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College Town gets ready for game day

Restaurants, bars eager to entertain fans, visitors, residents

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Madison Social bartender Brooke Ulvi prepares for the lunch crowd. College Town, the Seminole Boosters' mixed-use development, has commercial space with dining and entertainment tenants. / Glenn Beil/Democrat

With saws, drills and hammers going at full tilt, construction crews are finishing the last commercial spaces at College Town before FSU's first home football weekend Sept. 14.

Based on its dining and entertainment offerings and proximity to Doak Campbell Stadium, the \$27.2 million mixed-use project should be a pre-game destination and a popular place for fans to gather after games. Hence the urgency in finishing the remaining restaurants, bars and shops.

"All of them are scrambling and working two shifts in order to get open by then," said Alan Hooper, president of Hooper Construction Inc. and head of the team that manages College Town.

Occupying 5.74 acres on West Madison Street at Woodward Avenue, College Town is a development mix of retail, restaurant and entertainment space, with 71 apartments on the upper floors. Seminole Boosters Inc. owns the land, which it leased to College Town LLC, and also provided part of the development's financing.

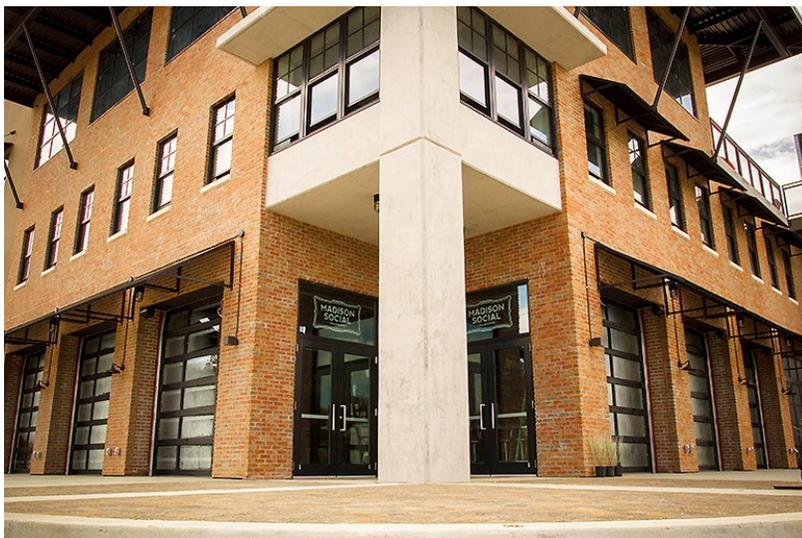
College Town marks a new era in the Boosters' real estate activities. It forms part of the so-called southern gateway to the FSU campus and, hopefully, a destination for football fans, students and the community.

The first dining spot to open was Madison Social, which occupies the prominent ground-floor space on the corner of Madison and Woodward. Besides signature cocktails and a lengthy beer selection, Madison Social has a pub-inspired menu of lunch and dinner items.

FSU alumnus Matt Thompson, who owns the business with Ryan McKenna, said Madison Social is getting calls from fans who want to book a table for game day, preferably on the patio with a commanding view of the stadium.

"We are already getting inquiries, and so we are kind of, I guess you could say, bracing ourselves for the storm that is going to come on not just Sept. 14 but on Sept. 13, the evening before with the Booster party that is going to go down here, and that will carry all the way through Saturday night," Thompson said.

He was referring to the Friday night event, which will consist of live music outdoors and plenty of pre-game celebration for the fans on hand.



Creating a destination

From the earliest discussion of College Town, the concept was a walkable destination.

Hooper and his long-time friend Michael Krupnick, the project's design architect, had done the same thing in Fort Lauderdale, plus Krupnick had become an observer of such environments when he lived in Phoenix, in Boulder, Colo., and now Santa Fe, N.M.

"We didn't know what it was going to look like for the longest time," Krupnick said of College Town's appearance. Rather, the driver early on was the axiom that "form follow function."

"What's important is that it functions as a pedestrian space," he added. That is done through the use of two levels of sidewalk, awnings that provide some shade, courtyard spaces and locating support functions such as deliveries and trash pickup on the alley side of the buildings.

"The other idea that Alan and I discussed is how do people meet there?" Krupnick said of promoting human interactions through architecture. "I try to create the spaces and the possibilities for that to happen."

Elliott Marshall Innes of Tallahassee, the architect of record, took the concepts from Hooper and Krupnick and turned them into construction drawings.

"It is important to the pedestrian-oriented urban experience that all the senses are engaged — not just the visual," said Brad Innes, principal of Elliott Marshall Innes.

That includes such things as the sounds, the smell of food, the feel of the building surfaces and other traits that draw the pedestrian forward.

"We are sure it is Alan's hope that the feel of the place, its sense of being in the present rather than some artificial themed development, will help in ensuring a timeless and rooted quality," Innes said. "We believe we are speaking for both Mike and Alan when we say just how important it is that the architecture feels authentic."

Similarly, College Town picks up some of the flavor of the mostly industrial neighborhood, with its lumber yard, former recycling facility, warehouses, auto repair shops and related businesses.

Krupnick says visitors will be just as comfortable there in jeans and T-shirts as they'd be in less casual evening attire. "We definitely wanted to be inclusive and not exclusive," he added.

FSU student Rafael Grigoryan considers himself lucky. He was one of the first tenants to sign a lease in July and moved into his fifth-floor corner apartment July 22. It has a balcony overlooking Madison Street.

Grigoryan is from Jacksonville and College Town reminds him of larger, town center-style developments back home. "You're bringing that class to Tallahassee," he added. Plus, the FSU campus is a 10 to 12-minute walk, and all he needs do for a bite to eat is head downstairs to any of the restaurants.

"It's very convenient," he added. "You don't have to use your car."

Ready in time for kickoff

New to Tallahassee is The Original Brooklyn Water Bagel Co., founded by Steve Fassburg and actually based in Boca Raton.

The College Town location will be considerably bigger due to the addition of a pizza kitchen, pasta menu, a beer and wine selection and a full coffee bar that uses fresh-roasted beans from the company's Boca Java subsidiary in Delray Beach.

To get that authentic Brooklyn bagel, pizza and pasta flavor, Brooklyn Water Bagel uses an elaborate on-site system to treat its water, remove all impurities, then add back a miniscule amount of calcium and magnesium — which does the trick and also enhances the coffee, said Drew McLeod, director of field operations and regional development.

"We are excited just to be here, first of all," said McLeod, whose previous restaurant experience includes owning the former Paradise Grill & Bar in Midtown with Fincher Smith. "As we look at launching this concept in early September and walking into that first home game Sept. 14 against Nevada, I think the whole area is very excited about what's going to happen."

"At College Town we are definitely wrapping our business model around the College Town idea," McLeod added.

At the very top is Recess, an entertainment spot that owner Hunter+Harp Holdings envisioned as a way to bring a Miami-style poolside bar to Tallahassee, said Chad Kittrell, principal at the firm.

“We took it a little step further and actually put it on the roof of the College Town development,” he said.

The rectangular pool ranges from 3 to 5 feet deep and is equipped with LED lighting and an underwater window on the deeper end, so the swimmers will be visible from the west side of the building.

“It’s got some really cool built-in features. We have purchased a dance floor that will actually go over the top of the pool in the evening, so we will actually transform the pool from day to night and reuse the space that way,” Kittrell said.