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Bungalows Key Largo to roll out this year

By Theresa Java Free Press Staff

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KEY LARGO — Work on hotelier and Cheeca Holdings Developer Jerry Johnson's newest Florida Keys-based resort is soon to get underway and representatives will go before the Monroe County Planning Commission this month to request a liquor license.

The high-end resort, Bungalows Key Largo, will be built at 99060 Overseas Highway where Point of View RV Resort is located and will open by end of year.

The planning commission will review Cheeca Holding's liquor license application, which would allow the resort to sell beer and liquor on site and to go. County staff is recommending approval for the license.

The 11.2-acre property is to include 135 individual units and is described as a "walking campus resort with bungalow hotel rooms."

The plans show that most rooms will be 800 square feet and have private outdoor "plunge pools" or tubs. The resort will also feature a full-service luxury spa, a Zen garden, two in-ground pools, more than 1,000 feet of shoreline and indoor and outdoor dining venues.

Bay View Homes owner Jim Saunders is overseeing the construction. He said the bungalows are being built off-site and will be delivered starting next month. He anticipates the resort to be operational by the end of the year.

"Once we have the work permits issued, it will roll-out really quickly," he said. "The construction has been going on off-site."

Saunders expects five to seven bungalows to be installed every day.

"The buildout is going to happen very fast," he said.

Johnson owned and operated Cheeca Lodge & Spa in Islamorada from 2003 to 2011. Under his stewardship, the upscale resort attained a high-gloss status, making Travel + Leisure's "500 Greatest Hotels in the World" list. It was sold in 2011 for \$100 million. He also developed the Inn at Key West and is based in Wyoming, where he owns and operates the Rustic Inn at Jackson Hole and the Lodge at Jackson Hole.

"We intend to build a resort that will not only be the finest in the Florida Keys, but will rival some of the greatest hotels in the world," he told the Free Press last year. "I enjoy the Keys. I've done Key West and Islamorada. It's time to try Key Largo."

To make his bungalow resort rival the best in the world, he plans on capitalizing on the water views: 60 to 70 percent of the planned 135 rooms will be on the water.

"This site is all about sunsets," he said.

The Point of View resort was owned by Northstar Resort Enterprises and had been operational since March 2013. That company had already nailed down a development agreement with Monroe County in 2011 that gave it permission to build a 138-room hotel on the property up until the year 2021.

Cheeca Holdings made small tweaks to the site and kept the same density plan, which was considered a “minor deviation” and gained the project quick approval.

The Bungalows will be the third of close in proximity high-end hotels, joining Playa Largo and the Hilton.

“The Keys are a more casual environment that often gets lost in translation,” Johnson said. “At the Cheeca Lodge, we had a phrase we used way back when: ‘barefoot elegance.’ It’s going to be all those things and be a luxury property.”

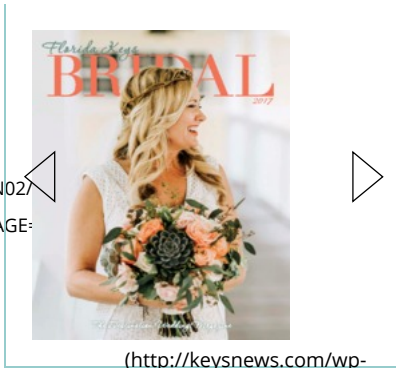
Details into bungalow rates have not yet been disclosed.

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