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Up Front

Find out how selfie app ShadeScout can improve your look. **PAGE 4**

News & Analysis

You may not believe it, but this pizza was cooked in 90 seconds. **PAGE 5**

PHOTO BY DAVID SPRAGUE

On Set: Metan Global Entertainment Group's Larry Namer at Woodland Hills studio.

Trans-Pacific TV

Convention Plan Returns

HOSPITALITY: Camarillo officials approve meeting center, hotel.

By KAREN E. KLEIN *Staff Reporter*

Officials in Camarillo have been talking about building a hotel and conference center for years, hoping to capitalize on local demand for meeting space and overflow business traffic from the western San Fernando Valley and Ventura County.

But the idea languished through the recession and looked all but dead after California's redevelopment agencies were dissolved in 2012. The city had earmarked a redevelopment agency parcel at Las Posas Road and the 101 Freeway for the convention center.

Old ideas die hard, though: The plan finally

Please see HOSPITALITY page 34

Carrier Catches Merger Fever

INSURANCE: St. Louis rival makes bid for Health Net before layoffs.

Athletic Shoe Maker Jumps Into Retail Market

BRICK & MORTAR: Gravity Defyer to open its first store in Huntington Beach.

Gravity Defyer Corp. has decided to open its first brick-and-mortar location next month.

The Pacoima athletic and comfort shoe manufacturer has signed a lease to open a storefront in Huntington Beach at the Carrabelle Mall. The company has four more stores in the works that it plans to open by the end of the year – including three in the greater Valley markets of Tarzana, Simi Valley and Thousand Oaks.

RETAIL & HOSPITALITY

Champaign Williams

Best known for its line of G-Defy athletic shoes for men and women that range from $70 to $100, the company has established itself as a brand sold on the Internet and through specialty retailers. However, founder **Alexander Elnekaveh** said that for the product's target demographic, ecommerce is not an effective marketing strategy.

"We're doing so well in direct marketing but we feel we are leaving money on the table," he explained. "Generally our customers are 45-years-old and up (and they're) not likely to purchase shoes online or over the phone."

In the past the company relied on traditional advertising such as health magazines like Diabetic Living and Weight Watchers to drive traffic. But Elnekaveh said those efforts were only bringing in two to three people in online traffic per ad.

"If we have a store, we believe we can get another five or six people," he said.

The company anticipates spending $80,000 to $150,000 to open a store. Each will occupy 1,400 to 2,000 square feet and require a staff of 40 employees.

"We're training retail people how to be doctors of feet conditions. They will have to learn it to understand how to help people," Elnekaveh explained. "We're not going to ask customers 'Which shoes do you like?' because they come to us because they have pain and need a good sharp shoe that takes it away."

Gravity Defyer was founded in 2009 and its shoes feature what is called the "VersoShock" sole, which acts as a mini trampoline that absorbs the pressure feet endure during contact with the ground. The shoes are manufactured overseas in Asia and Europe, with warehousing and shipping handled in Pacoima.

The company will monitor the success of its first five stores, and if sales meet expectations, Gravity Defyer will open an additional 15 units by June 2016.

"There is always a challenge – this time it will be how to make our customers know that we are here," Elnekaveh said. "Still, wellness and prevention is a big market right now."

Leap: Rendering of Gravity Defyer store in Huntington Beach.

Retail Renovation

Renovations on the 34-year-old Oakbrook Shopping Center in Thousand Oaks are underway.

Real estate giant **CBRE Group Inc.** announced the renovations in May, stating that improvements will be complete by the end of summer.

The facelift includes removing the wood trim facade from storefronts throughout the center and replacing it with stucco and stone for a more modern look. Additional seating areas, storefronts and a drought tolerant landscape will also be added.

"We anticipate customer response to be very positive," said **Lisa Engel**, CBRE broker. "We've gotten rid of window boxes and have larger windows put in to showcase what the tenants are selling. It's going to look more upgraded, warm, and welcoming."

The 89,000-square-foot center is managed by **Tiarna Real Estate Services Inc.** in Sherman Oaks and was originally redeveloped in 1981 by **Dillingham Investments**.

Anchored by Vons, which recently received a complete interior makeover, many tenants are renewing their leases as renovations continue, including Bank of America, The UPS Store, Pegasus Fashion Lounge and Price Club 4 Pets.

The center is currently at 95 percent capacity, Engel said.

NoHo Eatery

The final stage of the **Garland** hotel's $20 million renovation has come to a close with the completion of **Front Yard**, an upscale restaurant that will open in late July.

The North Hollywood boutique hotel has undergone an extensive redevelopment the past two years, including renovated guest rooms, a revamped lobby, a new front drive and now the new restaurant.

The 4,000-square-foot eatery is situated on the edge of the property. The menu is versatile, ranging from flatbread personalized pizzas, tempura broccolini, fresh halibut and flat-iron steak. The restaurant also includes traditional options such as burgers and fries.

Chris Turano, a veteran with more than 15 years experience in hospitality, was appointed executive chef of Front Yard in May and will manage all of the hotel's on-property food businesses.

"It's about being an oasis to the hustle and bustle of L.A.," said **Scott Mills**, general manager of the hotel. "The Front Yard is a place to eat and drink, a relaxing atmosphere, something very SoCal. It's a breath of fresh air."

Staff Reporter Champaign Williams can be reached at (818) 316-3121 or cwilliams@sfvbj.com.