

It's official: Resort, conference center coming to Mesa

by **Gary Nelson** - Sept. 3, 2008 09:57 AM
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A massive resort and conference center will be built in southeast Mesa, city and corporate officials announced Wednesday morning in a thunderous kickoff to major **development** in the Gateway area.

Nashville-based Gaylord Hotels will build one of its signature properties on the north end of land now occupied by the General Motors Desert Proving Ground. Paired with a high-end golf course and retail amenities, it is designed to pull people - and eventually business - into the area surrounded by Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport.

Details on the size and cost of the resort are still being worked out, said Colin Reed, chairman, president and chief executive officer of Gaylord Entertainment Co., parent company of the hotel firm.

"We're in the process right now of getting the exact program nailed down," Reed told *The Arizona Republic* Wednesday morning. "I would suspect it will be north of three-quarters of a billion dollars. Our initial investment will be that."

Gateway has long been the focal point of

Mesa's most ambitious economic development plans.

"It puts Mesa in a national theater," City Manager Chris Brady said. "We're now a national player with this project with any major city in the United States."

Brady said the price tag on the Gaylord property and associated projects will be astronomical.

"We estimate they're probably going to spend at least a billion dollars on this project, plus all the other projects that are going to come with it," Brady said.

Scottsdale-based DMB Associates, which bought the northern part of the GM property in late 2006 for \$265 million, has been hammering out the deal with Gaylord for months.

Gaylord, DMB and Mesa think the hotel will lure business conferences and other well-heeled travelers from around the country, spurring interest in the area and its high-tech potential. In addition to the airport, which the Air Force abandoned in 1993, Gateway is home to Arizona State University's Polytechnic campus, now on the brink of the 10,000-student mark.

Gaylord owns several entertainment venues in Nashville, including the venerable Grand

Ole Opry. Its four resort/conference centers can only be described as spectacular.

Gaylord Opryland is the oldest among them. It has 2,881 rooms, 600,000 square feet of meeting space, nine acres of indoor gardens and an indoor river.

Gaylord's newest, the Gaylord National, opened this year on 41 acres along the Potomac River in Maryland, near Washington, D.C., and is billed as the largest hotel/conference center on the East Coast. It has an 18-story atrium with a nightclub on the top floor.

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