

For Springfield, City Kidz the start of something bigger

by David Chapman
Staff Writer

To those not familiar with the Springfield area, Wednesday's grand opening of the City Kidz Ice Cream Cafe might not seem like much. To those familiar with the area, though, the first commercial tenant to open in The Lofts at Third & Main signified another stepping stone to the revitalization of Springfield.

"We're helping bring Springfield back," said Clinton Bush, City Kidz CEO of the Southeast region. "I'm really excited about the future for this area."

The grand opening had a grand turnout from several officials, including former Mayor Jake Godbold and current State Sen. Tony Hill, State Rep. Mia Jones and City Council member Johnny Gaffney.

The high-profile turnout, along with more than 50 others, wasn't just for the ice cream, either: it marked the first tenant for the first new development in the area in 40 years.

"How sweet it is," said a smiling Gaffney, who admitted the cliché fit. "This means a lot for the district ... we need more family venues, places that increase the quality of life for everyone around it.

"It is a stepping stone ... it took a lot of hard work to make this happen," he added. "Now we have another viable entity and hopefully this bodes well for the future."

The Third & Main project is a mixed-use development of 7,500 square feet of bottom floor retail along with 36 extended-stay apartments available for short-term rentals for patients of the Proton Beam Therapy Institute at nearby Shands Hospital.

Though City Kidz is the first to open, more tenants are right behind. The Uptown Market, a grocery and deli venture being

undertaken by Burrito Gallery owners Tony Allegretti and company, should be open some time in August and tenants should be available to move into the apartments some time in late July, according to James Richardson of the City's Neighborhood Redevelopment and Special Projects office.

"I'm really proud to see to see this take off," said Richardson. "I hope it's the lynchpin that will help further revitalize the area."

The project was assisted by nearly \$500,000 from the Northwest Jacksonville Economic Development Fund, which provides capital for project development. The fund is used to attract businesses to the area, which provides jobs and adds to the overall quality of life.

Bush, along with his wife, Sonya, and brother, Anthony Miles, plan to use the shop to provide a "real world experience" while creating jobs and a springboard to further the message of financial literacy for children — everything from balancing a checkbook to opening a bank account.

For the developer of the project, Bill Cesery, the day marked the start of something to build on.

"It's always good to get that first tenant in and have the doors open," said Cesery. "You're always a little concerned about a project being successful, but the demand is here and it really is a niche."

New and open doors are always a welcome sign, said Jones, and like others noted, a project of this caliber should lead to bigger and better things ahead.

"It's a great opportunity for economic development," said Jones. "I see it (first tenant in the first new development) almost like a rebirth."

dchapman@baileypub.com
356-2466



City Council member Johnny Gaffney (center) and Clinton Bush (third from right) cut the ribbon signifying the grand opening of City Kidz Ice Cream Cafe. Bush owns the Springfield establishment and was joined by several dignitaries and officials including former Mayor Jake Godbold (left), State Rep. Mia Jones (third from left), City Deputy Chief Administrative Officer Kerri Stewart (fourth from right), co-owner Anthony Miles (second from right) and State Sen. Tony Hill (right) for the event.



A packed house greeted the establishment to the Springfield neighborhood Wednesday.