

New Anchor in Water Mill

By Debra Scott | May 15, 2014 - 12:24pm

If there's one thing that stays the same in Hamptons real estate, it's change. And if any area is getting much-needed change, it's the commercial zone of the tiny hamlet of Water Mill. For almost forever Water Mill has been a picturesque place to pass through on one's way from Southampton to parts east. Perhaps the most notable shop in town was the Penny Candy Shop that closed a few years ago.

Come summer, the hope is that that will no longer be the case.

The shopping center on the north side of the highway called the Water Mill Shoppes opened in the '90s and gained popularity when anchored by Citarella. When the popular food emporium moved to Bridgehampton, the center slid into near obsolescence. But this season promises to be a banner year for the once fading diva.



Taylor K. Vecsey

West Elm, a home furnishings retailer owned by Williams-Sonoma, will open a new anchor store in the space formerly occupied by Citarella on June 3. (Citarella, in search of a Southampton location for several years, opened a new outlet there on Hampton Road this month.) The West Elm store will be the 59th link in a chain of successful stores that stretches from Brooklyn, where it was founded, to the Middle East.

"We've been thinking about the Hamptons for a store for a little while," said Abigail Jacobs, vice president of brand marketing for the company. They were "really excited" to find the Water Mill location, especially since a Steven Alan store will also be going into the same shopping complex. Steven Alan is a fashion brand that West Elm has collaborated with in the past, and this summer West Elm will be introducing a new collection of bedding, textiles, and rugs designed by Mr. Alan. "It's a great spot with a lot of traffic coming through," said Ms. Jacobs, who feels that West Elm's outdoor lines and gift selection will especially appeal to Hamptonsites.

Scott Strough, the head of Strough Real Estate Associates in Sag Harbor, and a principal in Water Mill Station, a two-year-old office complex behind the shopping center, is also pleased about the new activity. "We're excited for the opportunity for our tenants," he said. His project, which includes the revamped railroad depot and another 22,000 square feet, has been rented to such tenants as Farrell Fritz, a law firm, and Bill Miller and Associates, a landscaping company.

"I think that you're seeing the genesis of the rebirth of Water Mill," he said, mentioning a proposal for 48 residential town houses that Philip Young and Joel Kaye hope to build on 6.4 acres of vacant land to the east of the center. "There's an incredible amount of investment money going into the area."

The new management team in charge of the center, which is now being called simply the Mill, is a partnership between RD Management, a shopping center developer, and Ripco Real Estate Corp., a retail real estate firm. "We're trying to create a nice casual place at a good sector point in the Hamptons," said Peter Ripka, a broker at Ripco. "We are improving it gradually with nice small touches." Over the winter they spiffed up the premises with a new paint job and improved landscaping.

care of their properties," said Hal Zwick, an agent specializing in commercial properties with Town and Country Real Estate.

If you haven't stepped foot in the center for a while, there has been a lot of turnover of late. After Citarella, Avanti Culinary Market took over that space. But the owners made several missteps, according to Ira Kornbluth, a neighbor, who said, "I was on their side." Ordering prepared food from them several times a week, he was hoping to contribute to keeping them in business, but "there wasn't enough selection, things were often missing, the freezer was down for a month or two. . . . They had very good things at the beginning, but then they downgraded the quality. It never caught on."

Muse Restaurant and Aquatic Lounge relocated a couple of years ago to Sag Harbor. Blockbuster, which had been an anchor along with Citarella, was replaced last year by an outlet of SoulCycle. But patrons of the cycling studio did not linger, according to sources. Then again, there wasn't much to attract the well-heeled woman who sweats her way through the popular classes. Foody's, an upscale pizzeria, closed around Thanksgiving after eight and a half years. Bryan Futerman, the chef-proprietor, said he's not looking back. Now working at Nick & Toni's in East Hampton, a job he left 13 years ago, he suffered in recent years for lack of foot traffic at the center. Now, he says, "I'm on to new things."

Vitamin Shoppe, Subway, and Classic Party Rentals have also left. Ripco is trying to get a restaurant in as another anchor. There are ongoing negotiations with the folks behind Osteria Salina, an Italian eatery in Bridgehampton, for the 100-or-so-seat space that would combine the former Muse, Foody's, and Dish, a teensy restaurant with only two tables that is also gone. "We're not going to open a restaurant there this season," said Timothy Gaglio, who owns Osteria with his wife. "We have a great concept going." It includes a juice bar to cater to the SoulCycle crowd. "We still hope to do it this fall."

Meanwhile, all eyes are on the location to see how it fares this summer. "We're expecting a phenomenal season this year," said Mr. Zwick. "And the Mill is sure to create additional interest for new retailers and food entities."