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Have You Heard?
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Holiday Inn Grand officially converts to Radisson in Billings

The Radisson is back in Billings. Last week, the owners of the former Holiday Inn Grand at 5500 Midland Road took down the old signs outside and replaced them with the new Radisson brand, signaling a new transition for the 44-year-old hotel.

The signs are a temporary cover now, but Stephen Nalley, the hotel's managing partner, says the permanent Radisson lettering should be up within two months, part of a multimillion renovation.

"We want to get it done as soon as possible," Nalley said last week.

The plan to convert the brand of the seven-story, 316-room hotel went into motion in December when Florida-based Nalley and his partner, Joe Gillespie, bought the facility at auction for \$7.85 million.

Nalley and Gillespie own 191 hotels under their partnership, called Inner Circle US. The Billings property also includes the 43,000-square-foot Montana Convention Center, the city's largest stand-alone convention facility.

Nalley said a designer has been to the property and plans have been submitted to Radisson. Renovations will be done in stages and take about a year to complete, he said.

Nalley stressed that the hotel would remain open during this period.

In December, Nalley had said he was planning to meet with Billings city officials about a possible public-private partnership to improve the convention to attract visitors to town.

Those talks remain preliminary, and Nalley said the owners are focused on hotel renovations first.

The Radisson brand should be familiar to Billings residents. The downtown Northern Hotel carried the brand in the 1990s, and it sponsored the Radisson Classic basketball tournament held during that time.

In a news release, Radisson officials said they're glad to be back.

"As one of the most refreshed hotel brands in North America, Radisson is focused on adding hotels in major cities, airport gateways and leisure destinations," said Javier Rosenberg, chief operating officer of Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group, which owns the Radisson brand.

Kismet moving downtown

Kismet Fine Rugs in downtown Billings is moving from its home at 224 N. Broadway, but not far away.

Renovations are underway at the former home of the Montana State University Billings extended campus at 112 N. Broadway, between Stacked and Belle en Blanc.

Store representatives said they expect the move to take place late spring or early summer.

Kismet Fine Rugs, owned by Jeff Kismet, expanded to Billings in November 2014. Kismet has operated a store in Wyoming for about 25 years, and he sells rugs

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Allan Overcast is the president and CEO of Tracer Technology Systems in Billings.

CASEY PAGE/Gazette Staff

BRIGHT IDEAS

For Billings inventors, patents are key in security and other fields

By **ERIK OLSON**
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The inspiration came to Allan Overcast when he heard about the 2010 shooting death of a young Montana State Patrol trooper in a remote spot near Three Forks.

The trooper, 23-year-old David DeLaitre, was found dead by another law enforcement officer following a shootout during a traffic stop with a man who later killed himself.

The murder sent shockwaves through Montana's law-enforcement community and caused Overcast, an engineer and radio system consultant for police, to wonder if he could design a better alert system and make a difference.

Was there a way to alert authorities the instant a gunshot is fired, saving precious time if an officer or citizen has been injured? If so, could Overcast get a patent on it?

"I had been wanting to do something to protect law-enforcement officers, but that was the proverbial kick in the britches," the 50-year-old Billings man said last week.

Three years ago, Tracer Technology Systems was born on Billings South Side. And, in August 2014, the company got a major shot in the arm when Overcast obtained an international patent for his invention, which can detect gunshots and immediately send a message through a cellular network to emergency personnel. It's also patent pending in the United States.

One device is designed for police to carry. Other versions can be plugged into walls or hung like a smoke detector and serve a broader purpose: detecting gunshots in public places like schools, churches or shopping malls, shortening response times and possibly saving lives.

"The cause of death of gun shooting is usually not the initial shot. It's the consequences from the loss of blood," Overcast said.

Overcast is part of the growing class of Montana entrepreneurs who have obtained patents, which help build their brand. Obtaining a patent can be a lengthy and costly process, but the value that patents bring to a business are worth the investment, local experts say.

Toni Tease, a Billings-based patent



The Ripple dinnerware was patented by Kevin Scharfe of Warum Studios in Billings.

Courtesy photo

attorney, said she's seen a rising number of Montanans seeking to patent their inventions. They range from a new type of cloth training diaper, to dishware for camping and active users, to systems to manage traffic.

"It really is a reflection of our community, and what people are doing. ... Behind every patent, there is a story," Tease said.

Nationwide, patent filings saw a surge last year, according to Lex Machina, a California-based company studying legal trends. In the second quarter of 2015 (April to June), patent filings totaled 1,656 in the United States, the highest quarterly amount since Lex Machina began compiling these statistics in 2011.

Tease works primarily with inventors at small firms. Her clients are nationwide, but the majority work in Montana and Wyoming. The slump in oil prices has curbed patent proposals related to drilling and development, but Tease said other sectors remain steady.

Obtaining a patent costs at least

\$10,000, and Tease's clients report spending up to \$18,000.

Patents provide value in three big ways, Tease said. One, they deter competitors and protect the inventor's work and idea. Two, they increase the value of the company for potential investors or buyers. And, they create an avenue to license a product, allowing the inventor to focus on creating while someone else sells the product.

About 90 percent of her clients are issued patents if they're eligible, and Tease estimates that about one in four discover their invention was already patented by someone else.

Patent law has traditionally been recession-proof, and Tease said she's pleased and surprised with the innovation she sees from local entrepreneurs.

"It is absolutely an extremely wide range of technology. That, to me, is the beauty of Montana," she said.

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