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### The Legends lands more tenants



Architectural rendering courtesy Kanes Architects

The creators of Rainforest Cafe and the Hard Rock Cafe are bringing new theme restaurant concepts to The Legends retail and entertainment district in Kansas City, Kan. Developers today will announce details of the \$246 million, 750,000-square-foot project in the burgeoning Village West development near Kansas Speedway. The announcement also will include commitments from a dozen or so retailers, with more within 90 days. **Story, C-1**



The Kansas City Star

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within 90 days to add to the district's draw. Although Village West's Cabela's already is the state's top tourist draw, the use of STAR bonds to build an aquarium at the store created controversy that is extending to the new retail and entertainment district.

The Unified Board of Commissioners is to vote on the development's financing package at a special meeting at 3 p.m. today at Cabela's. The proposal calls for using \$114 million in STAR bonds to finance the shopping center and entertainment district.

So far the Unified Government has used STAR bonds to pump more than \$160 million into Village West, including Cabela's and Nebraska Furniture Mart, and adjacent Kansas Speedway, State and local sales tax revenue generated by the development is used to pay off the bonds.

Most of the \$114 million for The Legends would go to infrastructure surrounding the center. But the deal allows for up to \$13.5 million to be used for personal property, including \$8.5 million for audio-animatronic dinosaur equipment.

Despite the success of the Village West development, Steven Schussler, founder of the Rainforest Cafe, needed to be convinced that the complex would attract enough tourists for his new restaurant concept, dubbed T-Rex. It would be a "prehistoric family adventure" with a restaurant and a shop.

Schussler said he talked to investment guru Warren Buffett's people about Nebraska Furniture Mart, as well as the head of Famous Dave's Legendary Pit Bar-B-Que and other tenants at Village West. He walked the parking lots of the complex on a weekday afternoon, looking at license plates to see where visitors were from.

"Kansas City was not on our road map — and I love Kansas City," Schussler said. "But I never thought it would have the traffic that I needed until I saw The Legends project."

He expects T-Rex to attract about half tourists and half local traffic. The \$10 million, 20,000-square-foot operation would include a meteorite display, flying pterodactyls, geysers, cascading waterfalls and ice caves. It also will have at least six private rooms for events.

Children would be able to participate in 20 activities, including "dinosaur digs" to uncover fossils and

artifacts, and paleontology students would serve as guides. T-Rex also would host some 3,000 students a week for field trips and offer incentives to schools, as well as bring in top paleontologists.

Schussler plans to open fewer than 10 T-Rex attractions in high-volume tourist locations throughout the world. The first T-Rex will open in Minneapolis' Mall of America in May 2005. The Legends location would open in late 2005.

Isaac Tigrett, co-founder of the Hard Rock Cafe and founder of House of Blues, plans to open a new high-end barbecue restaurant concept called Bozo's Hot Pit Bar-B-Q Restaurant. The operation would offer "hearty American food, live music and dancing."

Among other retailers committed to the project include Ted's Montana Grill, Dave & Buster's, Gold Stone Creamery and Helzberg Diamonds.

Jerry Gaines, permanent director of the Missouri Restaurant Association, said he would have liked to see more locally owned operations, but added that they often don't have the deep pockets to pay rent at high-profile centers. He also wondered whether the traffic at Village West could support so many operations.

"It's all right when you have the (auto) races, but what happens when you don't have a race?" Gaines said. "You have restaurants at 19th Street that haven't survived the competition even with all the rooftops out there."

Wyandotte County Administrator Dennis Hays, however, said the new retail and entertainment options would continue to build on Village West as a destination retail development.

"And it will prove for our community, the state and the entire metro area to be a major asset for many years to come," he said.

Assuming the board approves the proposal, the announcement is sure to generate enthusiasm from Wyandotte County residents starved for retail amenities. But it has already angered several members of the Kansas Legislature, who this month pushed through a bill that, among other things, prohibits using STAR bonds to purchase personal property like the audio-animatronics.

The bill, which goes into effect June 3, made an exception for the Unified Government's plans to use \$2.5 million of STAR bonds to purchase projectors, lighting and

sound systems, and popcorn machines for a new theater.

Rep. Kenny Wilk, who served on the conference committee that drafted the final version of the bill, accused the Unified Government of trying to "get under the wire on this deal."

Wilk, who was one of six legislators to sign a May 6 letter that stressed to Unified Government Mayor Carol Marinovich and Lt. Gov. John Moore the importance of honoring the bill's intent, urged the Unified Board to "think long and hard about (approving the financing). I just would really, really hope that the Unified Government would not poke the Legislature in the eye on this issue. ... There will be political fallout."

Sen. Karin Brownlee, the chairwoman of the Senate Commerce Committee, who also signed the letter, called the proposal to use STAR bonds to finance personal property for the T-Rex restaurant an "outrage."

"That was never the intent of this legislation," she said. "We wanted to provide an incentive that attracted major quality development to our state. But regardless of how 'special' a restaurant is, it's not the place of the state government to fund the decor inside the restaurant."

But at least one legislator took issue with these concerns. Rep. Rick Rehorn of Kansas City, Kan., called the letter that the conference committee members wrote "totally inappropriate" and said it held no legal force.

On Tuesday, Unified Government spokesman Mike Taylor defended the Unified Government's decision to move forward with the use of STAR bonds to purchase personal property.

Taylor said the Village West project had far exceeded the expectations of Wyandotte County residents and state officials, attracting millions of visitors.

"STAR bonds were a crucial part of that," he said. "Our project was approved and the bonds authorized long before this discussion about how they should be used came about."

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# Legends attracts more big draws

By JOYCE SMITH and MARK WIEBE  
The Kansas City Star

A massive entertainment district planned near Kansas Speedway is attracting several top restaurants and retailers — including new concepts by founders of the Hard Rock Cafe and Rainforest Cafe.

The Legends, a 750,000-square-foot complex in the Village West development near Interstate 435 and State Avenue in Kansas City, Kan., will offer many operations that are exclusive to the region and

### First glance

■ The Legends entertainment district planned near Kansas Speedway is attracting several top restaurants and retailers.

■ Among the new restaurants are concepts being developed by the founders of the Hard Rock Cafe and Rainforest Cafe.

designed to draw tourists as well as area residents. One of the new concepts would feature audio-animatronic dinosaurs.

"These are major deals," said

Dan Lowe, a partner in RED Development, developers of The Legends. "They (potential tenants) were attracted to the traffic at Nebraska Furniture Mart and Cabela's, the demographic of the customers, and the sales volume that those guys are doing. The studies that we did show there's a tremendous gap in the market for food. It is significantly underbuilt, and we are trying to tap into that market."

Backers plan to unveil details of the \$246 million project today.

RED will announce more tenants

See LEGENDS, C-2