

Area near 14th and P picks up high-end retail

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With Fresh Fields already breaking ground on 1440 P Street, developers like Jim Abdo and Jon Gerstenfeld are beginning to see the area between Dupont and Logan circles in a whole new light.

And soon, Washingtonians will too.

By next year, Abdo's Development said residents in the area will be able to go to CVS to refill prescriptions, Starbucks for coffee, Anthropologies for hip, urban clothes, and, of course, Fresh Fields for food.

"I don't want to turn 14th Street into the inside of Pentagon City mall, but I do need anchor tenants to make smaller businesses feel comfortable," Abdo said.

Fresh Fields and future next-door neighbor CVS are the only retailers definitely going into the area, but the developer is close to signing high-end home furnishing and hardwood stores, Blockbuster and Hollywood video stores, Starbucks and Caribou coffee shops, as well as dry cleaners and banks. Abdo also wants to build an outdoor bakery or cafe in the building that is currently a 7-Eleven. He said 7-Eleven's lease is up at the end of this year, and he won't be renewing it.

"There is a valuable need for services and businesses in this area other than just liquor stores," he said.

Gerstenfeld, owner, SJG Properties and owner of P Street's Lighthouse for the Blind building, said he's constructing high-end retail and residential space at the site, which should be finished by late 2001 or early 2002. Retail space will begin at about \$35 per square foot, Gerstenfeld said.

Once a vibrant area for upper-income families, 14th Street suffered greatly during the Martin Luther King Jr. riots and "white flight" toward D.C. suburbs. White, upwardly mobile families moved away from the city in search of better schools and safe streets. However, a renewed confidence in the city has many empty nesters and "power couples" moving back to the area.

"This is an area that really speaks to a lot of people with two theaters [Studio and Woolly Mammoth] and proximity to U street and Dupont," Abdo said. "It behooves retailers to be in a market with new, urban dwellers."

This summer, Abdo completes The Manhattan, loft-style condos that range from \$200,000 to \$900,000. The complex will have 24-hour concierge service, a conference room and a possible skywalk to the Fresh Fields.

"When people are spending half a million

on condos, they want more from an area," Abdo said.

Monty Hoffman, president of P.N. Hoffman, agreed the renovated area will attract a slew of high-end retailers who have the best of both worlds — upscale residential neighborhoods and proximity to office buildings at Dupont Circle and K street.

"Retailers will do very well here because you have a dense population around the area with new residential projects like the Manhattan, 1440 Church street and the Zenith," he said. "It's a great economy and other areas such as Dupont and Georgetown are filled up."

A major force in the entire renovation process is Wayne Dickson, who recently launched his own real estate brokerage firm called Urban Partners with his wife Carol. With three decades of experience in the area, Dickson knows the demographics of 14th Street well. From a neighborhood conversation around a kitchen table to talks with the president of Fresh Fields, Dickson was convinced he could turn the "rough edges" of the area into a vibrant community.

Convincing retailers to buy space in the area, instead of Georgetown, may be a challenge, but Dickson predicts the P Street neighborhood is home to serious buyers, not just window shoppers.