

Workers center of dispute

HOTELS, From 1A

and intriguing.

"That's unheard of," said Edward Carducci, manager of the Wyndham Milwaukee Center Hotel. "I wouldn't think it would happen in Milwaukee — or even Chicago."

"Wow," added Sam Gallo, head of a Milwaukee labor union for 2,000 hotel and restaurant workers.

Tight labor market

Gallo, business manager of Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Local 122, said the dispute highlights a tough labor market for entry-level workers in the suburbs.

Those in the industry say hotel housekeepers and janitors typically earn between \$6.50 and \$9 an hour.

For Nelda Nuncio, however, it was not about money.

An Embassy Suites housekeeper, Nuncio says she was approached last summer by a supervisor who was going to the Sheraton and wanted others to go along.

Nuncio said she and several co-workers were called into a meeting inside the Embassy laundry room, where they all got Sheraton job applications and were told they could earn \$1 an hour more.

Nuncio, of Milwaukee, said she decided to stay at the Embassy.

"This is nice here," said the 25-year-old Nuncio. "It's nice — the managers and everybody."

The two hotels — Sheraton the

THE LAWSUIT

The lawsuit filed by Embassy Suites Hotel alleges that the Sheraton Hotel last August recruited two Embassy housekeeping supervisors to leave their jobs, accept positions at the Sheraton and secretly recruit other Embassy workers.

largest in town, Embassy the second-largest — are within walking distance of each other along Moorland Road just off I-94, in an area where Brookfield strives to show its best face for visitors.

Officials at both hotels declined to comment on particulars of the dispute.

Unpleasant situation

Sheraton General Manager Susan Mabry, who has been on the job since May, agreed that the court squabble is "very, very uncommon." But she insisted that it has not affected the Sheraton's day-to-day operation.

"It's not something we enjoy," she added. "That's for sure."

The lawsuit paints a picture of two suburban business giants sparring playfully behind the scenes, until one finally decides to take off the gloves.

According to the suit, the Sheraton last August successfully recruited two Embassy housekeeping supervisors to leave their jobs and accept positions at the Sheraton. Named as co-defendants, the two supervisors are identified as Jeanette Emery of Waukesha and Alma Enriquez of Milwaukee.

Both are represented by the Sheraton's lawyers. Both declined to comment.

The suit alleges that each supervisor lied about her reason for leaving the Embassy: Emery wanted to start her own day care business; Enriquez was moving to California to be closer to her father. In reality, the suit says, both had accepted jobs at the Sheraton, agreeing to secretly recruit other Embassy workers.

Attorneys for the Embassy call the alleged actions "intentional, predatory," as well as an "illegal scheme using unlawful purposes to accomplish an unlawful purpose." Without being specific, they claim the Embassy lost several employees as a result.

The Embassy seeks unspecified punitive damages, including repayment of compensation paid to Emery and Enriquez.

In its formal answer to the lawsuit, the Sheraton denies allegations of wrongdoing, saying that normal competition and other "legitimate business reasons" could explain any action taken against the Embassy Suites.

Sheraton attorneys also assert that Embassy cannot be awarded damages because that hotel "comes to this court with unclean hands." No details are provided to explain that assertion.

According to court records, the two sides have discussed an out-of-court settlement. But they are due back in front of a judge Oct. 15 for a final pretrial hearing.

Both the Sheraton and Embassy are key players in Brookfield's efforts to lure conventioneers and

EMPLOYMENT HOTEL WARS

Two neighbors on a commercial corridor have become adversaries in a court fight over employees.

SHERATON HOTEL

LOCATION: 375 S. Moorland Road

BUILT: 1971

SIZE: 390 rooms

BROOKFIELD RANKING: No. 1

OWNERSHIP: Starwood Hotels & Resorts

LAW FIRM: Gonzalez, Saggio & Harlan

EMBASSY SUITES HOTEL

LOCATION: 1200 S. Moorland Road

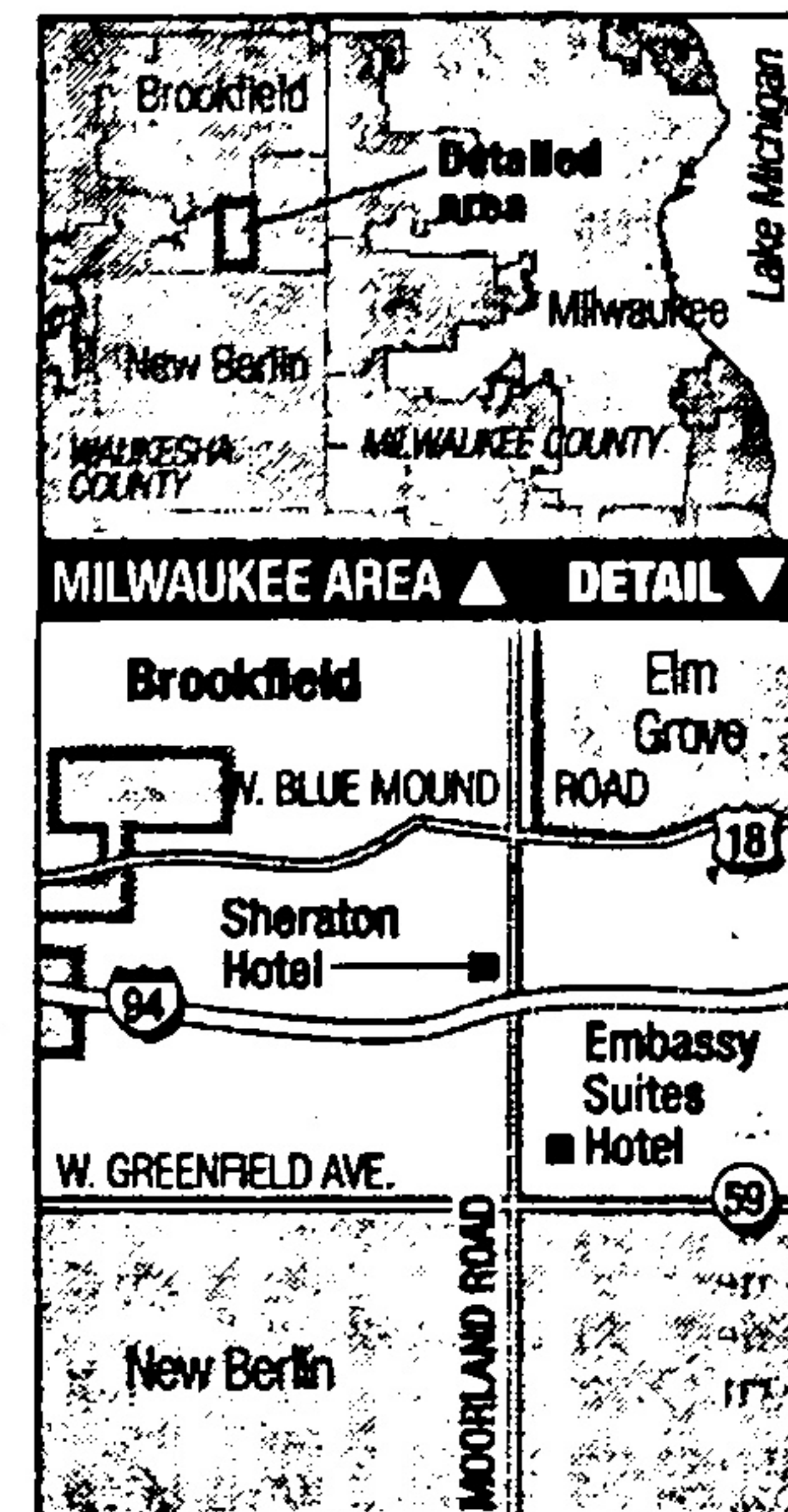
BUILT: 1985

SIZE: 203 rooms

BROOKFIELD RANKING: No. 2

OWNERSHIP: Brookfield Hotel LP

LAW FIRM: Wessels & Pautsch



BOB VEIERSTADLER/Journal Sentinel

vacationers from the hospitality industry in downtown Milwaukee and elsewhere.

Lori Rademacher, executive director of the Brookfield Convention & Visitors Bureau, said maintaining a team atmosphere is important, and she was surprised to learn of the fight between the Sheraton and Embassy.

On brochures and billboards, the tourism agency touts Brookfield as "Milwaukee's suburb with style."

Rademacher said she doubts most travelers would care about

the Sheraton-Embassy tiff.

"I don't want to minimize the charges. That is a big deal," she said. "But I don't know if we'd be doing the consumers a favor by making them aware of it."

Country Inn & Suites General Manager Dianne Heuvelmans worries that the lawsuit could have a chilling effect on what has otherwise been friendly competition.

"It hurts the Brookfield family," she said. "Do I have to worry that somebody's going to sue me? That worries me."