

THE BUSINESS JOURNAL

VOL. 23, NO. 5

SERVING METROPOLITAN KANSAS CITY

OCTOBER 15-21, 2004 \$2.00

Retail developers play show and sell

By ROB ROBERTS
STAFF WRITER

Wyandotte County, long known for blue-collar sites such as its Argentine rail yard, will become home to attractions such as a 100-foot-long, 45-foot-high Argentinasaurus, thanks to a trend trans-

forming the local retail landscape.

It's called retail-entertainment, and nowhere will it be more evident than The Legends of Village West, where Rainforest Cafe creator Steven Schussler will open the world's first T-Rex restaurant and retail establishment late next year.

With that in mind, developers buried

a 6-foot-long dinosaur bone, which was unearthed by surprised dignitaries during the Oct. 12 groundbreaking.

The event also served as an occasion for RED Development LLC officials to announce that they'd hit pay dirt in their

PLEASE SEE **DEVELOPERS**, PAGE 37

DEVELOPERS: *A need to bring live bodies back*

FROM PAGE 3

search for tenants for the 750,000-square-foot project.

But with several other Kansas City retail-entertainment projects now in the works, the question is: Will there be enough retail-entertainment tenants and public interest to sustain the trend?

Dan Lowe, a managing partner of RED Development, said the answer is yes — for developments that are done correctly.

Along with the 11 tenants announced in May, RED has signed or is close to signing 44 of the 120 to 140 tenants planned for The Legends, near the Kansas Speedway, Nebraska Furniture Mart and Cabela's.

Part of RED's success, Lowe said, has been because it added a 250,000-square-foot entertainment component.

"People today want more of an experience than the typical run-of-the-mill shopping center provides," he said. "And The Legends will be not only a shopping experience but an entertainment experience and an educational experience. In fact, several of our tenants are calling this newly expanded area an 'edutainment district.'"

Besides T-Rex, with its skeletal and animatronic dinosaurs, The Legends will feature educational attractions such as exhibits highlighting legendary figures from the area's past and two yet-to-be-announced museums, Lowe said.

In downtown Kansas City, The Cordish Co. is working on a project with an even heavier entertainment slant.

Blake Cordish, a vice president of the Baltimore-based company, said there is no question that Kansas City Live will succeed.

"Unlike suburban projects, which are basically a zero-sum game, demand for downtown entertainment actually increases with more supply," Cordish said, calling it the "more is more" principle.

A perfect example, he said, is Baltimore's Inner Harbor, an international model of successful entertainment-based revitalization.

"In the last three decades, Baltimore has added literally dozens of major attractions and millions of square feet of entertainment," Cordish said. "The net result has been that last year Baltimore attracted over 18 million visitors, and entertainment is now one of the top employers and tax bases for the city."

KCK's Village West is expected to draw 12 million to 15 million visitors a year.

The two dozen restaurants in The Legends' retail-entertainment mix also will benefit from existing demand, Lowe said.

A market study conducted for RED determined that per-capita restaurant spending within a 6.5-mile radius of the Kansas Speedway was \$837.

Other sites studied were Interstate 470 and Missouri Highway 291 in Independence, \$1,702; the Country Club Plaza, \$2,385; Leewood Town Center, \$2,503; and Oak Park Mall, \$2,579.

Destination tenants such as T-Rex and Bozo's Hot Pit Bar-B-Q, a high-end restaurant created by Hard Rock Cafe founder Isaac Tigrett, will contribute to The Legends' draw. Only eight T-Rexes will be built in the United States, Schussler said. Tigrett plans just four Bozo's locations, each with an upstairs ultra-lounge and live entertainment on both levels.

David Szymanski, director of the Center for Retailing Studies at Texas A&M University, said retail-entertainment is part of a larger trend toward creating "more self-contained community shopping environments, where you really have the choice of 'all of the above.'"

Kurt Barnard, president of Barnard's Retail Consulting Group, said the retail-entertainment trend has more to do with what's not working.

"Market research supports one thing: Fewer consumers are going to large malls," Barnard said. "So mall developers are faced with a need to come up with something to bring live bodies back."

Although some view retail-entertainment as a fad, Lowe said skeptics need look no farther than the restaurant-laden Plaza



DAVE KAUP PH

Participants at The Legends of Village West groundbreaking unearth a cast of an apatosaurus femur, a nod to a planned T-Rex restaurant.

to see that the concept has staying power.

The Cordish Co., which completed more than \$1 billion worth of development in the past year, banks on the staying power of urban and suburban entertainment projects as a long-term holder of its real estate, Cordish said.

"Suburban destination projects are geared toward lifestyle shopping, with restaurants and related attractions serving the secondary role of extending visit time and offering convenient amenities for nearby residences," he said.

In contrast, Cordish said, an entertainment district generally is part of the fabric of a downtown.

"In our minds, it is an anomaly that the downtown (in Kansas City) is presently not more energized and a tremendous opportunity for our company to play a significant role in this revitalization," he said.

REACH ROB ROBERTS at 816-421-5900 or rroberts@bizjournals.com.