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Marriott Shoals earns Four Diamonds again

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The Marriott Shoals Hotel and Spa has again achieved a Four Diamond rating from AAA.

Sylvia Berry, office and travel agency manager for AAA-Alabama's Florence office, presented the designation Tuesday morning at the hotel.

"We are proud to recognize Marriott-Shoals," Berry said, while handing a plaque certifying the designation to Larry Bowser, general manager of the hotel and spa. "This is the only Four-Diamond hotel in North Alabama.

"We appreciate what you do for our AAA members."

Bowser said this will be the third straight year the hotel has received a Four Diamond designation. The Marriott Shoals was built in conjunction with two Robert Trent Jones golf courses in the Shoals as part of an effort to boost the area's tourism and economy.

"We're very proud for the hotel and staff," Bowser said. "A Four Diamond rating is not an easy thing for us to maintain. We're very honored to accept this designation from AAA, which sets the standard for hotel ratings."

The economic incentive package was funded by the Retirement Systems of Alabama, which operates the golf trail, and a 1-cent-per-gallon fuel tax in Colbert and Lauderdale counties.

Officials envisioned a Four Diamond hotel when the local Public Park Authority joined with RSA Executive Director David Bronner for the Shoals' economic enhancement package.

The agreement they reached called for the hotel to be of four-star quality. The package included transforming the top of the Renaissance Tower into a high-end restaurant. Today, the 360 Grille operates in the tower.

Bowser said officials don't plan to rest on the laurels of a Four Diamond hotel.

"We've applied to have the 360 Grille rated separately, in hopes of it becoming a Four Diamond restaurant," he said.

According to information provided by AAA, 1,224 lodgings and 768 restaurants in the United States, Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean have Four Diamond designations.

Only 3.9 percent of the more than 31,000 lodgings that receive AAA ratings have Four Diamond designations. About 2.8 percent of the 27,000 restaurants that receive AAA ratings achieved the level of Four Diamonds.

AAA rates hotels on a range of one to five diamonds. Only 103 lodgings received Five Diamonds in 2009.

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