Public views new $16 million Convention Center

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LAFAYETTE — Gretchen Kelly and Jill LeBlanc were among the first to tour Lafayette’s new $16 million Convention Center when its doors opened for public inspection Wednesday.

They paused in front of a plaque that commemorates the building’s grand opening. It lists the project’s architects, Gov. Mike Foster’s name and the year construction was completed (2002). But Kelly and LeBlanc said they found the closing line most interesting: “Project Funded By Louisiana Taxpayers.”

“At least I know where some of my hard-earned taxpayer dollars went,” Kelly said.

After a 30-minute walking tour of the structure, Kelly and LeBlanc said they feel their tax dollars went to good use.

“There are a lot of modern conveniences, like monitors in the lobby, that will draw events to Lafayette,” Kelly said. “I think it’s worth the $16 million, considering the amount of money it will bring to the local community.”

Three conventions booked in 2002 are expected to make $2 million in economic impact on local hotels and motels, restaurants, stores and tourist attractions, sales director Sam Voisin said.

Revenue from a 4 percent hotel-motel tax will pay for the center next to the Cajundome.

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Convention center rental rates range from $230 to $4,000 depending on the amount of space used, Voisin said. Staff, security and equipment are not included, he said.