

CityCentre signs first round of high-profile retail tenants

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After months of speculation about the tenant lineup at **Midway Co.'s CityCentre**, several prime retailers have confirmed plans to occupy the much-buzzed-about mixed-use project.

Eden Prairie, Minn.-based **Lifetime Fitness**, Dallas-based **Studio Movie Grill** and New York-based **RA Sushi** will all be a part of the planned project, located at the southeast corner of the Sam Houston Tollway and Interstate 10. CityCentre -- which is being developed on the old Town & Country Mall site -- will also include lofts, a hotel, shops and more restaurants.

After a sample site plan complete with the names of proposed retail tenants slipped out into the public this summer, Houston-based Midway Co. has remained mum about details on CityCentre. And the center's leasing agent, Nick Hernandez of Page Realty Partners Ltd., refers all questions regarding the center to the developer.

Mark Anawaty of Midway Co. could not be reached for comment on the first batch of tenants to have committed to the project, which will eventually encompass 350,000 square feet of commercial space.

But Lifetime Fitness has confirmed that it is bulking up its Houston presence with its first three-level facility, which will be one of the anchors of CityCentre.

The existing Lifetime Fitness locations -- at Cinco Ranch, Willowbrook and Sugar Land -- are all two-story facilities spread out over several acres.

"We were really impressed with the demographics in the area so we were able to be flexible with our construction to be able to fit this particular site," says Jason Thunstrom, director of corporate communications for Lifetime Fitness.

Thunstrom says it's too early to determine the size of the facility since the company has just recently filed a building application with the City of Houston for the site. He does say that the health club will include a parking garage.

Thunstrom points out that Lifetime Fitness' CityCentre facility will be the first location that is not in a strictly residential area.

"We are largely a suburban phenomenon, but this location will bridge the residential and business environment, and we're excited about the growth potential in the area," he says.

Meanwhile, cinema-eatery chain Studio Movie Grill plans to open a new 36,000-square-foot theater in CityCentre by the end of next year.

Brian Schultz, owner and president of Studio Movie Grill, says this will be the theater operator's first theater built from the ground up in the Houston area. Studio Movie Grill's existing location at 8580 State Highway 6 North is in a former eight-screen Loews theater.

The theater, which is designed for patrons to eat at tables while watching a movie, will also include mini-balconies that will allow movie producers and directors to sit and observe audiences' reactions to their movies.

"It's something that is missing in Houston, and we plan to have a lot of premieres and screenings with directors, so we look forward to being the only theater in town to offer that to the movie industry," Schultz says.

The theater will feature first-run films and will offer a full menu, as well as beer and a full bar with premium liquors.

Meanwhile, the trendy RA Sushi restaurant has also signed on to open a new location in CityCentre, according to Realty Executives Commercial broker Patricia Bond, who represented the restaurant in negotiations with Midway.

New York-based Benihana, which operates four restaurants in the Houston area, acquired the RA Sushi concept in 2002 and opened the first RA Sushi in the state in Highland Village last year.

While RA Sushi and Lifetime Fitness are new names to the project, Studio Movie Grill was among the 50 or so tenants listed on the CityCentre site plan that leaked out this summer. Also on the list were Sonoma Home, Z Tejas and Fourth & Towne.

Construction on CityCentre won't start until an undisclosed percentage of the retail space is taken. But the leases by Studio Movie Grill, Lifetime Fitness and RA Sushi may be enough to give the project a needed jump-start.

Midway bought Town & Country Mall in 2004 and began demolition work the following year.

Taking CityCentre Stage

Lifetime Fitness

Headquarters: Eden Prairie, Minn.

Concept: Three-story fitness center

Size: Not yet determined

Status: Filed permit with City of Houston

Studio Movie Grill

Headquarters: Dallas

Concept: Cinema-eatery featuring first-run movies and a full restaurant and bar menu

Size: 36,000 square feet

Status: Scheduled to open by the end of 2007

RA Sushi

Headquarters: New York

Concept: Upscale sushi restaurant and bar

Size: Not yet determined

Status: Lease has been signed