



MARK GUSS/Tribune photos

Workers direct the installation of a specially made 2-ton grill for the "dish" restaurant that is opening at BayWalk.

## DOWNTOWN / Vision is to draw people beyond 9-to-5 jobs

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to 2½ hours in a movie, you'll go to lunch or dinner for an hour or an hour and a half, and you may shop for half an hour."

But if you're looking for Ybor City-style nightclubs or somewhere to just hang out, this is not the place. BayWalk is designed to create a "family entertainment" environment.

"I'm not saying we want to discourage kids, but I don't need 100 kids hanging out," Sher says.

BayWalk is part of a flurry of development activity that is steadily transforming downtown St. Petersburg into more than a 9-to-5 place to work.

"What BayWalk is going to do is make downtown a destination point every night of the year," predicts Russ Sloan, president of the St. Petersburg Area Chamber of Commerce.

Perhaps the most dramatic change taking place is a boom in residential construction ranging from apartments to high-rise, high-priced condominiums. The residences are being snapped up by professionals, single people and empty-nesters who either work downtown or want to be near its museums and other attractions.

"What the vision of downtown is — and it's rapidly coming to fruition — is to have a downtown where people live and they stay after 5 o'clock," says Mayor David Fischer. "And I think BayWalk is going to be the activity anchor of this vision."

Downtown's resurgence is a sharp contrast to the stagnation and failed development schemes that plagued the city's urban core until the mid-1990s. In fact, remnants of the failed Bay Plaza Co. plan to turn downtown into a shopping mecca figure prominently in

the BayWalk project. The complex is being built atop two once-empty lots that were to have been the Bay Plaza project.

"It's very similar to Bay Plaza," Fischer said of BayWalk. "I think the difference is that Bay Plaza was a developer trying to do many things. And in hindsight, it's not always a good strategy."

The city is playing a key role in the development. It's building a \$12.9 million public parking garage that will be linked to BayWalk by a tree-lined pedestrian walkway. The 1,400-space garage, which will include 56,000-square-feet of retail and office space on the first floor, is expected to be completed before the plaza's Nov. 17 opening.

BayWalk will be anchored not by the old, all-in-one department



A worker finishes last-minute details at BayWalk, a \$40 million, 150,000-square-foot complex.

stores that malls use to lure customers, but by a 20-screen Muvico Theater, or "megaplex," expected to draw up to 1.5 million people a year.

Megaplexes are a new breed of movie theater with 14 or more screens. Because of their ability to draw a broad range of consumers, they have become desirable as anchors in urban entertainment centers.

BayWalk Muvico 20 will feature 4,200 stadium-style, high-backed seats with cup holders, upgraded

sound systems, an expanded snack menu with such items as shrimp, chicken breasts and gourmet coffee, and a child care center. Ticket prices will range from \$3.75 to \$7.

"The whole reason to the playroom is to bring the spontaneity back to going to the movies," said Randi Emmerman, spokeswoman for Fort Lauderdale-based Muvico. "Many times, parents with young children don't have the opportunity to go to the movies anymore."

Sloan, the chamber of commerce president, says he's heard concerns from some downtown

### BayWalk

Location: Downtown St. Petersburg.

Developer: The Sembler Co. of St. Petersburg and Redevelopment Partners of Tampa and Clearwater.

Cost: \$35 million to \$40 million

Size: 156,000 square feet

Opening date: Nov. 17

#### Entertainment

■ A 20-screen Muvico movie theater

#### Restaurants

■ Adobo Grill  
■ Dan Marino's Town Tavern and Martini Bar  
■ Dish  
■ Johnny Rockets  
■ Gratzzi's  
■ Today's Gourmet Deli & Market  
■ Wet Willie's daiquiri bar

#### Retail

■ The Acorn  
■ Afterthoughts  
■ Ann Taylor  
■ Australian Creations Jewelers  
■ BayWalk Booksmith  
■ GBX Shoes  
■ The Cricket Shop  
■ Sunglass Hut  
■ Hurricane Pass Outfitters  
■ Key West Confections  
■ People's Pottery  
■ Sacino's Formalwear  
■ White House, Black Market  
■ Mephisto  
■ Chico's

Source: The Sembler Co.

merchants about BayWalk siphoning away customers. Indeed, he says the project's novelty likely will dominate the attention of downtown consumers, at least in the beginning.

But Sloan also believes there will be so many people coming to BayWalk — more than 3 million by the Sembler Co.'s estimates — that downtown merchants and attractions eventually will catch their share of them.

"I do think you'll see a spillover effect that I think ultimately will benefit everybody," Sloan says. "But short term, I think there will be some changes."

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