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King of Prussia Mall expansion unveiled

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UPPER MERION>>Each mall took years to **build** its unique identity, but with the tying of a long red ribbon, The Plaza and The Court officially became the King of Prussia Mall on Thursday.

As the mellifluous strains of the Philadelphia String Quartet wafted in the background, a huge crowd munched from a lavish brunch buffet prepared by Brulee catering of Philadelphia, followed by a brief ceremony that culminated with the symbolic and **seamless** fusion of the two malls.

A ribbon tying seemed more appropriate than a **traditional** ribbon cutting, noted Kathy Smith, director of marketing and business development for the King of Prussia Mall.

"Today is a very important day in that we are tying a ribbon to symbolize the joining of The Court and The Plaza into one destination shopping experience, King of Prussia Mall," Smith said.

The job of tying the ribbon was handled by Rick Sokolov, president and COO of Simon Property Group, Inc., which owns the mall, and U.S. Rep. Brendan Boyle, D-13, whose congressional district includes parts of Philadelphia and Montgomery County.

Prior to the ceremony, Sokolov privately noted that his memories of the mall had followed its evolution through the years.

"My wife and I were raised in the Delaware Valley, so we go back to the very beginnings of King of Prussia, and we're very proud of all our folks who have worked so hard to put all of this together," he said. "We invite everyone in the Delaware Valley to come and see what we created here, because it is truly unique. This project was not easy. Our CEO, David Simon, had the vision to say that these two great independent (properties) ought to be integrated into one, and then David Contis, who runs our mall **business**, set about with his team to figure it out. Now, two years and a lot of effort later, we're able to enjoy this incredible space."

King of Prussia Mall manager Bob Hart noted that the connecting corridor, anchored by Savor King of Prussia, a grand update of the food court concept, was created with guest **services** in mind.

"We have new retailers, new restaurants, state-of-the-art concierge and parking deck, which we think is as nice as anything in the country," Hart said, adding that permanent valet parking, available in the orange parking garage, would include a car wash for the \$10 all day parking fee.

The four-level parking deck, with space location technology, 1,200 spaces and several escalators, roughly fills the space where John Wanamaker reigned supreme from 1965 to 2011, and features a concierge station that will allow shoppers to drop off their keys and even have the concierge map out a shopping strategy and make restaurant reservations.

"Normally, when you go to a parking deck it's dark and dingy, while this has state-of-the-art LED lighting," Simon Malls President David Contis had noted on a [preview](#) tour back in June.

"Once you park and walk in from that [garage](#) you are in King of Prussia Mall," Smith noted. "It's the closest you can get to walking into the middle of King of Prussia Mall."

Boyle joked that Thursday's celebration marked the first time he had been at King of Prussia Mall without the trip costing him any money.

"For those of us who are Philadelphia and Montgomery County area natives, we all have our experiences with the King of Prussia Mall," he said. "It's really one of the premier malls in the country."

Alluding to the catwalk that shoppers have relied on for years to get from The Plaza to The Court -- which has now been blessed with a new roof -- Boyle said he was thankful that the new enclosed corridor rendered those Olympic sprints between the two malls in inclement weather a thing of the past.

"It's great to have a Philly guy (Sokolov) as the head of one of the major shopping companies in the world," Boyle said. "And the fact that Simon has made this reinvestment in King of Prussia signals to all the pharmaceutical and biotech companies that are here, and all the small entrepreneurial companies that are taking root right here in our area, that this is a good place in which to do [business](#) and that the Philadelphia Metro area is literally one of the best places to do business in the country."

With the expansion project finished, King of Prussia Mall is now home to more than 400 [stores](#), including seemingly endless traditional dining options, such as the Cheesecake Factory, Grand Lux Cafe and Ruby's Diner.

Joining the existing three food courts in the mall, Savor features popular regional and national favorites, including Melt Shop, Sweetgreen, Kevin Sbraga's The Fat Ham, Nicoletta, Hai Street Kitchen & Co. and Shake Shack, a second incarnation in King Prussia for the popular eatery known for gourmet burgers, hot dogs, crinkle fries and milkshakes.

Enhancing the dining experience and overall ambience, Savor offers soft seating lounges, multi-tiered fountains, device charging stations and plenty of natural light.

"With the Savor area we wanted to develop a sense of community and bring our guests together in [comfort](#) and convenience and give them a chance to mingle," Contis had noted. "We want people to stay longer ... that's what retail is all about. It's fun, it's exciting, it's entertaining."

Much of the light that floods Savor is furnished by what Contis referred to as "our living room window," a massive wall of glass overlooking the parking lot by Macy's, which, along with Bloomingdale's and Neiman Marcus, has provided access to its store via the corridor.

Some of the high-end retailers that have recently opened or will soon be opening at the mall include [luxury](#) eyewear brand Oliver Peoples; Bottega Veneta (BO-teg-a VEN-eta), which specializes in luxury handmade leather goods; Rag & Bone, offering men's and women's ready to wear and accessories; Calligaris (CALI-gar-iss), a provider of versatile home furnishings; Tempur-Pedic; CH Carolina Herrera; Diane von Furstenberg; Robert Graham; Jimmy Choo and Stuart Weitzman.

The Plaza began taking shape in September 1962, when visionary Arthur Powell, head of the Kravco [company](#), ushered in a new era of modern shopping with discount department store E.J. Korvette opening its doors to a world of clothing, books, toys, appliances and what would become the largest record department in the area, ultimately touting such triumphs as the in-store arrival of Bruce Springsteen's "Darkness on the Edge of Town" before any other stores in the spring of 1978.

J.C. Penney came along two months after E.J. Korvette opened, and Kravco's architectural vision of an open-air mall was off and running by the summer of '63 with the arrival of Acme supermarket, and the **high-end** John Wanamaker store in 1965.

Over the years ,The Plaza became **home** to such memorable icons as the Purple Cow ice cream and snack shop, Record Museum record store and Gene's books, as well as department store giants Sears, J.C. Penney and Strawbridge & Clothier.

Twenty years after The Plaza's debut, The Court was built as The Plaza's more **modern**, upscale next-door neighbor, introducing local shoppers to Bloomingdale's and Bamberger's (now Macy's) as well as such curious new culinary options as Skolnik's Bagels and the long gone but still missed mmmMarvelous Muffins.

Oddly enough, although the distinctly different identities and names of the two malls didn't necessarily always resonate with out-of-towners, many locals also took liberties when referencing the shopping mecca, Smith said.

"I've found that people who grew up with King of Prussia normally identify the entire mall as The Plaza anyway," Smith said, smiling. "But I think everyone is in for a treat when they see this expansion. It's an incredibly beautiful new connection between the two buildings that makes it one mall."