

HealthSouth changes name of meeting center

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HealthSouth Corp. is making new moves to market its Birmingham conference center to a wider clientele.

The HealthSouth Conference Center, as it has been known, has upgraded its facilities and changed its name to the Cahaba Grand Conference Center, a move that its general manager, Richard Davis, says will more accurately reflect its function as a public-use facility.

Davis, who serves as director of conference and travel services for HealthSouth, took over the additional role as general manager of the center in July.

He says marketing research gathered in recent months from existing clients and other event-planning professionals revealed misconceptions in the industry that the center was primarily used for HealthSouth or other corporate events.

But the center's 20,000-square-foot ballroom, which can be divided into six separate meeting rooms, as well as its large lobby area and executive boardroom, also are used for weddings and other social occasions as well as business meetings, conferences and other events.

The Cahaba Grand name, Davis says, "lends itself better to the public perceiving us as we really are."

Freshening up

He says the company has "refreshed" the facility, installing new furnishings, creating new menus and adopting higher service standards. It has also given it a polish, refinishing the doors and stage and completing other maintenance needs.

"We're really rebuilding the product, and that's a lot of what the name is intended to reflect," he says.

The company is sending out invitations this week to a grand reopening of the facility on Nov. 8 to launch the new name.

Davis says the center has done little to market itself in recent years and relies mostly on word-of-mouth and strong repeat business, such as the American Heart Association's annual Heart Ball. As a result, much of its business is local, serving groups in Birmingham and Montgomery.

As part of the new effort, Davis says he plans to market the conference center more aggressively in north Alabama, Nashville and Atlanta.

"Repeat business is incredible, but it's time for us to go out and grow the business," he says.

Davis also has recruited Dallas Teague Snider, a national account director and recruitment manager with ConferenceDirect, a California-based meeting planning firm, to serve as director of sales and marketing for the center.

"She is very well known in the meeting community here in Birmingham and really quite an asset to us," he says.

Snider says the center is putting together all-new brochures and will begin advertising in trade publications, making sales calls and taking part in trade shows to spread the word in targeted markets.

Recent history irrelevant

The center has devised a new logo and plans to unveil new Cahaba Grand signage early next year.

"We feel the new name is going to have appeal to new market segments," Snider says.

Davis says dropping the center's HealthSouth moniker is not an attempt to distance the center from associations with the corporation in the wake of the \$2.7 billion accounting fraud that came to light in 2003. Today, with new senior management, HealthSouth Corp. is struggling to recover from the scandal.

Says Davis: "We want people to understand, we're very proud to be a part of HealthSouth."

The HealthSouth name simply did not reflect the conference center's diverse client base and its availability to the larger community, he says.

"We are the only non health-care-related enterprise that HealthSouth has," he notes.

Having a corporate name simply leads to confusion, he says. Generic names like Cahaba Grand sound better on wedding and other social invitations, he says, and companies using the facility for

their own events don't necessarily want another company's name showing up in their news releases.

"HealthSouth is a great name for a health-care facility, but we're not a health-care facility," Davis says.

HealthSouth will continue to own and operate the center. The name change, he says, is simply "an effort to make ourselves more marketable to the community that we serve."

Davis says the facility, located at HealthSouth's corporate headquarters off U.S. Highway 280, competes with Birmingham's big hotels for events, but it also works in concert with them to accommodate out-of-town users.

"There is no one like us," Davis says. "We have to operate a little differently."

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