

Checking out Staten Island

VRN's Marie Driscoll spent a day touring Staten Island during a site visit arranged for outlet retailers.

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y.— Staten Island, long the safe, somewhat humdrum middle child of New York's five boroughs, is on the cusp of a revitalization designed to capture a larger share of New York City's 52 million annual visitors.

By summer 2016, the New York Observation Wheel and its neighboring Empire Outlets will be open. The 620-foot wheel will be twice the size of the London Eye, with a view of the Manhattan skyline, including Central Park, Lady Liberty and Ellis Island.

Just a few feet from the entrance/exit ramp of the newly restored Staten Island Ferry Terminal, Empire Outlets will also open in summer 2016. The 350,000-sf complex, a joint effort of BFC Partners, EWB Development and Casandra Properties, will include the outlet center and a 200-bed, 130,000-sf hotel that has already captured the interest of international tour operators eager for bookings.

The purpose behind the project is to entice ferry riders to stick around Staten Island for a while. On June 20, during one of those ferry rides, the project was blessed by NYC mayor Michael Bloomberg (his 2nd blessing in six



Empire Outlets, depicted in the foreground above, and the New York Observation Wheel, will open in 2016. The outlet center is a development of BFC Partners, EWB Development and Casandra Properties.

months) and Staten Island borough president Guy Molinari. They shared the ferry with a group of outlet retailers who wanted to see the site for themselves.

What they saw was impressive. Here are some reasons for the project's potential success:

The Staten Island Ferry, which operates for free 24 hours a day, seven days a week, is among the top five tourist attractions in New York City, along with the Empire State building, Central Park and the leading museums. An estimated 65,000 passengers, including around 13,000 who are tourists, traverse New York Harbor daily.

Staten Island has strong demographics —

though the median household income is the highest (\$73,000) of the five boroughs, per capita retail sales are about 30 percent less than the New York state average. Does this mean Staten Islanders don't shop? It probably means they need more stores!

Staten Island has only one mall, General Growth Properties' 40-year-old Staten Island Mall, which generates \$600 in sales psf compared to the national average of \$448, per ICSC.

Finally, don't forget that one in three visitors to the U.S. stops in NYC, spending a total of \$36.9 billion on food, fashion and entertainment.

— Marie Driscoll

(Continued from page 7)

Banana Republic, Coach, Cubavera, Gap, Guess, Levi's, Nike, Old Navy, Perry Ellis, Puma, Skechers, Wilsons Leather and Zumiez.

The initial phase of the project is 225,000 sf. There is space to add an additional 240,000 sf plus 23,000 sf in outparcels.

What makes the center unique is its proximity to the Mexican border. The site has direct access to the 47,000 northbound daily border crossings by pedestrians and vehicular traffic. The site also has 1.2 million people living in a 25-mile radius.

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Construction on the **Outlets at Tejon Ranch** was scheduled to start this summer, with the opening tentatively set for Memorial Day weekend 2014. Lebec, Calif.-based **Tejon Ranch Co.** has released a timetable for the 500,000-sf project, which will be on more than a half-mile of frontage along Interstate 5 near Bakersfield, Calif. Tejon is partnering on the project with New York-based **Rockefeller Group Development Corp.** and with outlet company **EWB Development**, which is handling leasing and marketing.

Woodmont Company has been marketing a site in North Fort Worth, Texas, for a 400,000-



Charles Company's \$94 million Gran Plaza Outlets in Calexico, Calif., is scheduled to open in late October, in time for the holiday selling season.

sf outlet center. **Champion's Circle Outlets** is planned just south of the Texas Motor Speedway at the southwest corner of State Highway 114 and Interstate 35 West. Details are still in the works.

WS Development is developing the 500,000-sf **Cheshire (Conn.) Outlets** at Interstates 84 and 691 along Route 10. The project, which could feature condo housing at some point, is 33

miles from **Clinton Crossing Premium Outlets** and 40 miles from **Tanger Outlets Westbrook**, both in Connecticut. Construction of the WS project is expected to begin in early 2014 and open in summer 2015. Jackie Burridge Centamore, who is director of leasing for WS, spent eight years in the same position with **Gap** before joining the developer in 2007. **V**