

Miami Herald

Posted on Fri, Oct. 26, 2007

West Broward's mall alternative

BY ELAINE WALKER

If Casey Conwell wants to have dinner at an outdoor cafe and stroll around he typically has to trek far from his West Broward home -- to places like downtown Hollywood, the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino and even Mizner Park in Boca Raton.

With Wednesday's opening of The Shops at Pembroke Gardens, the Cooper City resident can dine in the fresh air much closer to home. The \$140 million open-air center is the first in a new generation of lifestyle centers sprouting up in South Florida.

"We're trying to make it like the downtown of Pembroke Pines," said Mark Fallon, vice president of real estate for Jeffrey R. Anderson Real Estate, which is developing the 400,000-square-foot Pembroke Gardens with Duke Realty. "It's designed to be something alternative to the mall. It's about creating a sense of place."

The idea of a lifestyle center is to provide a gathering place for a community, where people can shop, dine and just hang out. Mizner Park and Miami Lakes Town Center were among the first of these nationally.

Anchor tenants at Pembroke Gardens, located at the southeast corner of Interstate 75 and Pines Boulevard, include Loehmann's, DSW, Barnes & Noble and Golf Galaxy. Next to the center, offices and townhomes are planned.

Instead of department stores, a key draw for shoppers at Pembroke Gardens will be the six sit-down restaurants, all making their first entry into the Broward and Miami-Dade markets. They are: Brio Tuscan Grill, Village Tavern, RA Sushi, Stir Crazy, Brimstone Woodfire Grill and The Pub Pembroke.

None will be ready for next week's debut, but most expect to open before the end of the year. "This will be a unique experience for Western Broward," said Conwell, 56. "Virtually every evening the restaurants here are packed. There's a big need for a gathering place in the neighborhood."

While lifestyle centers are the latest craze in the industry, South Florida has been late to the party. But lifestyle centers or town centers are now in development throughout western Miami-Dade and Broward. Turnberry Associates hopes to build a mega-lifestyle center just down the road in Davie.

"There's very few lifestyle centers in South Florida and there's huge demand," said Cynthia Cohen, president of Strategic Mindshare, a Miami-based retail consulting firm. "My definition of a boomer date is dinner and a walk. That's really what a lifestyle center caters to."

For the serious shopper, Pembroke Gardens offers a lineup of upscale fashion retailers that until now were only found in places like Aventura Mall, Town Center at Boca Raton or Galleria Mall in Fort Lauderdale. The list includes Chico's, J. Jill, Banana Republic, bebe, Soma, Lucky Brand Jeans, Coldwater Creek, White House/Black Market, Talbots and BCBG Max Azria.

Pembroke Gardens will also include new entries such as Love Culture, Sur La Table and Coldwater Creek Spa. It also features the first Z. Gallerie in Broward County.

"We feel there is a customer that is not being served right now," said Bill Fowler, executive vice president of Love Culture. The Pembroke Gardens store is the chain's first on the East Coast. ``The mix that the lifestyle center provides will cater to a segment of the population that is not going to the mall today."

To help make shopping at Pembroke Gardens more convenient, the center is designed with some of the 2,200 parking spaces directly in front of the stores. But for those who aren't in a hurry, there's also a center court area with a fountain and plenty of places for strolling.

The downside for shoppers is that no more than 40 percent of the approximately 85 tenants are expected to be ready for opening day. Contractors were scrambling this week to finish storefronts and put in glass windows, so retailers can start working on store interiors and bring in merchandise.

Fallon expects tenants to open steadily leading up to the Thanksgiving holiday season and throughout the rest of the year. Some, like Barnes & Noble and RA Sushi, will not open until next year.

"A lot of people are trying to rush it right now," Fallon said. ``Everything you hear about how long it takes to get things done in South Florida [is] real -- and more."