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EXPANDED MENU: New retail projects draw big-city restaurants to the suburbs

By STEVE ADAMS
The Patriot Ledger

Big-city cuisine is headed for the Boston suburbs, spurred by a pair of major new projects planned for the lower end of Route 128. New dining options will include an Aquitaine French bistro, Ruth's Chris Steak House and The Yard House, a southern California brewpub chain that is using Legacy Place in Dedham as a springboard for its East Coast expansion.

Developers view big-name restaurants as an important selling point when attempting to attract other desirable retail tenants.

"Restaurants are looked at by retailers as entertainment," said Carol Carbanaro, a vice president at New England Development of Newton. "They bring people to the center, and they keep people at the center longer."

Negotiations on leases are taking place at Legacy Place, the latest lifestyle center proposed by W/S Development of Newton, and rival Westwood Station, a mixed-use project off University Avenue in Westwood.

"It just goes to the quality of the type of

center that we're looking to create at Legacy Place," said Robert Frazier, a W/S Development vice president.

Lifestyle centers - open-air shopping centers without traditional mall anchors and an emphasis on entertainment and dining venues - are the major source of growth in the retail industry as demand for traditional enclosed malls has waned. Legacy Place will include a 16-screen Cinema de Lux complex built by National Amusements, which is rebuilding its corporate headquarters on the site.

Steele Platt, founder and CEO of the Irvine, Calif.-based Yard House, views the foot traffic generated by the megaplex as an advantage for restaurants.

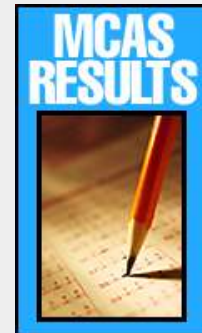
"People like to do lots of different things," Platt said. "Whether it's a movie or a restaurant, it's a convenience thing. I like lifestyle centers better (for a restaurant location) than being on a freestanding corner by myself."

The 11,500-square-foot Yard House at Legacy Place will have seating for 325 patrons and 130 draft beers on tap, Platt said. It will be the first of up to four Yard Houses to open in New England in the next few years, Platt said. He's also scouting locations in Boston near Fenway Park, at the proposed Patriots Place mall in Foxboro, and in Providence.

Founded in 1996 in Long Beach, Calif., Yard House now



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operates 15 restaurants, most of them west of the Mississippi. The centerpiece of the restaurants are transparent keg rooms displaying more than 600 beer barrels. A full menu includes salads, sandwiches, burgers, seafood, pizzas and steak.

Ruth's Chris Steak House, whose only Massachusetts restaurant is in downtown Boston, will open its second Bay State location at Legacy Place next year. The Heathrow, Fla.-based chain has 115 locations and reported \$271.5 million in revenues in 2006. It's best known for its signature "sizzling" prime steaks topped with seasoned butter and cooked in 1,800-degree broilers. Entrees run in the \$20 to \$46 range.

Critically-acclaimed French bistro Aquitaine, whose flagship restaurant is in Boston's South End, opened its first suburban location in Chestnut Hill in 2000 and now is eyeing a third location at Legacy Place.

The restaurant will have capacity for 220 diners, including some outdoor seating, owner Seth Woods said.

"We'll have an outdoor patio with cafe doors and bring the whole feeling and energy of Legacy Place into the restaurant and vice versa," Woods said.

W/S Development, which also built Hingham's Derby Street Shoppes, has a history of filling storefronts with urban dining options. Rustic Kitchen, a Mediterranean bistro with original locations at Faneuil Hall and in Cambridge, opened at Derby Street Shoppes in 2004.

Westwood Station, a mixed-use development to be built at the former University Avenue industrial park, will have approximately 90 stores and 10 full-service restaurants, New England Development's Carbonaro said. The Newton firm is in charge of retail leasing negotiations for Westwood Station.

Leases are on hold while developer Cabot, Cabot & Forbes of New England seeks a change in town regulations limiting the capacity of restaurants with liquor licenses to 150. But negotiations are under way with restaurants interested in up to 8,000 square feet and seating for 275 patrons, Carbonaro said.

Two national chains whose only Massachusetts locations are in downtown Boston are interested in becoming tenants, Carbonaro said, declining to name them until leases are signed. Four others are new to Massachusetts.

"Our focus has been to bring restaurants that are brand new to the market or will be that first entry into the suburban market for the higher-end restaurants located downtown," Carbonaro said. "It's all tied into the entertainment component."

Both Legacy Place and Westwood Station are being reviewed by town boards and the state Executive Office of

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Environmental Affairs. Developers of both projects hope to gain approvals and break ground before the end of the year. Both plan late 2008 openings.

Jay Doherty, president of Cabot, Cabot & Forbes, is confident about Westwood Station's ability to attract successful retail shops. A first phase of the project will consist of up to 485 condominiums and apartments built above street-level shops, generating a steady flow of potential customers throughout the day.

"The big emphasis is on creating places where people want to dock their cars and get out and be part of the scene of the neighborhood," Doherty said. "We're creating a new community within Westwood."

Legacy Place

Dedham
47 acres
60 stores and restaurants
Major tenants: P.F. Chang's China Bistro, Ruth's Chris Steak House, Legal Sea Foods, The Yard House, Aquitaine, Whole Foods Market, L.L. Bean, 16-screen National Amusements Cinema de Lux
Developer: W/S Development of Newton and National Amusements Inc.

Westwood Station

Westwood
137 acres
1.2 million square feet of retail, 1,000 housing units and two million square feet of office space
Retail tenants: Approximately 100 stores including 10 full-service restaurants
Developer: Cabot, Cabot & Forbes of New England, Boston

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