

Mall's grand opening filled with promise for the future

BY CHRIS KONNAIRD

A loud, metallic screech announced the arrival of another passenger-packed train to the Dadeland North Metrorail station, while down below a jazz band's melody announced the arrival of the area's newest supermall, Dadeland Station. Investors are hoping the two will soon be making beautiful music together.

The mall's grand opening festivities on Tuesday, October 29th celebrated a project two years in the making that reportedly will create 700 jobs and bring more than \$100 million to taxpayers. The mixed use development is a co-venture between Metro-Dade Transit Agency and the Berkowitz Development Group.

"This is one of the most lucrative areas to be in," said Jeffrey Berkowitz, president of the Berkowitz Development Group, undaunted by the close proximity of the new mall to nearby powerhouse Dadeland.

"These stores will not compete [with Dadeland]. They're not the same stores," Berkowitz said. "This isn't Burdines, it's Target," he said, referring to one of Dadeland Station's five major retail stores, or "anchors."

But Mr. Berkowitz was quick to encourage any competition the two malls might create for each other.

"I'm a capitalist," he explained.

The 320,000-square-foot, \$40 million-plus vertical "power center" is built on property leased by Metro-Dade Transit Agency, according to Manuel Palmeiro, marketing services manager for the Agency. Future phases will include a hotel and office building similar to nearby Dadeland Center at the Dadeland South Metrorail station.

Dade County Mayor Alex Penelas and several county commissioners were on

hand for the ribboncutting ceremony before an estimated 700 guests. Penelas was optimistic about the mall's future as well as its impact on the local community.

"Aesthetically, it is not an eyesore, and there is the benefit to the community of having another store," Penelas said after the ceremony.

Dadeland Station most certainly is not an eyesore when pitted against the lot's previous resident: a vacant parking lot.

"This mall does with seven acres what most malls need 35 acres for," Berkowitz said.

In addition to the shopping center with anchor tenants such as Target, The Sports Authority, Best Buy, Bed Bath & Beyond and Michaels, there will be more than 10,000 square feet of "transit convenience retail" or "value-oriented retail" stores such as sandwich shops and dry cleaners; shops geared toward the Metrorail riders who will have easy access to the street-level plaza. According to Berkowitz, 50 percent of those stores must be set aside for disadvantaged and minority business people.

Jack Smith, chairman and founder of Florida-based The Sports Authority, called the area "the greatest market probably in all the southeast [United States]." Smith, who founded The Sports Authority nine years ago and has since watched it grow to 150 stores strong, likes the "array of codependency" and thinks it will prove to be a successful environment.

"We've hit a home run," he added.

Like them or not, Metrorail riders and residents near stations can expect this will not be the last "power center." Three levels of commercial space over South Miami station's back garage can be expected as well as a joint-use transit facility at the Mt. Sinai stop. A 45,000-square-foot site is also in the works at the First Street Metromover station in downtown Miami.

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