

As Seen In

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A European-style mall grows in Deer Park

LI ripe for retail expansion, if done right

By **CLAUDE SOLNIK**

You might think Long Island needs many things, such as lower property taxes, a convention center and maybe an outdoor stadium for professional teams. The last thing you might think Long Island needs is another shopping center.

But David Blumenfeld will tell you his firm isn't building "just another shopping center" in Deer Park.

Blumenfeld's firm, Syosset-based Blumenfeld Development Group, is developing The Arches at Deer Park – a mix of outlet and conventional shopping, restaurants and other amenities, which he believes redraws the local retail map.

"It's a shopping experience," Blumenfeld said of the project where steel and some roofs are up. "A shopping center is a long, drawn-out thing that has no character to it. This has character. You can go here for a day with your family and have something to do for everyone."

Long Island may seem awash in retail: Throw a stone, hit a store or a strip mall. And retail isn't easy here. Rents here – although cheaper than in New York City – aren't rock bottom. Department stores that once ruled the retail world face competition from the Web, big-box retailers and specialty shops, as well as their brethren in New York City.

But Blumenfeld is trying to reinvent the local retail scene with open-air



The Arches promises to be a community gathering place, as shown in this rendering.

amenities. At Christmastime, you'll have an annual lighting ceremony complete with a 60-foot Christmas tree. There will also be a Wi-Fi accessible courtyard. And best of all, the project is designed to be a sort of detached downtown.

"We listened to the people. We had 14 town meetings to get this approved. We went through what we needed to go through," Blumenfeld said. "We're giving them a community, a downtown Babylon."

Big visions

The area that saw the birth of the mall concept through Roosevelt Field may be returning to the outdoors for big retail dreams.

The Arches is farthest ahead. But other major projects could bring major retail development to town. The Light-house Development in Hempstead calls for office, residential, hotel and retail.

And Wilbur Breslin, president of Breslin Realty in Garden City, is seeking to build an 850,000-square-foot open-air shopping center known as Brookhaven Walk, complete with restaurants and retail. Breslin believes a growing population – 3 million people – justifies thinking big.

"Long Island has less retail space per capita than any other part of the United States," Breslin said. "Nobody believes it; but it's a fact."

Breslin said his firm has a 2 percent retail vacancy rate, a sign that the area can absorb more retail. And he believes that in an area speckled with small shopping centers, big projects can stand out.

"There's nothing you can open on the Island that's not going to be successful if it's planned properly," Breslin said. "That's a big 'if.'"

The outside is in

The 80-acre Arches is steaming ahead as part of Long Island's al fresco retail look at least in part because of its appealing amenities, which, besides a cinema, will include a spa and a fountain that will become a skating rink in



David Blumenfeld described his project, The Arches, as "a shopping experience."

winter.

If the project sounds like it has a European feel, that's because this downtown look is designed after Savarelli, a mall in Milan. A well-known landscape architect designed the greenery. About \$200,000 worth of landscaping was handpicked for the walkways.

Stores will sport stone façades as well as an open-air appeal that Blumenfeld believes is itself an amenity.

"Nine months of the year, it's a beautiful day. You want some air between your shopping," Blumenfeld said. "There are covered walkways throughout. There's fresh air, light, high-end architecture. In a mall, you get an enclosed feeling."

Although Blumenfeld describes the Arches as something new for Long Island, he views it as overdue. "People live on Long Island for a reason," Blumenfeld said. "They're out here because it's nice. When they shop, it should be an enjoyable experience."

Blumenfeld sees The Arches as a "smart style center," bringing "retailtain-

ment" to real estate development. An alluring mix of retailers help.

Tenants will include a 30,000-square-foot Neiman Marcus, a 50,000-square-foot Christmas Tree Shops unit and a home-goods store owned by Bed, Bath & Beyond. You'll have a Johnny Rockets, Starbucks, Chipotle and Jamba Juice shake shop. Blumenfeld is in talks with sit-down restaurants as well.

And oh, there also will be outlets: Nike's largest outlet in the country, about 20,000 feet (according to Blumenfeld), is being built, along with outlets for Banana Republic, Disney, Children's Place, Gap, Eddie Bauer, Kate Spade and Lucky Brand jeans stores.

Retail redux

While big retail projects may be successful, they aren't easy to develop. Taubman has been locked in a battle with Oyster Bay to develop the old Cerro Wire property. And Breslin's 850,000-square-foot Brookhaven Walk was pared down from earlier plans – and still has yet to break ground.

"It's very difficult to go through the approval process," Breslin said of this project, which may finally move ahead after 30 years. "We have [other] things on the drawing board. We have a half a dozen major shopping centers in the planning stage."

Big projects can bring some big benefits. The 800,000-square-foot Arches, for instance, is expected to generate around 2,000 construction jobs with \$97 million in salaries. Its tenants would produce 1,600 jobs and have a \$137-million impact on the local economy.

"I think the key to all this retail is you've got to build something nice," Blumenfeld said. "You can't build a typical store that may work somewhere out in the middle of the country where there's nothing else around it."

"We come with a lot of credibility," Blumenfeld said. "A lot of things we've built on Long Island, we've built well. We're there to stay. We're not sellers. We're going to be there. We're going to operate it." ■