

Another changing of the guard for hotel on Grand Island

Byblos sells it for \$6.25 million to Long Island hospitality firm



Byblos Niagara Resort & Spa, former Holiday Inn Grand Island that was bought in 2013 foreclosure, was sold to McSam Hotel Group. Buffalo News file photo

By [Jonathan D. Epstein](#) | News Business Reporter | July 8, 2015

A Long Island-based hospitality company with more than 30 hotels in its portfolio has acquired Byblos Niagara Resort & Spa on Grand Island, ending the plans of its Middle Eastern former owners for their own high-end hotel firm to gain a lavish toehold in the U.S. market.

Sam Chang's McSam Hotel Group, a midrange hotel developer, operator and investor based in Great Neck, Nassau County, paid \$6.25 million Monday to take ownership of the 263-room complex. The seller was Byblos Hospitality Group of Dubai, United Arab Emirates, which itself had acquired the former Holiday Inn Grand Island two years earlier in a foreclosure auction.

The 181,245-square-foot full-service hotel sits on 12.6 acres of Niagara River waterfront at 100 Whitehaven Road. It features more than 28,000 square feet of meeting and banquet space, both

indoor and outdoor swimming pools, a sauna and whirlpool, and a fitness center. Rooms have private balconies, and it's located next to a golf course and marina with 1,000 feet of waterfront land.

McSam officials could not be reached to comment Wednesday on their plans for the hotel. The firm is more known for building and operating hotels such as Holiday Inn, Fairfield Inn or Hampton Inn rather than the kind of four-star resorts that Byblos built and owns in the Middle East. "They've been doing it for quite a while," said Lawrence E. Best, owner of Buffalo Hotel Realty, who handles hotel sales and brokered the deal for Byblos. "He buys and sells. He's quite an operator."

Chang, 54, a native of Taiwan, is one of the biggest hotel developers in New York City, with hundreds of hotel rooms at more than 30 properties in the five boroughs and Connecticut. He also has another 29 projects under construction and 20 more in the works, as he seeks to double his holdings. He currently has some 4,000 rooms under development for various national hotel chains.

He is developing a 35-story Holiday Inn on Eighth Avenue in Manhattan and last year bought a 110-year-old historic church on West 36th Street in Manhattan for \$50.8 million, and filed plans for a 28-story, 566-room hotel that will incorporate the church's facade and structure. He also owns half of a construction firm that handles most of his project work, and also owns 7.5 percent of Trump Entertainment Resorts.

Byblos, founded 10 years ago by CEO Jean Samman to meet the needs of a growing tourism market in the Emirates, owns six commercial hotels, a residential hotel, a chain of coffee shops and a chain of Lebanese restaurants. It had teamed up with local investors, including Buffalo surgeon and now real estate investor Dr. Fadi Dagher, to acquire the former Holiday Inn for \$4 million at a foreclosure auction in January 2013.

The company then invested \$2.5 million in renovations and upgrades, with plans to create a tourist draw as a first step toward owning other properties in the United States. But less than two years later, it put the property on the market for \$9.8 million to test interest before hiring Best, who listed it for \$7.5 million.

"They hired me to put a property valuation on it," Best said, "and within six months, we had a buyer."