

King of Prussia Town Center's gradual unveiling of stores is right on track

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UPPER MERION>> Many folks may be surprised by the gradual unveiling of the much-anticipated King of Prussia Town Center, possibly expecting every tenant to fling open their doors at once.

The meticulous design of this outdoor lifestyle shopping center has always ruled out that sort of cookie-cutter approach, noted Tom Sebastian, senior vice president of development at The JBG Companies, the real estate investment, development and management firm behind the center.

“There are 17 buildings and each building has its own unique architecture, with vaulted ceilings and lots of glass, wood, stone, and landscaping,” Sebastian said. “Because we have 17 different buildings it’s impossible to build them all simultaneously, but between now and Thanksgiving you’ll see a lot more tenants open.”

The first locations in this pedestrian-friendly atmosphere, which captures and elevates the experience of being in a downtown urban environment, were the upscale Brazilian churrascaria steak house Fogo de Chao and Ulta Beauty in July, followed by L.A. Fitness the first week of August. Davio’s Northern Italian Steakhouse, b.good, Naf Naf Grill and REI are all debuting this month, followed by City Works Restaurant & Pour House, Hair Cuttery, Paladar Latin Kitchen & Rum Bar and Road Runner Sports in September.

King of Prussia Town Center will offer a walkable outdoor-oriented shopping experience that, ironically, many shoppers may find akin to what The Plaza — now officially integrated into the fully enclosed King of Prussia Mall across the road — was designed to be in its early years in the ’60s and ’70s.

“The King of Prussia Town Center really responds to today’s consumer’s desire to have that all-encompassing experience and get more of that downtown feel of discovering different restaurants and shops outdoors, and being outside and socializing in an integrated kind of experience,” noted the project’s publicist, Allie Seifert. “There really isn’t anything in the area like this. There are other town centers that are kind of cookie cutter, but this is so robust and unique.”

Sebastian allowed that King of Prussia Town Center will be a different type of destination than the mall.

“Ours will be a more frequent destination. We’re right next door to Wegmans, which is a weekly shopping trip for people. We have L.A. Fitness, a state-of-the-art health club, which will be another daily destination for people. They generate a regular flow of people. One of the things that occurred to us when we started the project five years ago,” he added, “is that King of Prussia didn’t have a great outdoor shopping center. The mall is world-renowned and a great destination, but if you want to have a nice evening with your spouse and your family where you go out for a nice meal and then spend the rest of the evening kind of after a meal drinking in the ambience, the mall is not the kind of place that offers that kind of experience. Walk up and down Main Street and the town square across from Fogo and you’ll see that we really invested a lot of money into building a first-class project.”

Among the unique embellishments here will be a lawn featuring a pavilion for live music on weekends, afterwork happy hours, and computerized water features for kids to play in.

“We’ll also have a wall of fire in the town square at night, which will be the first of its kind in any project of its kind in the country,” Sebastian said, adding that up to 40 businesses will ultimately open in the center.

“We currently have 20 leases, with a first class collection of full-service and fast casual restaurants. We’ve avoided signing leases with chains that you commonly find in strip malls and places like that because we wanted to create a unique collection of restaurants.”

On the heels of such noteworthy eateries as Fogo de Chao, known for its tableside service and all-you-can-eat meats like filet mignon; City Works Restaurant & Pour House, which offers 100 craft brews on tap; and all-natural fast casual b.good, which focuses on grass-fed beef and locally sourced ingredients, coming in the spring is the trailblazing upscale casual Founding Farmers, a growing chain owned by 40,000 farming families, “American dishes made primarily with pure ingredients honoring the farmers and their hard-earned bounty.”

Still in the design stage, Founding Farmers will be the largest restaurant tenant and the last restaurant to open at the center, Sebastian said.

“All of these tenants will have a significant economic impact, creating thousands of new jobs in the market. A typical restaurant like Fogo will need to have about 100 to 120 people, and we’ll have six full-service restaurants like them, to give you an idea of how many jobs will be created. What the Town Center has already done and will continue to do, is be a catalyst for economic activity.”

King of Prussia Town Center occupies 20 acres within the 125-acre Village at Valley Forge master plan, which has been five years in the making on the site of the former Valley Forge Golf Course and will include apartments, townhouses and offices.

Master developer Realen Properties’ site, which is nicely situated at the convergence of four major thoroughfares in King of Prussia, had prevailed over numerous construction setbacks by the time Wegmans made its sparkling debut in the spring of 2012.

The announcement around the same time that Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia would be building a facility on the property was the added tonic that kept the project humming along in tip-top form.

“There is up to a million square feet of commercial space with offices and hotels, in addition to retail space,” Sebastian said. “Eight different development projects are now in various stages of completion and there are five residential projects under construction. We’ve created an environment where people will want to rent apartments and own townhouses and so other developers have purchased property adjacent to the Town Center and are constructing the first residential buildings in 20 years in King of Prussia.

“To me,” Sebastian added, “that is key to what we are doing. This will be the nicest place to live, work, shop and dine in the area.”