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Aging gracefully

AFTER 76 YEARS, TUCSON'S BROADWAY VILLAGE STILL ENCHANTS

By Barbara Thau

SOME SHOPPING CENTERS GET older without ever going out of date. One such is Broadway Village, built in 1939 in Tucson, Ariz., in the Spanish Colonial style. Developer John Murphey and his wife, Helen, turned to renowned Tucson architect Josias Joesler, who modeled the project after a Mexican village – with low-pitched, clay-tile roofs, arched openings, carved niches, arcades, mortar-washed brick and colored ceramic.

Still, though some buildings may never go out of style, some tenants do, and that is what happened at Broadway Village, which by 2008 was crowded with financially distressed tenants “pushed over the edge by the recession,” according to broker R. Craig Finfrock, a principal of Tucson-based Commercial Retail Advisors. “It was 95 percent leased, but the tenants there were hanging on with Band-Aids and duct tape,” he said. “And the mall had no major traffic generator. The restaurant in there was doing very poorly.”

Enter CRI Broadway Village Partners, Broadway Village’s white knight. In 2008 the company, a joint venture with Commercial Retail Advisors and 4D Properties, purchased the 38,000-square-foot center from the Murphey Trust for \$5 million and embarked on a \$1.5 million upgrade. CRI Broadway Village Partners “proceeded to retenant Broadway Village,” Finfrock recalled, after it went through the mall “brick by brick,” making such cosmetic changes as repainting, reroofing and power washing.

The idea was to transform the mall from “a collection of nondescript retailers to a neighborhood specialty retail center with an emphasis on [local] restaurants, boutiques and higher-end product that we felt



would offer something new,” Finfrock said. Because food sellers are anchors for many specialty centers, the new owners wooed artisan pizzeria Falora, which ranks second on the *USA Today* list of the 10 best pizza spots in Tucson.

Today the mall’s 11 tenants include Avenue, a boutique that sells accessories by independent designers plus vintage home goods, antiques and custom furnishings; yoga studio Session Yoga; and SideCar, a cocktail lounge – all of which provide an alternative to the nearby El Con Center, a power center offering the likes of Target and Home Depot. Broadway Village draws locals, tourists and students from the nearby University of Arizona, and it is “oriented toward the higher-educated, middle-to-upper-middle-class demographic of this central Tucson area,” according to Finfrock.

The shopping center recently kicked off its second phase of growth with a \$2 million renovation to rebuild and upgrade parking lots and make room for Natural Grocers, a chain specializing in natural and organic foods. CRI Broadway Village Partners is banking on the supermarket to drive more traffic by appealing to the mall’s many health-conscious shoppers. “Natural Grocers will help create a sense of place for Broadway Village, the neighborhood and surrounding areas,” Finfrock said, “and give a balance to our tenant mix.”

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