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New name, features, as CityPlace transforms from mall to urban neighborhood

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WEST PALM BEACH — CityPlace is no more.

As of today, it's called Rosemary Square, as downtown West Palm Beach's premier shopping and entertainment venue enters the second phase of its "re-imagining."

Owner Related Cos. says it is reshaping the 20-year-old mixed-use development, where it has been redoing the streetscape for several months, to include "a redesigned plaza, thoughtfully appointed public spaces, expanded green areas, outdoor dining venues, new shops, and interactive art installations."

But the changes reflect more than new adornments, Gopal Rajegowda, Related senior vice president, said Thursday. They represent a recognition that, as the city has grown up around the district, it has become time to transform it from a mall to "a dynamic, urban neighborhood," he said.

"One of the most important things we have been focused on is the quality of public life within our district," he said. "Because we are so much the heart of downtown West Palm Beach, we really wanted to focus on the public realm."

"By 2050, the prediction is, two-thirds of the world will live in urban environments. As all this is happening, the quality of public life is in focus. When we started this, we asked, 'how can we create a more dynamic public realm?' ... The first thing was, we needed to figure out how to re-imagine the public realm and then create a more inclusive platform for people to live, work and play."

Related already has laid much of the groundwork for its transformed plaza — literally. Visitors peering over construction barriers will notice that curbs have been removed and new a pattern of gray and white pavers gives Rosemary Avenue and other streets that traverse the development the sense they're part of an enlarged public space, wider and more oriented toward people on foot than to cars.

Landscaping has been planted, running up the sides of buildings. Parallel strings of lights drape above Rosemary, mimicking those on historic Clematis Street and forming a visual link toward it and the waterfront to the east.

Rajegowda said Related plans to invest \$550 million over the next five years in new downtown developments, including office and apartment towers and a second hotel near the Palm Beach County Convention Center on Okeechobee Boulevard, adjacent to its Hilton West Palm Beach.

The developer has won approvals for a Class A, 300,000-square-foot office building just north of the shopping area, called 360 Rosemary, and for a luxury 21-story apartment tower with ground floor shops, to eventually take the place of the five-story former Macy's building, across from the plaza.

The office tower construction is scheduled to start this summer and be completed in the first quarter of 2021. In a downtown desperately short on top-quality office space, it's gaining traction with prospective tenants, Rajegowda said. The residential tower, as yet unnamed, will break ground during the first quarter of 2020 and will open by the end of 2021, he said.

The new features on the Rosemary Square plaza will include a "social sculpture," titled Water Pavilion West Palm Beach, by Danish artist Jeppe Hein, in which children and adults can walk in and out of "rooms" created by vertical columns of water, according to a release from the developer.

A 30-foot tall, "hyper-realistic" banyan tree sculpture, Symbiosis, by Symmetry Lab, will be illuminated by digitally programmed LED lights embedded into its leaves. Surrounded by a moat filled with water, "the sculpture will emulate a realistic majestic tree by day and transform into a luminous undulating form by night," the release said.

Demolition work in the plaza to start those and other features is scheduled to start this week.

The plaza's new look was planned by Copenhagen-based urban design firm Gehl, architect David Manfredi, landscaper Matt Hadden and sustainability consultants Spinnaker Group. Gehl also has worked with the city government in recent years, conceptualizing ways to make the downtown more livable.

New eateries will join the Rosemary Square retail mix in coming months. Among them:

— True Food Kitchen, specializing in health-minded and seasonally-inspired fare, is scheduled to open a 6,000-square-foot restaurant in late fall.

— Barrio Sangria Bar, Big Time Restaurant Group's new al fresco culinary concept, is to open this summer adjacent to City Cellar. The 100-seat outdoor bar will feature handcrafted sangrias, tapas, cheese and charcuterie, main plates, and rustic, hearth-baked pizza.

— Sur La Table, a retail and cooking school with an outdoor pavilion for grilling lessons is scheduled for a fall opening.

— Pop-up concepts such as Tacos & Hip-Hop by DJ Steve Pershad and local taqueria Zipitios, owned by Ricky Perez, also have signed on.

— The Shack, described as a health-conscious, grab-and-go eatery once on the plaza, will reopen along Rosemary.

The re-imagining comes amid a struggling environment for stores nationwide as consumers turn from retail to e-tail. At the same time, as the overall economy has shown steady growth, West Palm has experienced a building boom, and has more than \$2 billion in projects in the works. The city's population has risen to an estimated 110,000, sparking hope by city leaders that a reinvigorated downtown will help put tenants in vacant storefronts and customers in shops.

“Where we are today at CityPlace is very different from where we were 20 years ago,” Rajegowda said. “There is a whole lot more live-work-play density. There’s a lot more coming, not only what we’re building in the district but around it,” he said.

Between the Broadstone, Alexander and Park-Line buildings, about 1,000 apartments have come online in the past couple of years within a few blocks of Rosemary Square, he noted. The new Virgin Trains USA service — formerly known as Brightline — also has drawn attention to the downtown, as will the two-tower, Arquitectonica-designed One West Palm, under construction at 550 Quadrille Blvd., he predicted. All the projects and improvements to downtown have “turned on the light bulb” for developers and for visitors to South Florida, he said.

“Look at what’s around us,” he said, listing the increasingly busy convention center, the Hilton, Restoration Hardware’s mansion store, the Virgin Trains station and the redesigned Clematis streetscape. “We’re no longer a mall.”