

## Many hotel rooms vacant

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By James Gallagher | *Staff Writer*

Getting a hotel room during Masters Week is easier than many people think.

Through Tuesday afternoon, several owners and managers of area hotels, including the Days Inn on Washington Road and Super 8 Motel at the Belair Road-Interstate 20 interchange, said they still had rooms available.

Cathy Gibson, the front-desk manager of Wingate Inn on Belair Road, said her hotel's vacancies are mostly the result of cancellations.

"Some of the people I held rooms for, they waited until the last minute to cancel," she said, adding that she turned away several reservations because the hotel was booked.

Many hotel owners say it's normal for hotels to have a few vacancies early in the week and fill up Thursday through Sunday.

Masters Tournament practice-round tickets are good only for one day, meaning visitors are less likely to stay overnight.

The Augusta Metropolitan Convention & Visitors Bureau reports that hotel bookings for the week are up. As of last week, reservations through the bureau's toll-free reservation hot line were up 10 percent to 15 percent over last year, bureau spokeswoman Jen Bowen reported.

Still, some hotels have vacancies through the weekend.

Days Inn General Manager Nicholas Vasseghy said his Washington Road hotel has had more vacancies because several new hotels have opened during the past few years.

"They built many new hotels in town last year," he said.

"The same demand is there, but the rooms are more."

The notable newcomer on the Washington Road corridor was the AmeriHost Inn, built on Center West Parkway next to the Guest House Inn, formerly the Motel 6.

Jugal Purohit, AmeriHost's owner, said he was not surprised that some hotels have vacancies while his hotel is booked solid through the week.

"The old hotels have to go," he said. "Customers would rather pay \$300 for a new hotel than \$225 for an old one."