

# Pavilions celebrates 10 years on the mall

The center's planned \$25 million renovation will make its 16th Street entry more inviting.

[By Elizabeth Aguilera](#)

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(Andy Cross, The Denver Post)

Denver's downtown Pavilions turned 10 years old under local ownership and with a plan for renovation that seems mellow compared to the tough beginnings and high expectations a decade ago.

Back in 1998, the southern end of the 16th Street Mall was known for its empty storefronts, souvenir shops and parking lots.

"So many people forget it used to be two surface parking lots," said Tracy Huggins, director of the Denver Urban Renewal Authority.

The \$107.5 million Pavilions retail site, developed by Los Angeles-based Entertainment Development Group Inc., headed by William Denton and funded in part by bond money from DURA, opened in November 1998 after four years of planning and construction. Last July, Denver-based Gart Properties purchased the Pavilions for \$94 million from Denton's group.

The 350,000-square-foot Pavilions runs between Tremont and Welton streets and 16th and 15th streets. At the time of its inception, city leaders called it the most important project going on downtown.

Rich Grant, spokesman for Visit Denver, the city's Convention & Visitors Bureau, said the development transformed the mall.

"The success of the mall was a little dodgier before," he said. "It didn't have an anchor on the southern end; there was really no reason to come down."

Pavilions has around 50 tenants, and about 75 percent are original tenants also celebrating their 10th year. They include the United Artists theaters, Barnes & Noble, Niketown, Virgin Megastore, Maggiano's Little Italy and Hot Topic.

Those tenants helped create a synergy that civic leaders said has contributed to the newer restaurants and retailers opening nearby.

When Bill Billings, one of the original partners in Maggiano's, scouted Denver for a location, he was tempted by Larimer Square but opted for the southern end of the mall instead.

"I liked the idea of being part of the Pavilions," said Billings, regional operations director of the Western U.S. for Maggiano's. "I was excited to be down at this site. It was fun to do that instead of doing the obvious and going to Larimer Square."

When it was developed it was the newest and hottest site for retailers.

Now Gart Properties plans to add more retailers, with a focus on what's new and hot, said Mark Sidell, company president.

"The momentum of downtown is really what is going to make this great," he said. "It's our job to position the surfboard to catch the wave."

A \$25 million renovation plan is in the works. It addresses long-standing challenges such as making the center more accessible from 16th Street, transforming the entry portals into more inviting spaces and adding new flooring and landscaping.

Other plans include working



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with Brookfield properties, owner of the parking lots behind the Pavilions on 15th. Brookfield wants to develop an office building and a hotel, and both parties hope to create entry into the Pavilions from the developments.

"We are looking at circulation, lighting, parking. People don't know what is back there," Sidell said. "The 10-year anniversary is interesting, but for us the real story isn't about looking back 10 years, it's about looking forward a couple of years, and that is where we can make a difference."

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