



## ⓐ Dallas' Mockingbird Station getting new tenants and a face-lift as it heads into second decade

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Published: 20 September 2012 08:35 PM

Gil Bonifaz's family has been serving up Tex-Mex fare in Dallas for more than 40 years. Herrera's Cafe started out with several hole-in-the-wall restaurants along Maple Avenue.

But the newest location will be smack in the middle of the ultra-urban Mockingbird Station complex, just yards from the popular Angelika Film Center.

"It was too good an opportunity to pass up," said Bonifaz, who hopes to have the new Mexican eatery open in November. "There is built-in business over there, and it was a chance for us to get close to customers from SMU and the Park Cities."

Herrera's will join other new tenants that hope to bring more to customers at what is already one of the Dallas area's most successful mixed-use developments.

"They are trying to diversify the offerings," Bonifaz said. "There's a burger joint going in right next to us."

Mockingbird Station is Dallas' first and, arguably, most successful transit-oriented development.

Located adjacent to DART's Mockingbird rail station, the retail, restaurant, apartment and office complex is getting a light makeover to take it into a second decade of doing business.

Along with the minor remodeling, the operators of the project are working to attract new retail tenants to join anchors including West Elm, the Gap and Urban Outfitters.

"Our objective at Mockingbird Station has been to elevate the customer experience and stay relevant with today's retail trends," said Aaron Stephenson, the leasing representative for the project with Retail Street Advisors. "To accomplish this, we have focused our efforts on a remerchandising plan that includes many new, exciting retailers and restaurants.

"And our capital improvement plan that includes a comprehensive signage program, new facade throughout the center and improvements to the common-area seating.

"These improvements are expected to be completed by the end of the year," Stephenson said.

Joining Herrera's, other new tenants coming to Mockingbird Station include Mockingbird Taproom, a combination restaurant and bar, and Smashburger, a Denver-based hamburger chain that has multiple locations in North Texas.

"We have leased or renewed over 90,000 square feet of retail in the past 18 months," Stephenson said.

The extension of the Katy Trail next year with a bridge over Mockingbird Lane is expected to bring even more business to the area.

Mockingbird Station has been owned by a European investment group since 2005. The owners added a two-story retail building at the north end of the property in 2007.

Since Mockingbird Station opened its doors in 2001, the project has received multiple real estate industry awards and is recognized internationally as one of the best examples of high-density urban redevelopment.

### Tough sell

But back in the late 1990s when original developer Ken Hughes envisioned the project, it was a tough sell to both investors and tenants.

He'd tied up a vacant Western Electric warehouse building on Mockingbird Lane that was built in the 1940s next to the MKT rail line. And there was a 1970s office

building just across the parking lot.

Hughes wanted to convert the old industrial building into more than 200 loft apartments and add ground-floor retail space.

But first he had to sell the plan.

The \$90 million project was hard to explain in a neighborhood where for decades mass transit meant just riding the bus to Dallas Cowboys games.

And the fledgling DART rail line was so unproven that most developers all but ignored the train's coming.

"When I first talked about building Mockingbird Station I'd say, 'Here's Central Expressway and Mockingbird Lane. And — oh yeah — we have a train stop back there,'" Hughes said. "My original money source wanted me to tear that Western Electric building down, and we parted ways."

Instead, Hughes built four floors of apartments on top and used the loft rental project as an anchor for the whole development.

Mockingbird Station won one of the industry's highest awards, the Urban Land Institute's Global Award for Excellence.

## 'A good mix'

Hughes had originally hoped to build a high-rise hotel at the north end of Mockingbird Station, but those plans never got off the drawing board.

"Just about the time we were very close with one of the Marriott products, the hotel market went to hell in a handbasket," he said.

Architect Dale Selzner with Dallas-based Selzner Associates was part of the original architecture team for Mockingbird Station. He said he wouldn't make many changes if there were a do-over.

"There is a good mix of uses there, and they seem to be holding up on their own," said Selzner, whose firm worked with design architect RTKL on the project. "It was a very complex project to put together, and I don't know of that much you could do different."