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MALLS

Desert Passage shops experience 'miracle' rebirth

Arrival of the Planet Hollywood brand has given a once-scorned mall a new lease on life

BY VALERIE MILLER

Transformation of the Desert Passage mall into the Miracle Mile Shops is earning praise for the once-struggling retail mall.

Retailers have taken note of the new, hipper image of the property formerly known as the Aladdin Resort & Casino — now remodeled and re-branded as Planet Hollywood Resort Casino. The roster of tenants for the 475,000-square-foot mall has grown from 150 to 170 over the last year.

"We wanted to be in Las Vegas and it just so happened that we heard about the renovation," explained Ed Jankowski, the COO of Solstice Sunglass Boutique. The high-end sunglass dealer is scheduled to open its first Las Vegas location inside Miracle Mile on May 25.

Jankowski won't go as far as to say that the retailer — offering the likes of Dior, Gucci and Marc Jacob — wouldn't have moved into Desert Passage. But the new branding definitely helped. "We wouldn't have been as excited about it," he said.

Prices of shades run from \$75 to \$500. Tourists will be the main focus of Solstice. The typical customer base is 70 percent female. Solstice was swayed by the excitement surrounding Planet Hollywood.

"Within the last three weeks, I've heard people say, 'I was in Vegas and stayed at Planet Hollywood! You'd never hear people saying that they stayed at the Aladdin, so I think they have been successful in the re-branding,'" Jankowski concluded. The next Solstice site will be in the planned Town Square project on the North Strip.

OFF AND RUNNING

A new shoe store has already dug in its heels at the Miracle Mile Shops. The St. Louis-based Bakers Footwear Group opened its doors in Planet Hollywood on April 28. Business is in high gear, according to store manager Rey-Ann Laronal.

Customers have packed the store



A Solstice Sunglass Boutique, like this one, is scheduled to open at Miracle Mile on Friday.

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Bakers Footwear is now open in Miracle Mile Shopping Center. Rey-Ann Laronal, the store's manager, shows the new line of Jessica Simpson shoes. Bakers sells a line of Guess shoes and handbags, along with Baby Phat and its own line of bags and shoes.

to buy up Rocketdog, Elvis, Steve Madden, BCBGirls and Baby Phat shoes. Handbags and fashion jewelry are also sold at Bakers.

While tourists flock to the store, locals make their way there, too. Bakers Footwear already had a Wild Pair shoe store in the Desert Passage. Bakers' shoes range from \$19.99 to \$109. Bakers also has stores in the Fashion Show and Boulevard malls.

Its newest store has not disappointed. "We have hundreds and hundreds of people that come through the store every day," Laronal said. She estimates 700 to 800 people visit the store on an average weekday and 1,000 to 2,000 per day on weekends.

Sixteen million people a year, or 45,000 per day, frequent what was the Desert Passage Shops.

MADE-TO-FIT

Merchants are being allowed to individualize storefronts, getting away from the Arabian-themed architecture of old. The brighter look has brought new tenants, according to John Bricker, creative director at Gensler. The global design company is responsible for the

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Mom-and-pop stores don't figure in Miracle Mile's plans

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makeover of what was Desert Passage.

"It is accessible. People will look at it and it will feel fresh. It is more emotional," he offered. By way of contrast, Bricker described the Desert Passage Shops' design as "heavy and dark." A billboard facing the Strip invites people in and a new façade lures visitors.

Occupancy has jumped from the mid-80s a year ago to about 93 percent today and retailers have taken note of the changes.

"H&M, Ben Sherman and Urban Outfitters — these are all new brands that wanted a presence in Las Vegas," Bricker explained.

The marketing of Miracle Mile is toward mid-range store tenants, with a few luxury shops thrown into the mix. That means many small stores are out. "The mom-and-pops are going away because they are short-term leases and we are focusing on long-term tenants,"

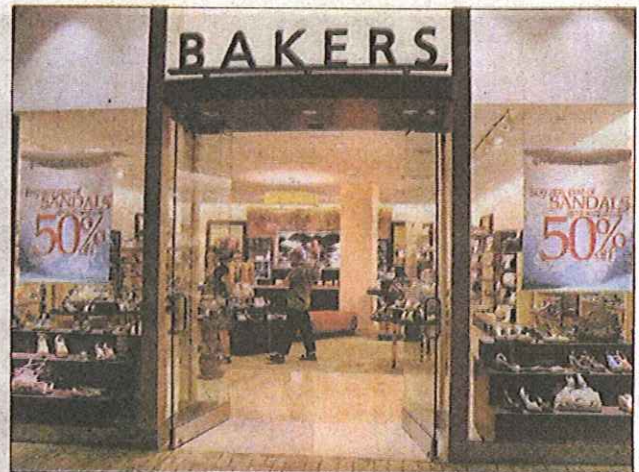
Bricker said. The departure of little shops is a decision being made by both the shops and the mall itself.

About 30 percent of the once-Desert Passage stores have the new, regionally

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neutral look but, as leases come up for renewal, more will undergo the transformation. The grand opening of Miracle Mile Shops is set for Sept. 28 — to coincide with the official opening of Planet Hollywood itself.



Bakers is one of 20-plus new retailers lured to the restyled ex-Desert Passage.

MARLENE KARAS | BUSINESS PRESS

The change is already apparent but didn't take place overnight. "It's been a year and a half in the making," its designer said.

The days of 'Deserted Passage' are over, proclaimed Solstice's Jankowski.

"With the (International Convention of Shopping Centers) show here, (attendees) will be checking it out. There's a buzz about it."

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