

## Hooksett rest areas' construction ahead of schedule

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**HOOCKETT** — The Hooksett rest areas are well underway and ahead of schedule, according to Granite State Hospitalities owner Rusty McLearn.

"The project is going very well," McLearn said on Monday. "We have a great partnership with the state. CCI is doing just a terrific job keeping us ahead of schedule."

The project is being headed by Conneston Construction, Inc., out of Gilford and was designed by Samyn-D'Elia Architects, P.A. in Ashland. Construction began on Oct. 24. Granite State Hospitalities, a business venture owned by Common Man founder Alex Ray and McLearn, who also owns Hampshire Hospitality Holdings, has been at the forefront of the plans and will be paying rent on the property to the state.

It was originally anticipated by McLearn that they would be finished by May 2015, per the contract between the Granite State Hospitalities and the state, but both McLearn and CCI President Jeffrey Downing feel that it will be completed ahead of schedule.

McLearn said that the current scope of the project shows that the rest area on the northbound side of Interstate 93, which is named after the late Executive Councilor Ray Burton, is on pace to have sections of it open in September. This will include the convenience store, the fuel pumps, and the bathroom area.

Downing said that the priority is getting the liquor stores finished, and it is anticipated that the new liquor store will be

completed by Sept. 7 on the northbound side, with the southbound rest area's liquor store finished about two weeks following.

The southbound rest area is scheduled to have its liquor store open in October, with the convenience store, bathrooms, and gas station open in November.

The visitor center and food courts will be opening early next year, according to Downing and McLearn.

"The priority right now is the liquor stores," Downing said, adding that they will then focus on getting the bathrooms ready.

Other work, according to Downing, includes paving the parking areas and ramps, which he said should occur in the first week of November.

Each welcome center will include a 16,000-square-foot "Uncommon food court" that will have a 1950s-style diner, an Italian restaurant, a country deli and sandwich shop, and a village bakery and coffee shop. This goes along with 16-pump Irving gas stations and a convenience store. The liquor and wine outlets will be 20,000 square feet, which is an expansion from the current 8,500 square foot outlets. During construction, liquor stores have been open, along with temporary visitor centers with bathrooms. There will also be a bank on each side of the highway.

The new interactive visitor centers will be much larger, at 3,000 square feet, and will be operated by the Department of Resources and Economic Development. There will be more than 300 parking spaces at each rest area, and the convenience stores will be

open 24 hours.

This is an upgrade from the former rest areas, which had a liquor store that sold liquor, wine and lottery tickets, as well as a small welcome center with bathrooms, maps and brochures of area attractions. The convenience store will sell snacks and beer, and is intended to be a one-stop shop for travelers along I-93.

Another added perk is that the new rest areas will help create jobs in the state. According to thecman.com, the design, construction and operation team is made up of New Hampshire companies and 137 full-time jobs are to be created.

According to [nh.gov](http://nh.gov), Granite State Hospitalities estimates expending \$23.6 million on the project, excluding the liquor stores. There is a 35-year term for operation, maintenance and refurbishment costs, and Granite State Hospitalities is expected to spend \$38 million. It is also estimated that Granite State Hospitalities will pay \$23.2 million in guaranteed minimum rent to the state's turnpike system over the term of the lease, and there is a tiered percentage rent based on gross sales and fuel sales. Forecasted sales show that the state's turnpike system may receive nearly \$40 million in rent payments.

"Everything is going great," Downing said. "It was a tough winter, and we spent a lot of money, but overall we are running two to three months ahead of where we are contractually obligated. It is always good to be ahead of schedule."

According to Downing, Gov. Maggie Hassan, as well as other officials from



around the state, are expected to tour the facility on July 17 at 10:30 a.m.



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**CONSTRUCTION IS coming along well at the Hooksett rest areas, according to officials, who say that the project is ahead of schedule. Pictured is the rest area on the north-bound side of Interstate 93, which will be named after long-time Executive Councilor Ray Burton.**