

SHOPPING CENTER BUSINESS®

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Liberty Opens To Crowds

A defining super-regional project for the Cincinnati-Dayton metroplex opens its doors.

— Jennifer Nobilt

For residents in the greater Cincinnati and Dayton regions, October 22nd, 2015 was an auspicious date: the formal grand opening of a highly anticipated project that is unlike anything else in the marketplace: Liberty Center.

Liberty, which is co-developed by Columbus-based Steiner + Associates and Chicago-based Bucksbaum Retail Properties, is noteworthy not just regionally, but nationally. The 1.2 million-square-foot mixed-use town center project, which sits on 64 acres at the intersection of I-75 and State Route 129, is one of only a handful of regional shopping centers to open this year, and is one of the largest and most ambitious projects of its kind in the nation.

The presence of a superregional project in a fast-growing marketplace with no true regional destination and upwards of 600,000 residents is a potential game-changer, says Steiner + Associates CEO Yaromir Steiner. “We expect Liberty Center to be a market-defining project in the truest sense of the word,” he explains. “The project is at the forefront of a new wave of innovative town center development, bringing together a dynamic commercial foundation with innovative and inclusive design features and a memorable and engaging experiential elements.”

Steiner + Associates Executive Vice President Anne Mastin says that Liberty Center fills a demand for area residents, who have



The 1.2 million-square-foot Liberty Center opened in October in the metro Cincinnati area, bringing new retailers and restaurants.

been “hungry for a great retail and entertainment destination.” According to Mastin, the region’s youthful and affluent demographic profile, and Liberty’s positioning at the heart of the Cincinnati-Dayton metroplex makes for a mutually beneficial fit between a project and its surrounding communities.

“There is a huge opportunity here in terms of growth, and, not coincidentally, the enthusiasm and anticipation for the Liberty Center grand opening was unlike anything we have ever experienced,” she says.

The project includes more than

800,000-square-feet of retail, restaurants and entertainment, 75,000-square-feet of office, 240 luxury apartments and a 130-key AC Hotel by Marriott. Liberty Center’s tenant roster includes a number of state and regional firsts, including Ohio’s first AC Hotel by Marriott, a 200,000-square-foot Dillard’s that is the retailer’s first ground-up store in the state, and a new 80,000-square-foot Dick’s Sporting Goods concept that is the first of its kind in the northern Cincinnati market.

Other highlights include an 82,000-square-foot 15-screen Cobb CineBistro theater with



More than 800,000 square feet of retail, restaurants and entertainment anchor Liberty Center, which also features office space, apartments and a hotel.



Gathering spaces, inside and outside, were an instrumental part of the design for Liberty Center in Cincinnati.

six “dine in” screens, and a list of tenants that includes nationally and regionally prominent restaurants and retailers like Cheesecake Factory, Old Navy, Banana Republic, Forever 21, Brio Tuscan Grille, H&M, American Eagle, Ashcroft & Oak, GAP, Pies & Pints, Victoria Secret, Express, Chico’s and Rusty Bucket. Steiner + Associates announced the addition of 24 additional retail and restaurant tenants in September, including Cantina Laredo, a first-to-market Mexican restaurant, and Canadian tea retailer DAVIDsTea, another market first. Other additions include wine club and upscale restaurant, Coopers Hawk, Northstar Café, Hanna Andersson, Eddie Bauer, Sunglass Hut, Silver Mountain Jewelry and local institution Rookwood Pottery.

While Liberty Center’s size, tenant roster and mix of uses are noteworthy, it is the project’s commitment to immersive, experiential design elements and extraordinary attention to detail that truly sets it apart, notes Yaromir Steiner.

“We want visitors to explore and engage with the project,” he explains. “At a time when shoppers have more options than ever before, we need to give them a reason to come—and to stay. Liberty Center’s design reflects the understanding that experiential environments add value to the shopping experience—and that a compelling destination is about delivering products, services and experiences that you cannot find online. As Easton Town Center has shown, people will travel to visit, and ‘just be, somewhere special.’”

To that end, the list of unique features, programmed public spaces and one-of-a-kind gathering spaces at Liberty is extensive. The 280,000-square-foot two-level enclosed Foundry Building on the eastern end of the project includes a feature known as The Living Room, a gathering space complete with a coffee shop, community tables, comfortable seating and live music, as well as a second-floor food hall with luxurious seating and select food vendors. The base of the Foundry Building’s giant smokestack opens out into a working fireplace, above which is an enormous panel of interactive digital screens. This “living wall” is designed to look like the surrounding brick—until the “bricks” fall away to reveal surprising new backgrounds or content. On the building’s exterior, the outside of the stack features another series of LED screens that provides similarly customizable and thematic exterior graphics and color variation.

Liberty’s younger visitors enjoy another feature on the second floor of the Foundry Building: the Cincinnati Children’s Discovery Center, a one-of-a-kind interactive kids’ play area designed by Roto—a creator of children’s museums and interactive exhibits. The pig-themed play area uses creativity and technology to provide unique and stimulating games and interactions for children.

Moving west through the project, tree-lined walkways connect to The Park and The Square, themed outdoor park spaces that include fountains, sculptural elements and a

band shell. A long retail building spans between the two parks, distinguished by a remarkable green roof space called TriHealth Triumph Gardens. Triumph Gardens, accessed via grand “Spanish Steps” at either end of the building, includes a true rooftop garden—complete with prairie grass and trees—a meditation area, and a second-story outdoor dining space connected to Kona Grill. Triumph Gardens also includes Sabin Hall, a first-class resource for conferences, weddings, non-profits, community meetings and Unity Chapel. The Chapel, envisioned for yoga, meditation, community programs and religious services, includes an interactive LED screen that can display decorative elements or religious iconography to suit the needs of different users. Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center and TriHealth will actively program these community resources with the goal of promoting health and wellness, bringing awareness and educating the greater community.

From meditation spaces, to prominent healthcare sponsors, health and wellness is a recurring theme at Liberty Center. That seems like a fitting backdrop for a project that prides itself a true community resource: not just a financial, but a social success story. To Yaromir Steiner, Liberty represents the culmination of lessons learned over years of developing other successful projects, integrating elements that will ensure that Liberty lives up to its billing as “the next evolution of the town center.” **SCB**