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Open-air centers quickly responded to consumers' needs and wants during the pandemic. Now, they look ahead to further adapt as the industry hopes for a quick recovery.

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Open For Business

Open-air centers were able to quickly respond to consumers' needs and wants in the early stages of the pandemic. Now, they look ahead to further adapt as the industry hopes for a quick recovery.

Randall Shearin



Image courtesy of Peter Khoy Photography/AO

Open-air centers, like 2nd & PCH in Long Beach, California (pictured), were able to quickly serve consumers during the early days of reopening. Centers are now figuring which changes will be permanent.

Retail environments have evolved exponentially in the past 12 months, with a lot of the changes forced by consumer behavior during the pandemic. Open-air retail took on a whole new meaning and a whole new level of importance to the retail industry in 2020. While technology existed to buy-online, pick-up in-store (BOPIS), the industry had to react as consumers quickly adopted new purchasing behaviors and municipalities enforced distancing and other restrictions. As consumers adopted new behaviors to make purchases, open-air retail centers continually modified their physical – and even online – presences to respond. Retail landlords have responded by enhancing their properties to add new

features for shoppers. Now, many owners are looking past the pandemic, viewing these changes as permanent or convertible to even more responsive features.

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ENHANCEMENT

After the pandemic took hold, many retail centers took time to figure out what they needed to do to allow tenants to conduct business. For many, at first, that meant creating dedicated curbside pick-up areas. As consumers were able to come back to centers – depending on the area – retail landlords quickly evaluated their environments and made changes where necessary.

“Even before COVID, we were seeing trends that afforded efficiency and con-

venience in the customer journey,” says Lisa Palmer, president and CEO of Regency Centers, one of the nation’s largest owners of community shopping centers. “The pandemic accelerated the trend of consumers’ desire at times to prioritize convenience.”

Adapting to a new way of business at a rapid pace became the only way to stay in business in 2020. Center owners and tenants had to be innovative in how they met their customers’ needs.

“We are seeing a lot of creativity in the industry,” says Beth Azor, founder and owner of Azor Advisory Services, a shopping center investor and advisory firm in South Florida. “South Florida is back open. However, in other parts of

the country you are seeing hair salons and nail salons on the sidewalk. We are seeing tenants — like veterinary practices — have customers wait in their cars to maintain capacity, but they'll acknowledge the customer by bringing them a bottle of water."

For Woodland Hills, California-based NewMark Merrill Companies, who owns a number of community centers in markets like Southern California, where lockdowns forced retailers to close, the company quickly realized its open-air environments would be an asset once allowed to reopen.

"During the period when we were closed, we really invested in our outdoor areas," says Sandy Sigal, CEO of the company. "We created areas where people could spend time, like outdoor eating areas. That had an immediate impact. I can point to numerous restaurants in our portfolio who had higher traffic than they did pre-COVID, even though they had no interior dining."

Outdoor dining areas at Newmark Merrill's centers have done so well, says Sigal, that the company has plans to keep



Regency Centers' Village at La Floresta in Brea, California, features a courtyard around a central fountain that has seating areas where visitors can spend time.

investing in more areas across the company's portfolio.

"Our research shows that in places where we made the investment in our outdoor areas, people were far more likely to come back," says Sigal. "That justifies the investment we've made."

Sigal credits municipalities for work-

ing with landlords during the pandemic. Many allowed reduced parking requirements, enabling the company to use parking spaces for outdoor dining.

"The tradeoff of two parking spaces for a tenant to have outdoor dining is the right tradeoff," says Sigal. "Our length of stay of the average consumer coming to our

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Pre-pandemic, CityPlace Doral hosted a number of events. The center's outdoor space has made it an attractive place for consumers during the pandemic. Photo courtesy of Liquid Outdoor.



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centers is going up month after month.”

Azor, as well, sees cities across the country being polite to landlords and tenants in an effort to spur business activity.

“Cities are being a little more forgiving on things like outdoor seating when limited occupancy situations are in effect,” says Azor. “They might look the other way now whereas in normal times they would be very strict about outdoor seating.”

Many retail landlords adapted parking lots into pick-up locations, dining areas, and even drive-in and drive-thru areas. With traffic counts down, retail owners were able to utilize these areas without substantial impact to parking but did need municipal approval to lower parking ratios in many areas. Regency Centers’ Palmer says that the true needs of parking will need to be a big consideration going forward.

“Shopping center owners should think about the design of their parking fields and their use of outdoor and gathering spaces to serve consumer needs more effectively,” says Palmer. “Early on, we created spaces at our properties for curbside pick-up. We continue to add more of these Pick Up & Go locations in each of our properties as they have been very successful.”

As the pandemic weighs on the industry, it is still considering which changes it will keep as the light dawns through the clouds. While many owners have quickly installed pick-up areas, to-go entrances and the like, the question of how many are rational in a non-pandemic environment looms.

“Takeout, curbside and delivery pick-up has grown more in the past year than over the past 10 years combined,” says Rob Budetti, principal with architecture firm AO. “It is a model of convenience, but not one that allows people to linger. You don’t want to create so many that it is the sole way that people interact with retail tenants.”

Budetti is seeing a number of owners install pick-up areas with a dual purpose in mind. At one center, the owner is installing the areas now to use as pick-up lanes during the pandemic, and in the long-term the space will be converted to a ride-share pick-up area. As the firm designs new and renovated projects, it is paying more attention to flexibility. The company de-

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Image courtesy of AO.

CenterCal's Mountain View Village in Riverton, Utah, was designed to have several programmed outdoor areas and parks.



Image courtesy of AO.

Centers have realized they must become experiential to create an impact with consumers. At Mountain View Village, games are part of the experience.



Image courtesy of AO.

Pocket parks and outdoor areas have proven themselves invaluable in pandemic times. Pictured is Mountain View Village in Riverton, Utah.

signed 2nd & PCH, an open-air lifestyle project in Long Beach, California. There, the company had envisioned an area that could be closed off for vehicle traffic for larger events on a regular basis. During the pandemic, the operator, CenterCal Properties, has kept the area closed in order to accommodate more social distancing and outdoor space for retailers.

Dallas-based Centennial Real Estate implemented a number of pop-up dining and lounge areas at its centers so customers could dine or spend time relaxing outdoors. Each of the areas had features like lighting, sunshades, heaters and comfortable seating.

"To encourage their use, we host events from outdoor movies and concerts to 'yappy' hours and yoga classes that draw people to the property and deliver a fluid indoor-outdoor experience," says Whitney Livingston, chief operating officer at Centennial. "This all works well during a pandemic, but these ideals will continue to be important hallmarks among successful shopping centers over time."

Livingston stresses that just placing the amenities alone will not work; management must work to activate the areas with activity. At Pacific City, which was designed as an open-air living room for residents of Huntington Beach, California, outdoor dining and lounge areas and ocean view observation decks were designed into the property.

"Not all properties have the benefit of a waterfront view and year-round mild weather, yet they still need activations," says Livingston.

Retail owners saw a number of changes from tenants happen. Chattanooga, Tennessee-based Hutton saw that with one tenant, fast casual chain Chuy's, who quickly added more takeout capabilities to increase business.

"Many of our tenants quickly figured out how to stop the bleeding and change the course of action, shifting things back to a positive direction," says Karen Hutton, founder and CEO of Hutton.

Landscape architecture firm Lifescapes is seeing clients with excess parking utilize that space for more income-producing uses, like adding multifamily properties and hotels. While these additions are not instantaneous, they will add income in the future.

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“Developers are trying to prep for the future as carefully as possible,” says Julie Brinkerhoff-Jacobs, president and CFO of Lifescapes. “There are also more open spaces being considered. We have always believed if there can be more outdoor spaces or entertainment-oriented space as part of the mixed-use experience, it’s all the better. People like to be outside when they can, and moving forward, people will be much more comfortable outdoors.”

Lifescapes recently completed a project for Federal Realty Investment Trust, The Works, in El Segundo, California. The property was a more traditional retail center that added new greenspaces for customers to spend time.

On the retail side, convenience became key. Buy online, pick-up in store (BOPIS) and curbside delivery have become essential parts of many retailers’ businesses. As such, they likely won’t disappear from the retail landscape as the pandemic subsides.

“Consumers have gotten used to those conveniences,” says Ashley Robinson, founder of The Seaker Group, which helps retailers optimize their businesses.

The Seaker Group has helped a number of retail, entertainment and restaurant clients measure changes so they can adjust them quickly if they are or are not working.

“Tenants and landlords need to see what is happening outside of their four walls if they are a retailer, or if they are a

As centers plan outdoor activities and add new features that involve more movement, it is important that retail owners evaluate their insurance coverage. SCB reached out to Mary Pipino, executive vice president of Beecher Carlson Insurance Services, LLC, to ask some questions on insurance coverage.

SCB: How often do you recommend retail center owners evaluate their insurance?

Pipino: Annually in preparation for their renewal to update important information and address any changes in their business operations. Examples include coverage limits, policy exclusions, property schedule insured values, lender insurance requirements, transfer of risk opportunities and deductibles and or retentions on each line of coverage in relation to current market premiums.

SCB: For center owners who host outdoor events, are there specific insurance needs that need to be considered?

EVALUATING COVERAGE

Pipino: Yes, how risky is the event and how are insurable interests addressed in the event agreement. As the host, does the event have quality insurance that extends to the host as an additional insured? Does that coverage adequately protect the host? Does the hosts’ insurance have any exclusions for that particular event such as certain types of animals?

SCB: Should retail owners consider evaluating insurance needs when adding expanded outdoor areas like fire pits and outdoor seating?

Pipino: Yes, how do these changes impact your retained and insurable risks. Examples: are hazards increasing for slips, trips, falls that need addressed; how is the firepit set up, what is its source of energy, is the flame controlled, are barriers in place to limit access by business invitees (including children) to prevent them from having access to it and getting hurt/burned.

— Randall Shearin

landlord,” she says. “They need to look beyond their market in order to measure in real time how consumer thinking is

shifting. That’s more important today than trying to predict what conditions will be like in six months.”

Throughout the pandemic, Newmark Merrill has performed several consumer surveys to measure where sentiment was headed so it could predict tenant areas to aid. In one recent survey, fitness was one of the surprises. In places where fitness tenants could open, Newmark Merrill saw traffic at 50 percent of historic levels the first week, then 75 percent of historic levels the second week after re-opening.

“The idea that people would be reluctant to workout indoors did not prove out,” says Sigal. “Every time they had the chance, they did.”

TENANT RELATIONSHIPS

The pandemic has brought landlords and tenants to a better understanding of each other’s businesses. While many retailers and restaurants had to quickly shift to provide takeout or curbside deliveries, landlords often weren’t aware that there



Newmark Merrill added colorful murals and outdoor seating at several of its properties, including Anaheim Town Square in Anaheim, California (pictured).

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Casto is planning a redevelopment of Winter Park Village north of Orlando. The mixed-use project is making the outdoors front and center as it plans for the future.

were costs associated with those transformations. While many landlords thought it was great that restaurants could shift to takeout-only, many didn't realize that it cost the tenant quite a bit of money to provide those services, says Robinson of The Seaker Group. In Manhattan, for example, many restaurants did not reopen when allowed to at 25 percent capacity because their profitability threshold is at 75 percent occupancy.

"You are seeing a broader understanding for how hard it is to be an operator," says Robinson. "Hopefully that will allow for more sustainable business environments going forward, from the government perspective, a landlord perspective and even the consumer perspective."

Part of what has brought landlords and tenants closer over the past year is the recognition of the symbiotic relationship that each party has on the other. Without the success of the tenant, the landlord cannot succeed, and vice-versa.

"Landlords and tenants are more incentivized to work together, because they were faced with something that neither of

CREATETM Architecture Planning & Design PLLC



Frankie Campione

What uses – aside from retail – are you seeing that are entering projects that were traditionally retail-only environments?

The buzz for a few years has already been mixed-use, which encompasses numerous alternate uses. Until the pandemic, entertainment was the immediate 'go to' as a compliment to retail in addition to open-air dining. Since then we are seeing uses including office, residential and warehouse.

What are developers asking for in regards to open spaces for customers?

Everyone seems to be asking roll up garage-type doors or NanaWall in lieu of fixed windows, especially in restaurant or food court designs where we are trying to extend open-air dining privileges.

What is the most unusual request you have received from a client in the past ten months?

Client prior to signing proposal: "Can you be done in 3 weeks?" We, of course, said, "Yes!"

ADVERTORIAL

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them caused,” says Robinson.

Even in markets like the Bay Area, which is one of the most competitive for retail space, landlords have given allowances for tenants until they are able to fully open and operate. That has helped to reset the market, says Robinson. She believes more landlords will begin to study tenants’ bottom lines versus just their gross sales when looking at real estate deals.

“There was a lack of understanding of retailers’ fixed costs,” she says. “Landlords now understand that fixed costs for some tenants are high, and they have to have a certain level of traffic and business just to break even. Most of the country hasn’t been meeting that with retail traffic down 40 percent.”

Landlords saw better results from tenants who entered the pandemic with a rich omnichannel offering. Those who didn’t — like mom-and-pop tenants who often can’t afford the investment such as platform costs — were often the tenants that needed the most attention from landlords.

“Retailers who already had a robust dig-



Elements like outdoor advertising allow consumers to be entertained and can be a boost for center review. Pictured is a Liquid Outdoor ad for Trunk Club at City Center Bishop Ranch near San Ramon, California.



Cesar Joao
Vice President - National
Account Services



How are you helping retailers adapt during COVID?

As a trusted advisor to all our clients, TCG always shares its HVAC expertise and we work with each of our clients’ teams to help guide them on the best practices that can be implemented during a pandemic. Below are some of the important steps we help retail clients with:

- Reducing viral load in the air through ventilation and filtration has proven to be key across all environments by rebalancing heating and cooling systems to take in higher rates of outside air.
- Filtration, cleaning and purifying the air of potential viral particles is another important step. TCG recommends all of its retail clients enforce their preventive maintenance services and implement more frequent filter changes throughout the year to protect employees and clients.

Which ‘lessons learned’ from the COVID era can the FM industry carry into 2021?

As everyone did in 2020, TCG had to implement all new safety guidelines for our employees and technicians in the field to adapt to our clients’ needs and requirements. Going forward, companies should have multiple action plans in place in case of a pandemic, including allowing employees to work from home (if required) and have all the necessary tools to work efficiently.

What advice do you have for property managers looking to streamline their common area repair & maintenance program?

Unfortunately, maintenance is not something that can be put on lockdown for months on end. To keep everyone safe and healthy, retailers should work with their vendors to implement and enforce their preventive maintenance, perform all essential repairs and implement safety guidelines. This includes items like having the maintenance technician wash their hands before and after doing any work and social distancing while work is being performed.

Why is it important not to defer preventative maintenance at your retail properties right now?

Although saving money is important, we do not recommend deferring PM programs/services. Failure to perform needed repairs could lead to asset deterioration and asset impairment, causing your properties to be unsafe during a pandemic. Some of the results of deferring maintenance include: safety and health risks to all occupants, expensive reactive/emergency repairs; HVAC system failures; improper airflow; and filtration issues that can cause unhealthy environments.

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ital presence and customer database were ahead of the game when the pandemic started,” says Palmer of Regency Centers. “Operators can educate and connect their merchants with various tools for success. In the middle of 2020, Regency provided our tenants with a Merchant Success Toolkit. This toolkit features 60 pages of marketing tools that help establish a strong marketing foundation, elevate market position and amplify merchant offerings to customers.”

Hutton had strong rent collections from the company’s national tenants, particularly those who were financially healthy or deemed essential. The company took a pro-active approach with its smaller tenants.

“We realized with our mom-and-pop and franchise owners that when they had to shut down, they lost all their inventory,” says Karen Hutton. “They also had family members and others who were close to them working for them. We extended offerings to each tenant; we spoke to each of them on an individual basis and asked what we could do for them. Because of our success with larger retailers, we were able to work out issues with many smaller tenants. We don’t want our smaller tenants to have to struggle to be at our centers, especially when this was beyond their control.”

Hutton says it took several months for her team to contact and work out plans for the company’s tenants, but the effort helped the company create a better relationship with its tenants in the long run.

“It brought us all closer,” she says.

Centennial has worked to develop two new programs in response to the pandemic, Retail To Go and Shop Now! Retail To Go allows consumers to place orders for food and retail goods by phone and allows them to pick purchases up curbside in their vehicles. The company partnered with Adeptmind to expand the program’s digital offering in time for the 2020 holiday season. Shop Now! allows consumers to search products from nearly every store at each of Centennial’s centers.

“Tools like these are necessary game changers for those wanting to remain relevant and competitive in the retail world,” says Livingston. “They have allowed us to merge the brick-and-mortar and online shopping experiences in ways consum-



Community centers, like the 96,890-square-foot Aventura Shopping Center in the Miami suburb of Aventura, Florida, shined bright during the pandemic. Aventura Shopping Center is owned by Regency Centers and anchored by Publix.



Some tenants at the 49,766-square-foot Brooklyn Station on Riverside in Jacksonville, Florida, have outdoor spaces allowing for guests to spend time outdoors. The property is owned by Regency Centers.

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ers never imagined were possible before. This was particularly important during the pandemic, but definitely are services that are now here to stay.”

Center marketing has played a big role for sales recovery at some open-air community centers. Sigal says Newmark Merrill has helped many small tenants tell their stories through marketing programs and social media.

“We don’t just say, ‘here is Joe’s Coffee Shop,’” says Sigal. “We say, ‘Here is the story of Joe; here’s Joe’s mission to serve the community. That connects Joe’s story to the community. It gives consumers a reason to support Joe, that it’s not just some random place to get your coffee. It’s important today for tenants to be clear to the community what they are about, and that they have a mission to serve and support the community.’”

The center must also put forth the effort to connect the community with the property, so its mission is clear.

“Landlords need to make sure that the community understands the role that your center plays in that neighborhood,” says Sigal. “A lot of owners have been lazy with how they convey their mission to the community. We have to take the time to tell the story of why they should come to the center versus buy online.”

Hutton also had her own experience as a tenant. Her company also owns Mod-Wash, a car wash chain that was in the middle of an aggressive expansion at the beginning of 2020. The company accelerated its expansion plans, opening 16 new washes in 2020. Hutton says other tenants also took advantage of the strong retail space that became available.

“I was surprised on how much leasing we did during the pandemic,” says Karen Hutton. “Starting in the summer and through the rest of the year, activity was strong. We had a good run of leasing space.”

Hutton saw a lot of interest from tenants like banks, veterinary clinics, retail-facing medical offices and even restaurants were among those who leased space with the company.

The nation’s newfound love for drive-thru concepts has driven demand for those spaces very high.

“If you are a shopping center owner and you have an available end cap or you can create an available end cap or you have



Regency Centers owns Belmont Chase shopping center in Ashburn, Virginia, in affluent Loudoun County.



Liquid Outdoor’s digital signage provides visitors with information while creating a revenue stream for centers. Pictured is a Liquid Outdoor unit at River Landing in Miami.

land to add a drive-thru, you are probably doing that,” says Azor. “Time is the only thing we cannot buy; drive-thrus will likely be used by more consumers in the future.”

Azor points to Shake Shack as an example of a tenant that is beginning to roll out drive-thru locations.

In Florida, Azor’s home market, second generation restaurant spaces in the suburbs are a hot commodity. As the state is wide open for business, retailers and restaurants are eager to expand. Azor has had three to five calls per week from restaurants for space. Health and fitness concepts are also interested in space.

“I’ve never had the phones ringing like they are now,” says Azor.

OUTDOOR ADDS EXPERIENCE

Once consumers were able to get out of the house, they sought familiar areas where they could socially distance, yet still have some sense of community. In many areas, open-air centers responded to that need by creating events that allowed for distancing, yet still enabled some level of social activity.

“Open-air centers have benefitted greatly during this time, but not just because people feel more comfortable outdoors,” says Robinson. “It’s because open-air centers have made a greater effort to provide multiple uses within the center.”

In a study of the Salt Lake City market, The Seaker Group discovered that traffic

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at one open-air lifestyle center in the market was down only 5 percent. That center was later able to raise its traffic over the prior year around July. Enclosed malls in the area, meanwhile, were seeing traffic declines of 30 to 40 percent.

"The malls were not offering ancillary benefits like outdoor seating areas where people can sit or dine, or areas like skating rinks," says Robinson. "That drastically impacted their traffic."

At Crenshaw Imperial center in Inglewood, California, Newmark Merrill created multiple outdoor areas for people to spend time. The company had murals painted to reflect community matters. It also added an outdoor seating area in the parking field for Norm's Restaurant. The tenant is doing as much dining in the outdoor area as it did with its indoor area, says Sigal.

People are seeking engagement. In communities where lockdowns were less stringent, social activity was much more robust, including retail environments.

"Experiential space and retail are always going to be in demand," says Budetti



Restaurants — with plenty of outdoor dining space — are a feature for the redesign of Winter Park Village in Winter Park, Florida. Casto is in the planning stages for the mixed-use project.

of AO. "People want to go out and be with friends and family. Socialization is critical to the human race."

Open-air retail centers and mixed-use projects have been very cognizant of consumers' desire to spend more time outdoors. Since many are located in urban and infill areas, they can serve a dual need by adding public spaces like parks.

"A big push for retail developments has been to create more outdoor space for tenants," says Budetti. "Retail landlords want tenants to have the ability to adapt within their space. We are seeing increased requirements for patio space. Retail owners are a lot more comfortable with having more space now. When we do go back to 'normal,' it's likely consumers will continue to choose outdoor settings versus crowded indoor settings."

The addition of outdoor living rooms,

dining areas and greenspaces has paved the way for a new type of center: an experiential center. Experiential centers will pave the way for the future instead of experiential tenants.

"Creating more Instagrammable places, and areas to hang out — the 'living rooms' of centers — are becoming more popular," says Budetti. "We are seeing the creation of a lot of pocket parks that are a little more intimate for smaller groups. Those will work well when people are easing their way into being back around other people."

At some centers, the open-air environment has become the draw. Codina Partners' Downtown Doral in South Florida, has seen traffic driven by the simple need of residents to get out of the house. The company thinks that will also continue to be a strong selling point in the future.

"For the foreseeable future, we believe that the appetite for fresh air and not feeling 'cooped up' will be an essential aspect of society's 'normal,'" says Ana-Marie Codina Barlick, CEO of Codina Partners. "To stay ahead of these demands, developers will likely integrate more open-air elements, expanded green space and features that address health and safety in the coming years. We've seen this trend prove successful at the vibrant mixed-use development of Downtown Doral, which has retailers that offer outdoor experiences and are complemented by an adjacent

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park, providing quick access to nature and sunlight.”

TAKING A LOOK AT WHAT'S NEW

Many retail developers who were in the midst of large projects pre-COVID are now taking a different view of those projects, says Budetti with AO. A number are reducing the retail square footage and taking a more mixed-use view of new projects, he says.

“They may be adding residential to what was a large mixed-use project with office and retail only,” says Budetti. “A number of retail concepts, like theaters, have been hit hard.”

Some projects, including one that AO was working on near San Diego, was all the way through permitting. Now, the developers are revisiting plans for the project, redesigning about 50 percent, according to Budetti.

“We are seeing developers really dialing in to what the right amount of retail space is within a mixed-use development,” he says.



Image courtesy of RMA Photography

2nd & PCH in Long Beach, California, features outdoor seating and pedestrian areas. AO designed the center to have an area that could be closed to vehicular traffic for events. The operator, CenterCal Properties, has opted to keep it closed during the pandemic so shoppers can have more room to spread out and socially distance.



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Casto is in the conceptual planning stages for the redevelopment of Winter Park Village in Winter Park, Florida, a northern suburb of Orlando. With its previous partner, JPMorgan, Casto created Winter Park Village from an enclosed mall to an open-air mixed-use project, which was completed in 2003. Casto purchased JPMorgan's interest in the project in 2020, allowing the redevelopment to begin.

"The redevelopment is taking shape," says Brett Hutchens, president of Casto Southeast. "There is a tremendous amount of interest from retail tenants who will take this project to the next level."

The big changes with the project will come in the form of placemaking and landscaping. Casto will add more outdoor seating for restaurants, responding to the area's warm climate and consumer demand for more outdoor spaces. The company has engaged Charlan Brock Associates as the architect and Dix-Hite as the landscape architect, while Prismatic will handle the center's branding.

"We want to take the center in the direction of experiential transactions, with parks, places and Instagrammable moments," says Casto.

Winter Park Village has a variety of tenants it plans to capitalize on. From outdoor retailer REI to grocery Publix, the center runs the gamut. Restaurants — including a lot of outdoor dining space — are a big focus for the future. The center



Entertainment is still an area that many retail owners see as poised for success long-term (see page 64). Pictured is a rendering of the Regal theater at Casto's re-imagined Winter Park Village in Winter Park, Florida.

already has several very popular, high volume restaurants, including P.F. Chang's and The Cheesecake Factory, which make it a draw for residents across the region. Casto plans to enhance the center by adding new tenants, as well as incorporating more experiential components centered around a few zones, with names themed "Amuse," "Enchant" and "Unwind."

LOOKING AHEAD

Open-air centers are evolving as business continues to awake following a tur-

bulent 2020. While 2021 will be a year in which to learn, many developers believe they are beyond a reactive stage and into a proactive stage in helping tenants and serving consumers.

"Our shopping centers became places for the community to get their essential goods and services during a challenging year," says Palmer. "The past year solidified our strong belief that open-air, neighborhood and community shopping centers are critical places in the neighborhoods and communities we serve and will not only survive the retail 'new normal' but will thrive. The proximity of shopping centers to consumers' homes will be key to future success as shoppers will want to take care of much of their retail and dining needs conveniently and close to their neighborhoods."

Pent-up demand from consumers also is on the horizon for many retailers and retail landlords. A number of landlords report interest is high for space from retailers who are seeking to open stores ahead of a suspected boom in business.

"I think we are in for the Roaring Twenties," says Azor. "I think people are going to spend money and they're going to eat out. They've figured out online shopping is ok, but they'd rather go to bricks-and-mortar. The comeback will be a boom for our industry." **SCB**

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