



Gafcon Inc. founder and Chief Executive Officer Yehudi "Gaf" Gaffen speaks during the groundbreaking ceremony for the so-called "Ghost Hotel" that Gafcon bought nine months ago and is developing. The ceremony on Friday, March 11, was second for the hotel, the first coming a decade ago. | MARCIE LANDEROS PHOTO

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'California Ghostbusters' Gafcon Breaks Ground on Hotel

The So-called "Ghost Hotel" Developers Have Big Plans for the Shell Standing in the North End of Imperial

MARCIE LANDEROS ON MARCH 12, 2022 LAST UPDATED: MARCH 13, 2022

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IMPERIAL — What has become known as the infamous "Ghost Hotel" took a next step toward full resurrection in the form of its second groundbreaking ceremony, this one coming a decade later with developer Gafcon Inc.

On Friday, March 11, the city of Imperial, San Diego-based Gafcon, Cambria Hotels and the Imperial Valley Regional Chamber of Commerce held the ceremony in front of the hotel that sits just north of Neckel Road off Highway 86, then a tour was conducted of parts of the first floor of the building, ending at Pioneers' Muse for a luncheon and keynote address.

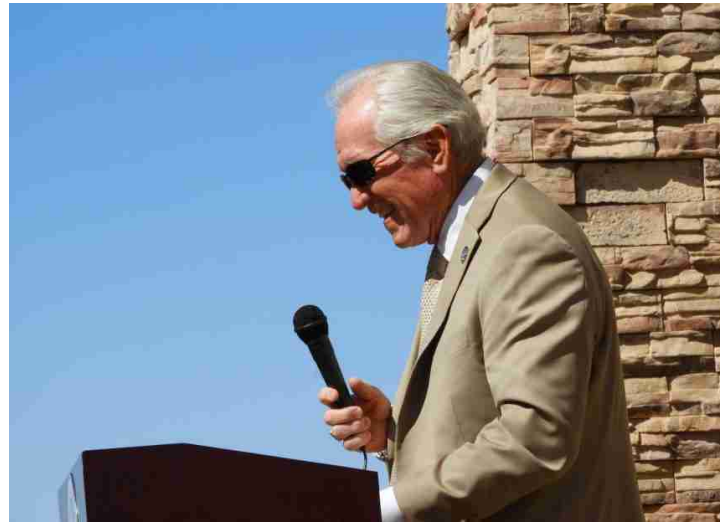
The hotel was in remarkable shape despite its years without care, experiencing almost no vandalism or destruction, much to the surprise many of the attendees. One notable exception was District 3 Imperial County Supervisor Michael Kelley, who had a theory on why the hotel has been largely left alone during his speech at ceremony.

“I think it was because the name of the hotel, the ‘Ghost Hotel.’ I can just see the vandals now. ‘Okay, hell no, I ain’t going to do that, that place is haunted,’ but little did they know, we were gonna get California Ghostbusters to show up,” Kelley said of Gafcon, drawing a laugh from the crowd.

Gafcon plans to build a four-story, full-service hotel on the project’s 22.52 acres, bringing in the chain Cambria Hotels to serve as the brand name. The hotel will have 108 rooms, with an indoor pool, event rooms, and a restaurant with a lounge area, costing Gafcon an estimated \$15.5 million, according to the developer.

Cambria Hotels is under the Choice Hotels umbrella. Choice owns such known brands as Quality Inn and Clarion. Cambria appears to be one of Choice’s premier brands.

Walking through the “Ghost Hotel,” the bones of the previous project could be seen all around, including a half-indoor pool. Originally, the hotel was meant to be a Holiday Inn & Suites owned by developer Daniel Chiu in Marin. Chiu broke ground in 2012 on hotel but abandoned the project in 2014, causing the long vacant structure to get the spectral nickname and standing as a monument to monumental distrust of outsiders with big promises.



Imperial County District 3 Supervisor Michael Kelley chuckles after referring to the Gafcon Inc. as the “California Ghostbusters” during the so-called “Ghost Hotel’s” groundbreaking ceremony on Friday, March 11. | MARCIE LANDEROS PHOTO





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Chiu abandoned the project, but he held onto the property itself until 2019, when he lost it to foreclosure. It was purchased by a lender named Evergreen Investment Co., which sold the property to Gafcon some nine months ago.

“It’s been an amazing nine months. I have to tell you, every organization has been extremely supportive, the City Council, the county. It almost feels like coming home,” Gafcon founder and Chief Executive Officer Yehudi “Gaf” Gaffen said during the ceremony.

Developing the hotel has been part of a spate of work in the northern reach of the city that has included a new Post Office and plans for a McDonalds and Starbucks along with a bike path. Recently, the city approved another step in the redevelopment of the Highway 86 corridor as a destination highway, which would run beside the new hotel.

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Imperial Mayor Geoff Dale was among the speakers for the ceremony and shared his excitement over the proj noting that the development of the hotel will create 295 permeant jobs in the city. Dale also addressed fears and

criticism of developing a hotel so far from the city's center.



Gafcon Inc. proudly displays its rendering of the planned development of the so-called "Ghost Hotel" during a groundbreaking ceremony on Friday, March 11. | MARCIE LANDEROS PHOTO

"This whole area is just growing and exploding, and the north end (of Imperial) is the ticket, that's where we're gonna go," Dale said.

Northward development was on everyone's mind during the luncheon and keynote address, which was delivered by Imperial County District 4 Supervisor Ryan Kelley, who is also vice chair of the Lithium Valley Commission.

"Imperial County is blessed with an abundance of geothermal brine at the Salton Sea, that brine is rich in minerals used to produce batteries, like lithium, magnesium, and zinc. We know that the developments are moving forward with lithium, but there are other elements that can be extracted for commercial commodity," Ryan Kelley said.

On Feb. 15, the Imperial County Board of Supervisors unanimously passed the Lithium Valley Economic Opportunity Investment Plan, which outlined the development of the lithium-extracting industry and how the county hopes to bring jobs to one of the country's most economically depressed areas.



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