

## AQUARIUM TO ANCHOR NEW 'RESTAURANT ROW'

Legacy Property Group to cash in on burgeoning tourist neighborhood

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Georgia Aquarium visitors will expect to be amazed by the exhibits inside the brand-new facility.

[Legacy Property Group](#) has a vision for what's going on outside the building. It's called Luckie Marietta, a district on the northwest corner of Centennial Olympic Park brimming with restaurants, shops and more.

The developer is currently talking with restaurateurs about creating a "restaurant row" with five to seven eateries in Marietta Place fronting Marietta Street, said project manager Zach Schaumburg. The majority of the restaurants will be locally owned operations to give visitors a "taste of Atlanta," he said.

"The restaurant row concept came out of basically trying to address the demand for restaurants, both for the downtown daytime employee base, the growing number of residents and then just the greatly anticipated number of tourists that are headed our direction once the aquarium and World of Coke are opened," Schaumburg said.

Aquarium benefactor Bernie Marcus likens the development he sees cropping up around the attraction to the lively scene along the Baltimore harbor, which now has several attractions as well as local and national restaurants and shops.

"The harbor area was a devastated place. They built the aquarium; it was the focal point, it began something which was an entire redevelopment of the entire area," he said. "I see that the same thing is going to happen in Atlanta."

One major component in Baltimore and planned for Atlanta is retail -- offering restaurants and shops for the 2 million to 3 million visitors expected annually at the Georgia Aquarium.

### Perfect timing for change

And the timing couldn't be more perfect, with the 10th anniversary of the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, which brought millions to Centennial Olympic Park and downtown venues. The construction of the aquarium, which is expected to open this fall just south of the park, has fueled plans for restaurants, shops, hotels, offices and residences.

"We're right on the cusp of a lot of good things happening in this area," said A.J. Robinson, president of [Central Atlanta Progress](#), a downtown advocacy group.

Legacy's "restaurant row" will include full-service and fast-casual eateries in Marietta Place, which was used by Adidas during the Olympics. The 35,000-square-foot building also has more than 5,000 square feet for patio or deck dining. Schaumburg would not disclose which restaurants are possible tenants.

"The vision is really to create an eclectic mix of cuisine at a more reasonable mid-range price point that is appealing to a wide variety of tourists, families, residents and employees," Schaumburg said. He noted that current choices are mostly on the higher end, such as Ruth's Chris Steak House and McCormick & Schmick's.

The company also plans to add six levels to an existing three-story parking deck, which was used by Nike during the Olympics, on the corner of Marietta, Thurmond and Luckie streets.

The expansion, which Schaumburg said should be complete by next summer, will add 500 parking spaces, 108 hotel suites and 22,000 square feet of retail, both Atlanta boutiques and national chains. Legacy also plans to add ground floor retail in Centennial Park West condos.

#### 'A leisure destination'

Marcus and others said they hope the area will be enticing enough that convention attendees will bring their families with them and travelers will spend their time downtown during airport layovers.

"Atlanta is known as a meetings and convention city. That is not the case for leisure," said Spurgeon Richardson, CEO and president of the [Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau](#). "We're not known to be a leisure destination."

The key is getting people to stay longer or return, Marcus said.

"This is going to be the beginning, rather than the end of the process," he said. "The aquarium is really the beginning of the process."

Richardson estimates there will be \$10 million worth of new developments in Atlanta in the next three to five years.

"The whole complexion of downtown is going to change," he said.

He said the city is pursuing other attractions, such as the [NASCAR](#) Hall of Fame, and will host major events such as the Men's Final Four at the Georgia Dome in 2007 and the NHL All-Star Hockey Game in 2008.

The city is helping shape the look of the area. A special zoning district, called the Centennial Olympic Park Special Public Interest District, was created in 1998 with development guidelines.

City planner Enrique Bascunana said the plans encourage sidewalks 15 feet or larger, ground floor retail and storefront façades at street level with no parking between the building and street and streetscape changes that encourage walking.

"We're trying to create an active environment," he said.

With the aquarium anchoring the area, Schaumburg said the worst thing would be to provide tourist attractions without completing the experience with restaurants and shopping.

"It's not a situation where if we built it they will come. In our minds, the people are coming. Now it's a matter of responding to that," he said. "We're just doing our part to build and offer the retail and restaurant to support the people headed our way."