villaverde.

SCA Design Group Inc. of Winter Park, which designed the existing upscale 891-room hotel at 9801 International Drive, is the architect for the expansion. The project also will add 157,000 square feet of flexible meeting space, a parking garage for 2,800 vehicles and a full-service spa.

"Spas are becoming an expected amenity in today's luxury hotel market," Villaverde says. "When meeting planners are putting together packages, that's one of the things they look for."

Other amenities include a grotto-style pool, an English garden, walking trails and a new restaurant highlighting California cuisine.

Dallas-headquartered Balfour Beatty Construction Co. will oversee the project, says Martin Belz, president and chairman of Memphis, Tenn.-based Peabody Hotel Group.

News that work would begin soon was greeted enthusiastically by Tom Ackert, executive director of the Orange County Convention Center.

"If they're starting to dig, I'll run over with a shovel and help," Ackert says. "We've been waiting a long time. The No. 1 thing our clients tell us we need is more business class rooms within walking distance of the convention center."

After weathering a number of challenges, Belz says he's excited construction is imminent.

The hotel first began talking about expanding in 1997. In 2000, officials announced a two-phase expansion, but financing failed to materialize after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, which negatively affected most



PHOTO BY JIM CARCHIDI

The Peabody first began talking about expanding in 1997.

Peabody Orlando expansion

Contractor: Balfour Beatty Construction Co.

Architect: SCA Design Group Inc. of Winter Park

Size: 35-story, 750-room tower, 157,000 square feet of meeting space, 2,800-space parking garage

Development cost: \$420 million

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segments of the U.S. economy.

By 2003, hotel officials predicted the expansion would be complete by the end of 2007, but rising construction costs brought on by worldwide demand for concrete and steel further delayed the project, says Belz.

Whatever the reason for the delays, Ackert is glad the wait is over. "The Peabody sits right in the heart of the convention center district — this is great news for the area."

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