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Planting Pineapple Square

By Harold Bubil

Now this is the right way to break ground - an 8:30 a.m. ceremony under crystal blue skies in 64-degree weather, followed by pastries and coffee at Mattison's. No wonder there was such a crowd for the kickoff of Pineapple Square this morning at Lemon and First in Sarasota.

The Isaac brothers, developers of the project, were there, along with Pineapple Properties LLC's CEO, John Simon, to talk about the four hard, expensive years of preparation to get to this point. They made sure to thank City Commissioners Fredd "Glossie" Atkins, Mary Anne Servian and Danny Bilyeu for their votes in favor of the retail/residential makeover that will stretch along Lemon Avenue from First to State streets.

(Bilyeu recently was voted out of office, perhaps because of pro-development votes, and Servian, who has consistently supported the project, faces an election runoff, but none of that was mentioned as the commissioners signed their names in wet concrete around a commemorative plaque.)

For the record, the three phases of the \$200 million project will total 130,000 square feet for 30 to 40 new retailers and restaurants, 276 condo units (priced from the \$600,000s) and at least 350 city-controlled public parking spaces to go with 462 private spaces, with completion sometime in 2010. Gary Hoyt is the local architect.

That ought to give the Quay project a run for its money. And that's why the commission voted for it, said Adkins: To keep downtown's retail core competitive.

Pass the bran muffins, please.



Yellow marks the spot The gathering of developers, politicians and interested parties at the official groundbreaking ceremony for Pineapple Square, The building in the background, painted pineapple yellow, is to be renovated for upscale retail. (Staff photo / Harold Bubil)