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AN APPETITE FOR MIDTOWN: Eateries get in on ground floor
High-rise tenants: 4 restaurants new to area match demographics of neighborhood.

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The developers of 12th & Midtown — a four-block office, condo and retail project — have signed four restaurants to leases in their 1010 Midtown building, filling out another piece of the burgeoning Atlanta community.

The restaurants are Ri Ra Irish Pub; RA Sushi Bar Restaurant; Piola, an Italian eatery with brick-oven pizza; and Noon Midtown, which will feature sandwiches, soups and salads.

All four restaurants are new to metro Atlanta. They are expected to open in early 2009 and will occupy the Crescent Avenue frontage of 1010 Midtown, a gleaming, glass-covered high-rise that curves along Peachtree Street.

1010 Midtown is the first phase of the larger 12th & Midtown project and part of a redevelopment effort dubbed the "Midtown Mile," a stretch along Peachtree just north of downtown Atlanta that backers hope to transform into a bustling urban area where people live, work and play.

Ri Ra, RA Sushi, Piola and Noon all fit the criteria sought by 12th & Midtown, said Shirley Gouffon, senior vice president of Selig Enterprises, part of the 12th & Midtown real estate team.

The restaurants all appeal to a core base of people in their early to mid-30s, matching up well with Midtown's demographics, Gouffon said. They also should draw residents from across metro Atlanta because these restaurants cannot be found anywhere else in the area, she said.

Within the next few months, Selig Enterprises plans to announce retail tenants for 1010 Midtown's Peachtree frontage, the space on the other side of the building, Gouffon said. Expect a similar formula to be applied: new-to-Atlanta shops that target the trendy crowd, she said.

"One of the focal points of what we're trying to do on the Midtown Mile, particularly at 12th & Midtown, is create a unique shopping, dining and entertainment destination," Gouffon said.

Ri Ra Irish Pub, which opened its first outlet in Charlotte in 1997, has been eyeing Atlanta for years, said David Kelly, its co-founder and managing director. Kelly visited Midtown seven years ago but felt the area was not quite ready for one of his company's pubs, he said.

"We're thrilled," Kelly said. "I think the Midtown area has now developed to a point where we feel comfortable that Ri Ra can do well."

Ri Ra, which has eight locations, is still working on design plans for the Atlanta site, Kelly said. Each Ri Ra is unique, using salvaged material from a pub in Ireland.

It tries to appeal to a wide range of customers, from bankers to punk rockers, Kelly said. "We get later, louder and younger as the day goes on, but that's the Irish pub," he said.

RA Sushi Bar Restaurant, which has 21 outlets, also had Atlanta on its target list for expansion, said Scott Kilpatrick, co-founder and vice president. It opened its first restaurant in 1997 in Scottsdale, Ariz.

RA Sushi was attracted to Midtown by the mix of office, retail and residential tenants, Kilpatrick said. The chain strives to be the "cool, neighborhood sushi restaurant," he said.

"We've done very well in areas where people live, work and play," Kilpatrick said. "We really see that as a perfect fit for us."

RA offers a variety of Japanese dishes and features a dining experience set to deejay-customized music, Kilpatrick said. "It's a high-energy, music-driven sushi concept," Kilpatrick said.

The slowdown in the overall economy has not affected interest in restaurant and retail space at 1010 Midtown, Selig's Gouffon said. Midtown remains an attractive market, and potential tenants tend to be smaller chains still in growth mode, she said.

"I think a lot of it is because we're not approaching the mass-merchandise retailers, the large chains," Gouffon said. "They're more highly specialized operations that may do a handful of new locations in a year, as opposed to doing 100 stores in a year."

12TH & MIDTOWN

Four new-to-Atlanta restaurants are scheduled to open in early 2009 in the 1010 Midtown building of the 12th & Midtown development. The restaurants will be on the Crescent Avenue side from 11th to 12th streets.

> Ri Ra Irish Pub & Restaurant (www.rira.com): Attempts to re-create the feel of an authentic Irish pub, using materials salvaged from old pubs in Ireland in the construction. Midtown space: 6,912 square feet.

> RA Sushi Bar Restaurant (www.rasushi.com): An edgy sushi bar and restaurant with 20 locations across the United States. Midtown space: 5,327 square feet.

> Piola (www.piola.it): Italian eatery featuring thin-crust, wood-fired brick-oven pizza and simple, healthy Italian cuisine. Midtown space: 2,092 square feet.

> Noon Midtown (www.noonmidtown.com): Will offer sophisticated sandwiches, soups and salads, as well as pastries and breakfast items, with a focus on locally grown produce and sustainably raised meats. Midtown space: 2,021 square feet.

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