

Sarasota Herald-Tribune

Monday, March 26, 2007

Pineapple Square retail breaks ground

By Kevin McQuaid

Pineapple Square Properties LLC, the Ohio-based developer planning to transform a swath of downtown with \$200 million worth of retail, residences and parking, capped four years of effort Wednesday with a groundbreaking ceremony on Lemon Avenue.

The ceremony, complete with a commemorative plaque, speeches and Sarasota city commissioners, marks the latest step in the plan to bring retailers like Brooks Brothers and Sur Le Table downtown by the end of this year.

"I think this will spawn and revitalize downtown retail," said John Simon, Pineapple Square's chief executive.

Turns out the idea for Pineapple Square came from former FDIC Chair Bill Isaac, a Longboat Key resident for much of the past two decades and one of five Isaac kin behind the project.

Isaac said that while he saw in Sarasota many amenities, quality retail wasn't exactly among them. At first, Isaac devised a development of an all-retail Pineapple Square. Plans for the project's 276 residences and 1,067 parking spaces came later.

Mayor Fredd Atkins said Wednesday that he believes Pineapple Square will help resurrect downtown shopping, which has been stung by the departure of merchants like Maas Bros., Kress and Montgomery Roberts.

To memorialize the groundbreaking, Pineapple Square gave away -- big surprise here -- pineapple plants. So where does one go exactly to find the necessary 216 pineapple plants in Southwest Florida?

If you're Heather McLain, Pineapple Square's public relations coordinator from Clarke Advertising, you go to Tropiflora, on Tallevast Road in Manatee County. They grow the ananas comosus in a lab. Who knew?