



## SALUTE TO BRICKELL

# Critical mass may lure a wider variety of retail

BY MARILYN BOWDEN

Brickell's existing retail consists mainly of restaurants that serve a day-time business clientele as well as residents, but experts say the area's residential population is reaching a critical mass that may attract a wider variety of retailers.

"Most of the tenants who are looking in Brickell or have taken space there have been food and other services that serve its residential and downtown population," said Jason Press, senior retail broker at Continental Real Estate Cos.

"A lot of that is due to the fact that the only spaces available are small."

With the growth of residential and the addition of more hotel rooms, he said, "there aren't enough services to support them all."

Kerry Newman, a broker for Koniver Stern Group who handles leasing for several Brickell landlords, said sales at area restaurants are up 20% from last year.

The Oceanaire Seafood Room – the first and oldest tenant in Mary Brickell Village – racked up the second best sales total companywide for its Easter weekend brunch, said General Manager Aaron Hutchinson.



Hampton Inn & Suites at 50 SW 12<sup>th</sup> St. will include 10,000 square feet of retail, says Bernard Wolfson.

"Business has been great," he said. "We've had a really strong season."

"It's been really exciting to see Mary Brickell Village continue to grow with new retail additions and some new restaurant neighbors."

Mr. Newman, who is its leasing representative, said Mary Brickell Village is now 98% leased. "We're just waiting for the right tenants to come in to fill it up," he said. He characterized that project as "a mix of neighborhood, community and entertainment."

In fact, space in the neighborhood is so tight that a recent business targeting Brickell settled for a First Avenue address instead. Gelato Nostro, which is celebrating its Grand Opening this week is at 1111 SW First Ave., referred to by co-owner

Oscar Piccolo as "off-Brickell." To underscore the point, he will be introducing a new flavor called Brickell Bacio.

It will get more exposure than available spots in Brickell proper, he said, which tend to be off the beaten path – and with its proximity to Metrorail and Metromover stations, it's more convenient to the Brickell business district than anything south of 10th Street.

"I love Brickell," Mr. Piccolo said. "Since I came to the US in 1999, I've lived in Brickell Key. In those 12 years, I saw this place could grow to become a great entertainment and restaurant area, and that is happening now."

With an expanding residential base and little availability, brokers say the area is ripe for more retail opportunities. Already, new options are being announced.

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The 221-room Hampton Inn & Suites Miami Brickell-Downtown, under construction at 50 SW 12th St., will include about 10,000 square feet of ground-floor retail, said Bernard Wolfson, president of Miami-based Hospitality Operations, the project's developer.

Mr. Newman is handling leasing.

"We felt that since we're in a concentrated business area," Mr. Wolfson said, "it would be nice to have a restaurant right in the hotel that hotel guests could utilize and that would also be an asset to the community."

The Hampton can offer a restaurateur up to 9,000 square feet of contiguous space, "which is the largest available ground-level retail space in the Brickell market today," Mr. Wolfson said.

"Since we can also offer parking and the possibility of providing room service, it's an ideal situation for a restaurant tenant."

Once a restaurant is in place, he said, whatever space remains can be configured for smaller service retailers.

What Brickell doesn't have, Mr. Press said, is the kind of department stores and national retailers that congregate in malls.

"There's a big separation between Brickell or downtown and the big retail centers – Aventura Mall, Dadeland, Merrick Park, the Design District, Midtown," he said. "For a successful downtown that is functional 24/7, we need more than just service retail."

"There's just no shopping center," Mr. Newman said. "Could there be? Yes."

Swire's Brickell CitiCentre, about which much is speculated but little is known, could answer that need, and change the face of Brickell retail dramatically. The billion-dollar project, spread across at least four city blocks just south of the Brickell Bridge, is slated to include substantial retail as well as other uses.