



MARK GUSS/Tribune photos

Florida Power worker Alfonso Rios, left, finalizes some work at BayWalk, while Hugo Farfan carries a mirror for the Ann Taylor store.

destination DOWNTOWN

St. Petersburg hopes to become a mecca for families looking for good food, a movie and some fun. It's called BayWalk and it opens Nov. 17.



By CARLOS MONCADA
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ST. PETERSBURG

Take a mega-screen movie complex, mix in a collection of theme restaurants, a handful of bars and then throw in a splash of shopping.

Serve it up along a downtown street where people can stroll and soak in the atmosphere. Add music, a distinctive architectural design and garnishes such as old-time lampposts, decorative paving blocks, trees and benches.

Make it a place with energy and excitement where people will spend a few hours and then return — again and again.

That's the concept behind "BayWalk," the latest in a new generation of shopping and entertainment centers that's set to open Nov. 17 in the heart of downtown St. Petersburg.

BayWalk and city officials expect the \$40 million, 150,000-square-foot complex to piggyback on the continued growth of downtown and fill a niche as a destination where city dwellers and tourists alike can shop, dine and play.

"It's about having fun," says Craig Sher, president and chief executive officer for The Sembler Co., which is developing the two-story, Mediterranean Revival-style plaza just two blocks from the city's showcase waterfront with Redevelopment Partners Inc.

While the malls have become a place to go when you're on a shopping mission, BayWalk and other entertainment centers like it are designed to encourage lingering.

"The average experience in BayWalk will be four to 4½ hours," Sher says. "Because you'll spend two

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"The vision ... is to have a downtown where people live and they stay after 5 o'clock."

David Fischer, mayor

The Muvico 20 theaters is a centerpiece of BayWalk, designed to turn downtown into more than a 9-to-5 place to work.