

SPOTLIGHT

Walking the Walk

Ambience and diversity draw residents to a Coral Springs institution

Robert Weinberg

The South Florida landscape is littered with the dead or dying husks of unsuccessful retail centers. Although places such as the Aventura Mall and Sawgrass Mills continue to thrive, it seems as though the era of the traditional indoor mall as a social gathering spot and one-stop shopping emporium live on largely through the 1980s teen comedies of John Hughes.

And yet, the sprawling Walk of Coral Springs has managed to truly flourish over the years by offering an alternative. South Floridians — particularly residents of Coral Springs and Parkland — continue to flock to the 18-acre outdoor complex for its mix of restaurants, retail shops, professional services, live music and regular events such as The Coral Springs Festival of the Arts. The attractiveness of the setting, with its fountains, brick pavers, open breezeways and plentiful café seating, create an almost European atmosphere.

Enticed by the surroundings, perhaps visitors will grab a smoothie at Jamba Juice or a caffe latte at Starbucks while waiting for a phone to be serviced at the Sprint store or for a watch to be fixed at Sziro's Jewelry. Maybe they'll pull up a bench and spoon up a treat from Yogurtland, or read a book or magazine purchased from Barnes & Noble while tapping their feet to the lively music drifting from Mythos Greek Restaurant. Music lovers who come to hear bands perform during The Walk's regular Wednesday-night showcase also patronize the stores and restaurants. This kind of synergy is key to The Walk's success, according to Mythos owner Gil Sternbach, who helped form a merchants association comprising many of its tenants.

"In the past, my observation has been —



especially through the economic downturn — that everybody was very focused on themselves, 'How do I promote my business?'" says Sternbach, a longtime Coral Springs resident. "We all suffered through the economic downturn. Everybody in the country suffered. So, subsequent to that, I banded the [merchants] together."

Along with fellow tenant Jeff Ratushny of Internet Sales Results, Sternbach created the merchants association to better pool tenants' resources toward a common goal. Sternbach is president of the association, and Ratushny serves as vice president.

"The merchants are cooperating to market and promote The Walk as the premier venue in Broward for shopping, dining and professional services," says Sternbach, a sincerely enthusiastic pitchman who's quick to share the credit with his neighbors. "This is a collective effort by the merchants."

A native Canadian, Sternbach celebrated his 15th year as a Coral Springs resident on

June 1. As a kid, he spent summers with relatives in Bal Harbour, observing the swanky shops in that locale as well as the garment trade at North Miami Beach's Loehmann's Plaza. However, when he was looking to relocate his family from Toronto, Sternbach selected Coral Springs, which is renowned for its schools and its infrastructure.

Shifts in the city's population and geography have necessitated changes in the restaurant and retail business. Sternbach observes that when he first built his house, it was on the outskirts of Coral Springs. Now, it's in the middle. He also notes that single-themed shopping plazas, such as the once-bustling Designer Row in Coral Springs, have gone the way of the dinosaurs.

If diversification is king, then The Walk is its royal palace. Restaurants alone run the gamut from romantic, date-night places such as Mythos and Gold Coast Grill — each of which is individually owned — to places for a quick bite such as Sir Pizza and Elevation Burger. While some of the shops

and restaurants are indeed franchises — the Starbucks, for example, was among the first in South Florida and remains among Broward's busiest — for the most part, they're not the typical Olive Garden or Outback chains.

Sternbach mentions a particular establishment that he's looking forward to having in The Walk: The Cheese Course, which is slated to open this summer — right next to Mythos. With locations in Weston and Boca Raton, the shop sells high-end, imported cheeses from all over the world, and will serve up fresh sandwiches and salads.

"It's a franchise, but it's a very unique franchise," Sternbach says. "There's no question it's a draw. I'm very excited about this place opening because I have no doubt they're going to attract a lot of attention right next door to me. And a lot of people who might not know about Mythos will come to them and they'll say, 'Oh, look, there's a Greek restaurant next door.'"

Sternbach is also eager to point out what he calls a "best-kept secret." Namely, that The Walk has plentiful parking in the rear of the complex. Visitors then can stroll the breezeways, complete with their own stores, shops and services, as they wend their way through the complex, enjoying the play of sunlight and the splash of the fountains.

"They really accentuate the plaza," Sternbach says of the fountains. "They give you a feeling of being in an oasis rather than in an indoor concrete jungle."

The Walk of Coral Springs is located at 2600-2900 University Drive. For information on upcoming events, call 954-340-6070. You can also visit The Walk on Facebook.