



WELCOMING

# *The Westin*

— SARASOTA —



*by Ryan G. Van Cleave | photo by John Revisky*



Left: Jim Donovan,  
Director of Sales  
& Marketing,  
Mary Winter,  
Spa Director,  
Craig MacAvoy,  
Executive Chef,  
Lauren Jones,  
Director of  
Catering, Doug  
Hope, General  
Manager

Right: Presidential  
Suite

Bottom: Lobby/  
Lounge

YOU'VE SEEN THE CONSTRUCTION WORK on the corner of North Gulfstream Avenue and Bayfront Drive as The Westin Sarasota has grown, girder by girder, window by window, into a stunning 18-story, 255-room building that opens for business on July 12.

If you haven't yet stopped by to see what makes this property different than other area hotels, give it a chance. You'll immediately see why Kolter Hospitality LLC wanted a Westin here in the cultural center of southwest Florida. We're a mature market, and that's not simply in terms of demographics. We're a tourist hot spot and being a stone's throw from St. Armand's Circle and the Van Wezel Performing Arts Center puts this new hotel right in the hub of the increasingly active arts district. Plus all those world-class beaches being just across a bridge or two doesn't hurt either.



Director of Sales and Marketing Jim Donovan adds that once a guest experiences what the Westin Sarasota offers, it will make them a customer for life. “The main focus of a Westin hotel,” he says, “is to provide the type of facility, service, and hospitality that ensures our guests leave feeling better mentally, physically, and wellbeing-wise than when they arrived. From restaurant super foods and turbo juices to the spa and WestinWorkout Room to the Heavenly Bed and Heavenly Bath experience, our guest’s entire being has the opportunity to be refreshed, rejuvenated, and almost reborn.”

Lauren Jones began work as the Director of Catering at The Westin Sarasota only a few weeks ago and since this is Kolter’s first full-service hotel with event space, she says there are “a lot of moving parts, and something new and exciting to organize and create each day.” With 26,000 square feet of banquet space, the Westin has the ability to serve functions of all sizes. The largest room, the 5,515-square-foot Triton Ballroom, has 22-foot vaulted ceilings and elegant glass chandeliers that are reminiscent of gentle beachside waves. Like the Triton, many of their event spaces feature floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking Sarasota Bay, bringing the natural elements from the outside in. She adds that destination weddings—which Sarasota surely hosts many—are typically under 100 guests. The Triton? It can easily handle 300 guests, which is an attractive option for those soon-to-be-newlyweds who want to bring big families along for the festivities.

They’re able to accommodate corporate gatherings too. From a small board meeting to a large conference with many breakouts, they have you covered for every occasion.

Jones knows the event business well, having worked for nearly a decade at a well-established St. Petersburg hotel. “What brides and grooms as well as event planners are looking for when hosting



Left: Exterior | Top: Evoq Restaurant | Bottom: Lobby Bar



an event is something that is unique and memorable. This could be achieved through the venue. From our floor-to-ceiling living wall in the lobby to the rooftop pool, we are excited to show the Sarasota market a fresh and vibrant experience that guests and event attendees alike have not had before.” At her previous hotel? They did 120 weddings a year. She was drawn to this position because of the newness and she wanted the challenge of creating everything from the ground up.

One of those challenges that’s often out of her hands is the weather. “We have received numerous requests for events on our rooftop for wedding ceremonies, cocktail receptions and gatherings,” and a call on the weather has to be made hours in advance. Regardless, their professional staff is ready to create an equally as memorable event indoors or out.

Craig MacAvoy has a lot to do with keeping guests satisfied since he’s the new Executive Chef. He lived in Sarasota before, and the idea of being part of the new Westin enterprise here enticed him away from his position as Executive Chef at the Ritz Carlton in Coconut Grove. From the in-room food offerings to the banquet fare, to what you eat poolside, to the restaurants EVOQ and The Roof Bar and Eats, it’s all his responsibility.





When asked about what special dishes he's created, he recommends trying the lobster pot pie. It sounds rich as anything, but it's far more in line with the Westin ethos of wellness than one might expect. It's a deconstructed dish vs. something traditional that's baked in a pie crust. All the individual components are cooked separately and presented in a new way with a sauce made from lobster shells. "It's comfort food for sure, but it's still also clean, bright, and flavorful," he says.

The Roof Bar and Eats is unique in that it's the only restaurant with a 360-degree view of Sarasota. Where else would you want to watch a sunset while enjoying a tapas-style fare? "We are working with local purveyors to utilize as many seasonal and local products in our menu as possible," notes MacAvoy, which isn't a surprise since he has such a commitment to top-shelf ingredients in all of their dishes.

Whether you want a smaller offering on The Roof or you want to sample the steak and seafood menu at EVOQ, you'll see how much attention MacAvoy has put into the experience which is anything but another "hotel restaurant." His goal is "to make this somewhere locals can come and feel welcome, enjoy the service, enjoy the meal, and ultimately don't want to leave."

The philosophy that MacAvoy brings to the kitchen table is that things should be made from scratch as much as possible. It simply tastes better, for one thing, but he believes that automation has made the younger generation of cooks miss out on important techniques. For example, dicing onions versus buying a bag of pre-diced onions matters. "The final product is more pure when it's made by your own hand. You can't really do that unless you put your heart into it." He's hoping to share as much of the culinary knowledge he's learned as he can with others.

Other noteworthy foods to sample are the lamb rib appetizer, which MacAvoy knows is unique and pushes what you might expect a bit. He's also worked up a fried quail—a take on fried chicken—that's marinated in buttermilk and spices, dipped in flour, fried, and served with a honey-maple butter. Feel free to top it all off with the key lime parfait, which is MacAvoy's take on the key lime pie. General Manager Doug Hope adds that while he's very excited to sample all the culinary offerings created by Chef MacAvoy, the crispy crab cakes with Napa cabbage slaw and ginger vinaigrette is first on his list. "It's a one-of-a-kind offering!"



Top left & right: Main Ballroom

Bottom: Executive Chef  
Craig MacAvoy



MARC EDWARDS PHOTOGRAPHS

Spa Director Mary Winter notes that every detail from the moment of arrival has been thought through, ensuring that their guests are comfortable, leaving balanced and refreshed. To that end, the Westin offers an intimate spa journey featuring specially curated treatment prescriptions that use the most luxurious, results-driven ingredients. She explains that they use “scrubs with volcanic pumice, black Tahitian sand, wraps with mineral-rich algae and peptides, as well as instant-result facials that feature ingredients including apple stem cells and vitamin C from a highly-respected skincare line, Hydropeptide.”



MARC EDWARDS PHOTOGRAPHS

The usual things one expects from a spa—massage, skincare, and nail services—will certainly be available, but their goal is to stay at the forefront of spa services by offering treatments like the Far Infrared technology. Far Infrared rays increase circulation, improve your immune system, reduce stress, fatigue, and joint pain, as well as assist in detoxing. Winters says “the Westin experience is a wellness program that focuses on wellbeing, including 6 pillars of health: Eat Well, Sleep Well, Move Well, Work Well, Play Well, and Feel Well. With this holistic approach, we touch people’s lives during and after their stay.”

Founded in 1930, Westin has more than 200 hotels in more than 40 countries. And if General Manager Doug Hope has anything to say about it, the sensory-rich environment at Westin Sarasota will be right in line with Westin’s brand of innovative programs and guest-centered service that transform every aspect of a guest’s stay into a revitalizing experience. “We’re delighted to be a part of the Sarasota community,” he says. “I’m sincerely looking forward to welcoming everyone to our new Westin hotel.”