

Rookwood developer Jeffrey Anderson seeks hot retailers

May 10, 2002

The Cincinnati Post

By Greg Paeth, Post staff reporter

In his seventh floor offices in Norwood's Rookwood Tower, real estate developer Jeffrey R. Anderson talks about the equivalent of a domino theory for retail development.

Sign one sizzling tenant - one can't-miss store that has proven it can lure affluent shoppers - and the others will follow.

It's a strategy Anderson has followed most notably with his Rookwood Commons development in Norwood, where the signing of trendy retailer Banana Republic led to Talbots, Anthropologie, Coldwater Creek, Zany Brainy, Abercrombie & Fitch and others.

All of a sudden, retail space begins to fall like dominos into the "leased" column and the bulldozers fire up their engines.

Anderson doesn't have to tax his memory to recall which tenant made things click for Rookwood Commons.

"At the time we did it - Banana Republic, three years ago...was the number one fashion retailer in the country," Anderson said.

"And if you've got Banana, which is the high end of the number one retailer, then everybody else went, 'You've got Banana?,' and we'd say 'Yes,' and then they'd say, 'Well, we're in'. That's how this business goes."

Although Banana Republic still has that halo effect, Anderson said Pottery Barn, Williams-Sonoma, Ann Taylor and Talbots are high on his list of tenants critical to the success of his "lifestyle centers."

Since it opened in August of 2000, Rookwood Commons and the adjacent Rookwood Pavilion shopping complex in Norwood have developed into one of the hottest places to shop in Greater Cincinnati because of the location, right off of Interstate 71 about five miles from downtown, and a blend of upscale shops, some of which are Rookwood exclusives in Greater Cincinnati.

Anderson is now planning phase three of the development, called Rookwood Exchange, an office and retail development inside a triangle bounded by Edmundson Road, Edwards Road and I-71.

Picking good locations is how Anderson got started.

The 55-year-old Detroit native grew up in Terrace Park and now lives in Indian Hill. He began working with Wendy's founder Dave Thomas shortly after graduating from the University of Virginia in 1969.

He specialized in site selection, and later began working for a list of fast-food clients, including Wendy's competitors McDonald's, Taco Bell and Long John Silver's.

In 1976, he went to work for Chi-Chi's Mexican restaurant chain, which was then growing explosively, and two years later became the company's director of real estate.

By 1985, in his mid-30s, Anderson cashed out his Chi-Chi's stock for \$10 million and decided to take it easy.

"I retired at 35 and built a house in northern Michigan to hang out up there and about six months later I realized I didn't have any friends who could hang out like I could so I was totally bored to death. I'd be like, 'Let's go play tennis,' and they'd say they had to go to work."

Anderson returned to Cincinnati and said he got back in the development business to keep busy, building smaller shopping centers in Greater Cincinnati.

Anderson became more interested in the business after his eldest son, Jeffrey, informed him he was more interested in real estate development than in continuing to work as an investment banker in New York.

Son Jeffrey is now director of development for the company.

Rookwood Commons, Anderson's first major project in the area, also has become the prototype for other Anderson developments, including his Deerfield Town Center project scheduled to open in a year off of I-71 in Deerfield Township.

Similar "lifestyle centers" are planned for Geneva, Ill., 30 miles from downtown Chicago; Eastwood Towne Center in East Lansing, Mich., the Summit of Louisville, and the Shops at River's Edge in Cleveland.

He defined "lifestyle center" as an open air development that isn't anchored by major department stores and has an ambience that encourages people to "hang out."

It's also convenient so that his demographic target - 35-year-old women with disposable income - can park near Ann Taylor, for example, run in and make a purchase quickly.

Anderson said recruiting tenants for Rookwood Commons has been the key to its success.

"We decided we were going to go after the best retailers we could find," Anderson said. "We would go around the country and we would look through everything and say, 'OK, how do I get Anthropologie? I saw them in New York City. How do I get Baker Furniture? I saw them in Georgetown,'" said Anderson, who owns and flies his own jet, which makes travel less of a hassle.

The success of the business has found Anderson trading places with some of the friends who didn't have the time to hang out with him 20 years ago.

"They're all beginning to retire now and I'm working harder than I ever did," he said.

Cincinnati centers

Jeffrey R. Anderson has developed these shopping centers in Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky:

Rookwood Commons: 320,000 square foot center opened in November 2000. Features 46 tenants, many new to Greater Cincinnati.

Rookwood Pavilion: 250,000 square foot center opened in 1994 with Joseph-Beth Booksellers, TJ Maxx and Steinmart.

Harper's Station: 215,000 square foot center in Symmes Township near Fields Ertel Road. Anchors are TJ Maxx, Steinmart and Dillard's Home Store.

Kenwood Pavilion: 57,000 square foot center opened in 1998 in the the Kenwood retail corridor with Mikasa, Organized Living, Cost Plus World Market and Panera Bread Co.

Alexandria Village Green: 208,000 square foot center in Alexandria, Ky. anchored by Wal-mart, JC Penney, TJ Maxx and County Market.

Skytop Pavilion: 125,000 square foot center on Beechmont Avenue completed in 2000 and anchored by Biggs.

Union Centre Pavilion: 132,000 square foot center opened in 2001 and includes a Biggs.

The Summit of Cincinnati: A 1920's Protestant church on the University of Cincinnati campus marketed as retail/office project. Now includes an Urban Outfitters and Bernie's Coffee and Tea Co.