

Posted on Tue, July 10, 2012

REI, Rock & Brews planned for Overland Park development by fall 2013

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The Kansas City Star

Prairiefire, a planned multi-million-dollar Overland Park development that was stalled by the struggling economy, has nabbed two new firsts to the market with more expected.

Recreational Equipment Inc., better known as REI, an outdoor recreational equipment store, and Rock & Brews, an outdoor beer garden concept co-owned by Gene Simmons of the rock band KISS, are set to open in the fall of 2013.

In addition, sources, who declined to be identified, said The Fresh Market specialty grocery store chain also could open its first area location in Prairiefire, which is located between Lamar and Nall on 135th Street.

“Retailers are getting more confident and some special retailers are really wanting to expand,” said Fred Merrill, president of Merrill Cos., the developer of Prairiefire. “Obviously, Johnson County is in the absolute bulls-eye for that kind of expansion.”



- REI plans to open a 23,500-square-foot freestanding store. It will sell gear and apparel for camping, climbing, cycling, fitness, hiking, paddling and travel. It also will have a bike shop with repair services, and a seasonal gear rental department for customers to test new outdoor activities. The Overland Park store will have apparel for snow sports but not equipment.

REI has 123 retail stores in 30 states. The closest location is currently St. Louis.

While any consumer can shop at an REI store, the company also is one of the nation's largest largest consumer cooperatives with 4.7 million active members. They pay a one-time \$20 fee and receive a share of the company's profits through annual refunds.

Kansas City was one of the top membership markets without its own brick-and-mortar REI store. There are 6,700 members in the area, and nearly 3,700 active members within 15 miles of the proposed Overland Park store.

REI said it plans to hire 50 to 60 employees.

- Rock & Brews celebrates great “rock & roll, beers, burgers, brats, pizza and more.” Dave Furano, veteran rock promoter, had long set up a backstage experience for such artists as Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen. In 2009 he teamed up with restaurateur Michael Zislis to open the first Rock & Brews in a Los Angeles suburb. Simmons later became a partner.

“At concerts, local cooks would bring out their best fare and really fuss over the bands. That’s the genesis of this business,” Furano said. “It is basic all-American hamburgers, pizza and beers. Great food, great atmosphere great service. Like the Bob Dylan song - everyone has to serve somebody.”

Zislis has been talking to the Merrills for a couple of years about Rock & Brews and other concepts. One of his boutique Shade Hotels could go in phase two of Prairiefire.

“They won our hearts,” Furano said. “Their vision of that space, the museum, their confidence and vision to put it all together. We think that restaurant will be the flagship for Rock & Brews training for the Midwest and the East Coast.”



Mike Zislis (left), KISS star Gene Simmons and rock Promoter Dave Furano teamed up for Rock & Brews.

The 5,000-square-foot freestanding Rock & Brews is scheduled to open in 18-months or two years. About 10 to 15 Rock & Brews are scheduled to open within the next two years. Two are under construction, and six, including the Overland Park location, are in development.

“These are nationally recognized tenants, first to our market,” Merrill said. “That is something we have tried to do and then mix it with the local tenants.”

In addition, Indiana-based Hearthview Residential has submitted a final development plan for 300 multi-family apartments in nine multi-storied buildings at Prairiefire. Construction could start this fall with the first units available next summer if all goes as planned.

While neither Merrill Cos. nor officials with The Fresh Market could confirm a Prairiefire lease, sources said the North Carolina-based specialty grocery store chain is looking at a fall 2013 opening in the center. The grocery retailer offers freshly baked breads and pies, full-service meat counter with freshly ground beef, ready-to-serve entrees, fresh seafood delivered several times a week, more than 200 different imported and domestic cheese varieties, and more than 400 different items in its produce section including a large amount of organic products.

Prairiefire was first proposed in mid-2006 and the 185,000-square-foot first phase was scheduled to open by mid-2010. Cinetopia movie theater, Pinstripes Bowling Bocce Bistro, and traveling exhibitions by the American Museum of Natural History in New York are among the other tenants set to open in the center.