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Ice cream shop first to open in new Springfield project

BY DAVID BAUERLEIN STORY UPDATED AT 2:37 AM ON THURSDAY, JUL. 2, 2009

Video Photos



RICK WILSON/The Times-Union
City Kidz Ice Cream Cafe employee Thomas Heath (left) hands an ice cream in a waffle cone to 2-year-old Kaden Watkins as his mother Shamair Watkins holds him.

The long-awaited Third & Main building in Jacksonville's historic Springfield overcame its share of fire, ever broke ground, and on top of that, a fire during construction.

But the \$6 million project made its official debut today with a grand opening ceremony that was smoldering through ice cream.

City Kidz Ice Cream Cafe became the first business to set up shop at Third & Main, which consists of extended-stay apartments at the corner of Main and Third streets. The city of Jacksonville assisted the cafe of Jacksonville, by providing a \$500,000 low-interest loan.

Main Street is one of the commercial corridors where the city wants to attract private investment that provides services to neighborhoods, said James Richardson, project manager for the Northwest Jacksonville Economic Fund.

"It's a prime example of something we want to see replicated in other areas," he said.

Later this summer, the ice cream shop will be joined at Third & Main by Uptown Market, which will serve in a delicatessen format. The group behind Uptown Market also operates the Burrito Gallery in downtown

The residential portion of Third & Main building will get its first guest this month in one of 36 extended-stay condominiums that will cater to patients of the University of Florida Proton Therapy Institute. The apartments took the place of condominiums that were initially planned until lack of pre-sales forced developers to adjust.

"This has been a tough one to build," said Bill Cesery Jr., president of the Cesery Cos.

The volatile real estate market first took its toll during the building boom when construction costs were hit by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the price increases intensified and put a hold on plans for moving forward. The roller-coaster market also took its toll on the way down when the condominium market plunged, ending the project before construction began in 2007.

Cesery said being able to tie the project to the Proton Therapy Institute, located just a mile away at the University of Florida, helped make the project financially doable. He said patients at the institute, which draws people from internationally, typically stay six weeks to three months for treatment.

The Proton Therapy Institute isn't guaranteeing Third & Main will get a minimum number of rooms. Cesery said he expects patients will be attracted by the convenience of being able to stay nearby in extended-stay apartments, creating a kind of residential support group during treatment.

"I think the demand is there and we've found our niche," he said.

Pastor Clinton Bush, chief executive officer for City Kidz Ice Cream Cafe, said as a Springfield resident because it's accessible to a large area of the city that doesn't have any ice cream shops.

City Kidz Ice Cream Cafe, founded in 2006, is a for-profit venture, but it is affiliated with a nonprofit organization that provides education in financial literacy for young people. Bush said he hopes to expand the store to other Jacksonville locations.

"I believe this is the rebirth of the commercial district of Springfield," he said. "That was very important to me."

User Comments



It was a great grand

Submitted by fsu813 on Wed. 7/1/2009 at 11:06 pm

It was a great grand opening.....i had the crab cake sandwich and a rocky road cone for the road....

"You dress good, you look good. You look good, you feel good. You feel good, you play good. You play good, they pay good!" - Deion Sanders