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H&M working on deal to come to CityPlace

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Thomas Cordy

H&M could go in the CityPlace space now occupied by Williams-Sonoma and Pottery Barn.

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WEST PALM BEACH — Fashionistas, get ready: **H&M** is working on a deal to open at **CityPlace** in West Palm Beach by the end of the year.

Retail sources say the popular global fashion brand hopes to take space located near the fountain, in the **Pottery Barn**, **Williams-Sonoma** and **Tommy Bahama** stores along Rosemary Avenue.

Pottery Barn and Williams-Sonoma, home furnishings stores owned by the same company, are expected to close on March 21. **Tommy Bahama**, a men's clothing retailer, is expected to

move elsewhere in CityPlace later in the year, possibly summer or early fall, sources said.

H&M's full name is **Hennes & Mauritz AB**. The Swedish company was founded in 1947 and in 2010 opened its first location in Palm Beach County: at **The Gardens Mall** in Palm Beach Gardens. H&M offers clothing for women, men, teenagers and children. The retailer is known for its low prices, quick inventory turnovers, fashionable wear and cult-like following.

An H&M spokeswoman wasn't quite ready to confirm the CityPlace deal.

"We don't have anything finalized," said **Nicole Christie**, an H&M spokeswoman in New York. "We're looking at a lot of locations, including CityPlace, but there's nothing we can talk about."

But Christie said H&M has been pleasantly surprised by the reception to its Florida stores, even when the stores carry seasonal wear not necessarily suited to the area's climate. She said business is strong in Florida stores year-round.

"We're expanding quite rapidly," Christie said. "A big focus is in Florida because of the customer base and the size of the market."

In the past year, the company has grown dramatically, opening numerous stores nationwide, including Florida. The company started in Florida with two stores in Orlando. Just recently H&M opened two stores in Miami-Dade County, with the store on Lincoln Road in Miami Beach doing phenomenal business during the holidays, a retail source said. Look for more stores to open in

South Florida.

Although CityPlace has moved away from its initial emphasis on shopping and more toward dining and entertainment, having an H&M store will make the center a destination.

The November 2010 opening of The Gardens store, the first in South Florida, prompted 1,000 people to wait in line to buy something. Some customers even drove up from Miami.

A CityPlace spokeswoman declined to comment on H&M. She also did not confirm word that a deal for an **L.A. Fitness** gym remains in the works.

Although CityPlace is staying mum on H&M, the retail center is talking about its other new tenants.

They include several new restaurants and bars. Among them: **Copper Blues Rock Pub & Kitchen**, **Tequila Cowboy Bar & Grill**, **WannaB's Karaoke Bar** and **The Brass Tap**. That's in addition to the high-profile Italian chain restaurant, **Brio Tuscan Grille**, set to open Feb. 21.

Tequila Cowboy and WannaB's are owned by the same Nashville, Tenn., company. According to the company's website, Tequila Cowboy is a full restaurant with entertainment at night.

WannaB's, meanwhile, is a karaoke bar. Together, the venues will take up 11,000 square feet.

A CityPlace spokeswoman said Tequila Cowboy/WannaB's are targeting a spring/summer opening.

As for the Brass Tap, look for a brew place offering dozens of draft craft beers with more than 300 varieties of imports, local craft beers and wines.

Tequila Cowboy, WannaB's and The Brass Tap all are across from **Revolutions Bowling, Bar & Grille**, the giant bowling alley under construction on Rosemary Avenue. The deals were hinted at by a request made last year by CityPlace to the city of West Palm Beach for larger signs for its stores, as first reported in this column in October.

Copper Blues Rock Pub, of Phoenix, Ariz., will open on the second floor next door to the **Palm Beach Improv**. Guests can enjoy food and music, including from top cover bands and big name musicians. A spring or summer opening also is slated.

For **Tommy Peters**, president of **B.B. King's Blues Club** at CityPlace, the more the merrier, including its new neighbor, Copper Blues.

"Our best store is in Memphis on Beale Street, and there's probably 20 music venues," Peters said. "If anyone else wants to do blues, that's fine with me...You can't be the lone ranger. You've got to be a place where people want to go."

An executive with the **Related Cos.**, CityPlace's developer, said in a statement that the move to make the center an entertainment and dining destination has been "incredible."

"We're excited to bring even more high-energy, high-quality destination restaurants and nightlife venues to round out the full experience of shopping, dining and entertainment at CityPlace," said **R. Webber Hudson**, executive vice president of **Related Urban**, the Related Cos. division that handles CityPlace leasing and management.

In addition to being an entertainment draw, CityPlace's recent moves also make it a beer lover's haven.

Longtime restaurant tenant **Brewzzi** makes its own beers, and new tenant **Mellow Mushroom** pizza offers a range of craft beers. Now **The Brass Tap** adds to CityPlace's identity as a place to sample brews, along with **Copper Blues**, which will offer more than 60 beers on tap.

"Our hope is that CityPlace will become a craft beer destination, and that will help everybody," said **Skip Stoltz**, owner of Brewzzi. Stoltz also owns a Brewzzi restaurant in Boca Raton.

The Brass Tap is based in Tampa and has three locations: Brandon, Wesley Chapel (in the Tampa Bay area) and Trinity, near New Port Richey. But the company is expanding rapidly through franchising: In addition to West Palm Beach, new locations are opening in Gainesville, Lakeland, Carrollwood, Dade City, downtown St. Petersburg, south Tampa and Texas.

It has been compared to **World of Beer**, already located in West Palm Beach on Clematis Street.

But Brass Tap chief development officer **James Walker** said The Brass Tap is more of a "premium" destination, in terms of beer offerings, service and interiors. The Brass Tap has 60 to 80 draft beers "and hundreds of bottles of beer" in the cooler — not on the wall, Walker said.

The Brass Tap at CityPlace is a franchisee-owned store. "Surveys say that what drives the craft beer consumer is variety," Walker said. Although this is The Brass Tap's first South Florida location, other area locations are in the works, too, Walker said.

Craig Schlock, The Brass Tap's senior director of development, said the space will be 3,945 square feet, including outside patio seating. Look for a May opening.

What will really help CityPlace's business is the completion of the convention center hotel, Brewzzi's Stoltz said. Whenever an event is held there, he said business at his restaurant is up 40 percent. The hotel construction plan cleared its final hurdle with the county last month. Related has until May 2014 to begin building the 400-room **Hilton** hotel, but a county official expects construction will begin before that date.

In other restaurant news, **Hamburger Heaven** opened late last month at the east end of downtown West Palm Beach. The transplanted diner from Palm Beach is now open at One North Clematis Street. Open seven days a week, from 7:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m., Hamburger Heaven offers a family-friendly environment with a full menu, and a dessert bar featuring milkshakes and baked goods.

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