

KUTCHERS TO BE HEALTH RESORT

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MONTICELLO — Mark Kutsher has seen countless casino dreams and development schemes while he and his family built and ran Kutsher's Country Club during the last century.

But while sports legends like Wilt Chamberlain soared on its courts and Hollywood greats like Jerry Senfield starred on its Stardust nightclub stage, all the plans to breathe new life into what's now the last of the classic Catskill resorts faded, like all those crumbling hotels.

Until now, that is.

Kutsher's will soon be sold to an offshoot of one of the world's premier companies devoted to healthy living — Veria Lifestyle, which plans to transform the 1,310-acre resort and all its properties outside Monticello into what it describes as a \$90 million Nature Cure Lifestyle Management Center.

Veria Lifestyle, which is connected to the Veria Living media conglomerate, recently presented tentative plans to the Sullivan County Industrial Development Agency for a getaway of a few hundred rooms that would feature everything from "yoga sciences" and "ayurvedic medical treatment" to "biodynamic restaurants," golf, tennis and "a wide range of health-driven activities."

Demolition of the old buildings could start within weeks, since the IDA just approved a sales tax exemption of \$88,000 for the process.

"It's the real deal; it's not contingent on this bill or that bill happening," says Kutsher, referring to past projects that were based on the passage of legislation legalizing casinos. "I'm very excited about the project. It will do wonderful things for the county."

Thompson Supervisor Tony Cellini, who's seen just as many development dreams disappear, agrees. He met with project representatives last week.

"It's going to happen," he says. "There's no doubt about it."

One reason for the optimism is that the owner of the parent company of Veria Living is Indian media mogul Subhash Chandra, who's worth \$2.4 billion, making him one of the world's richest people.

"He doesn't have to borrow," says IDA Chairman and Sullivan County Legislator Ira Steingart. But the Nature Cure Lifestyle Management Center — which will be on the tax rolls — isn't just about the hundreds of jobs or thousands of dollars it will mean to a county with chronically high unemployment and one of the state's highest poverty rates.

It's about the end of an era for those classic Catskill resorts — an era Mark Kutsher literally held in his hands recently as he cleaned out the hotel offices where his late mother, Helen, wrote down the names of guests — and their favorite rooms, birthdays and food preferences — in her little notebooks.

In fact, before Helen Kutsher died in March, they discussed the sale of the hotel where she greeted guests with a firm handshake and warm smile for most of her 89 years.

"For the property to get to another level," said Mark, "that would please us immensely."

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