

Building blocks

A monthly report on growth and development in South Jersey

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Eateries on front burner at Willingboro location



Photos by AL SCHELL/Courier-Post

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WILLINGBORO

Like an army, shoppers travel on their stomachs.

That's why restaurants are an important part of the strategy for Willingboro Town Center, a redevelopment emerging on a gray stretch of Route 130, where consumers will soon be able to choose from a variety of cuisines — as well as enjoy a cocktail in this historically dry township.

Leases for seven eateries have been signed, said Alan S. Dinenberg, vice president for Legend Properties of Mount Laurel and Conshohocken, Pa. That includes the casual dining chain Ruby Tuesday, which was awarded a bargain-basement liquor license by the township council this month.

"A lot of restaurants are looking for urban market opportunities," Dinenberg said. "Retail is important, but everybody has to eat."

The sole applicant, Ruby Tuesday was awarded the license for \$2,500. The township could have auctioned the license, but Councilman James Ayres said he believed the Maryville, Tenn., chain deserved the license for investing in the township.

Considerations

Restaurant spokesman Andrew Becks said the chain chooses locations based on population growth, household income and traffic volume.

"We offer alcoholic beverages in the majority of our restaurants, and we're happy to provide those

drinks to our guests who want to enjoy them," he said. "We're looking forward to becoming part of the community in Willingboro."

In many New Jersey municipalities, a liquor license is a valuable commodity. The Mad Batter in Cape May paid more than \$800,000 for its license in 2004, and licenses in Cherry Hill and Evesham have topped the \$700,000 mark.

Voters here approved a referendum in 2002 that created five liquor licenses in this formerly dry town, but the measure has generated little buzz. Until Ruby Tuesday, only one restaurant applied. That business, Fly 'n Fishbone on Beverly-Rancocas Road, was turned down because only restaurants and catering halls on Route 130 and Rancocas Golf Club on Beverly-Rancocas Road are eligible for licenses.

MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about the redevelopment at Willingboro Town Center and other work in Willingboro, call the township offices at (609) 877-2200 or visit www.willingboro.org.

Various uses

Once the site of Willingboro Plaza, a shopping center shuttered in 1990, the 56-acre parcel is being developed into a mixed-use community of retail, residential, business and educational facilities.

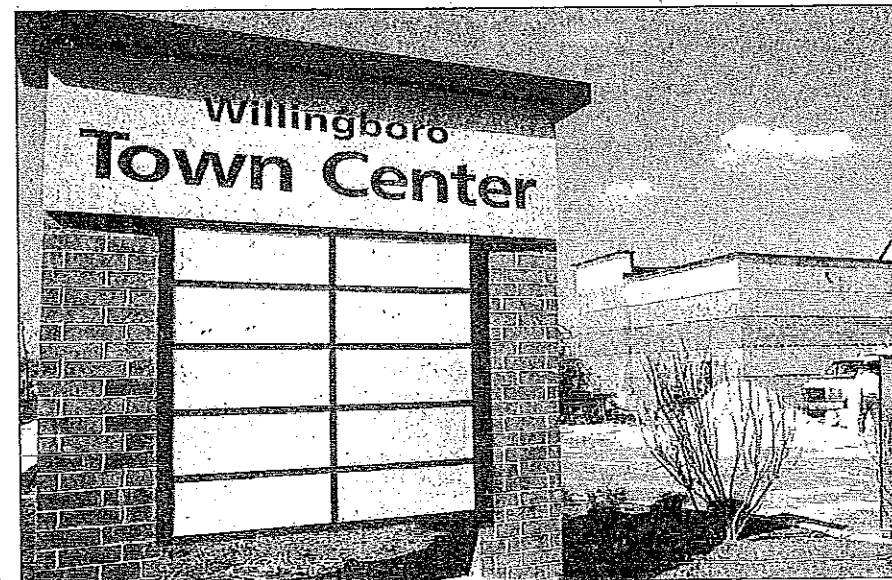
The location includes a satellite campus of Burlington County College, Willingboro Township Library and a Merck-Medco prescription center, which employs 850 people. There is an Acme market and

several apparel stores.

Other new eateries slated for the center are a mix of quick-serve chains and mom-and-pop restaurants. They are Starbucks, Quiznos subs, Rita's Water Ice, Bagel Shoppe, Shish Kabob House and Panda Garden. Great Clips Hair Salon and Nail Splash also have been signed, said Legend spokesman Edward O'Donnell.

Ruby Tuesday's tentative opening date is Feb. 6. The 4,600-square-foot restaurant will seat 175 guests and employ 80 people, the company said.

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A Starbucks coffee shop is among the tenants at the Willingboro Town Center, a 56-acre parcel being redeveloped on Route 130.