

BOB SHALLIT MARCH 9, 2016 4:51 PM

Sacramento's University Village set for major revamp

HIGHLIGHTS

Owners plan to spend \$10 million on center remodel

New tenants could include Zócalo and Buckhorn

Changes driven by new San Francisco ownership group



Sacramento's University Village shopping center is about to get a multimillion-dollar makeover and an infusion of new tenants that likely will include a Zócalo Mexican restaurant and a barbecue place from the owners of Buckhorn Grill.

That's the word from brokers, neighbors and tenants at the prominently located, 84,354-square-foot center at Howe Avenue and Fair Oaks Boulevard.

Merlone Geier Partners, the San Francisco-based company that acquired the center in 2014, isn't offering specific comment on the remodel. But **Gary Muljat**, a company vice president who handles leasing, said Merlone Geier anticipates announcing "more than one deal" affecting its tenant mix.



One of those deals is likely to involve Zócalo, the restaurant business owned by Sacramentans **Ernesto Jimenez** and **Jimmy Johnson**, according to local brokers. Zócalo is expected take over the space formerly occupied by Chinese restaurant Eastern Empire along with adjacent square footage.

Jimenez and Johnson have declined comment, saying they have not yet completed a lease deal.

Another new tenant will probably be Buckhorn BBQ, a new bar and dining concept from the owners of the Buckhorn Grill chain.

Tom McLaughlin, Buckhorn’s regional operations manager, said Wednesday his company is “99 percent there” toward signing a lease for a 3,400-square-foot space at the center’s southern edge that will be vacated next year by CVS Pharmacy.

“We’re really impressed with all the amenities they’re adding,” McLaughlin said of Merlone Geier’s renovation plans. “They’re trying to make it a destination location instead of a run-of-the-mill center.”

The overall remodel will cost about \$10 million and will include installing new facades on all buildings, creating new walkways and upgrading the courtyard that sits behind the Eastern Empire location, said **Jon Gianulias**, a principal with the Core Commercial real estate investments and leasing company that has its offices within University Village.

“It’s going from a pretty outdated center (to one that’s) A-plus,” he said.

The revamped patio – with water features and new lighting – will have individual spaces for Capitol Beer and Tap Room and Tokyo Fro’s sushi restaurant, both of which face onto the courtyard, as well as for Zócalo, along with a common area.

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A major remodel of the center may also affect Safeway, the center's anchor, which could be looking at a remodel or expansion, Gianulias said. Other key University Village tenants include Citibank, the popular Bandera restaurant and Starbucks.

Merlone Geier, which acquired University Village for an estimated \$20 million, is also the company behind the massive Delta Shores shopping, entertainment and housing development that's set to get under construction soon in south Sacramento.

Tasty combination

Local brewpubs drew big crowds with special events during Beer Week, which ended Sunday.

One of them, New Helvetia Brewing Co., had a record night Friday with an enticing pairing: beer and chocolate.

The Broadway pub collaborated with midtown's Ginger Elizabeth Chocolates to offer up flights including a stout, lager, porter and Belgian tripel matched up with lemon, passion fruit, caramelized milk and Mayan chile bonbons.

New Helvetia founder **David Gull** ordered 800 pieces of chocolate for 200 flights and, he said, "I had to send my wife out" to get another 200 chocolates when supplies ran low.

The evening was a big success – and represented the second time New Helvetia has scored with a Ginger Elizabeth collaboration. It uses that company's confections in brewing Mystery Airship: Imperial Chocolate Porter, a product that took a gold medal at last fall's Great American Beer Festival in Denver.

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