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Restaurants are right recipe in Town & Country revitalization

BY CATHY WESELBY

PALO ALTO - Town & Country Village is undergoing a culinary renaissance with two new restaurants opening during the past month and two more on the way.

Former Google Inc. chef Charlie Ayers opened Calafia Cafe & Market A-Go-Go on Jan. 20, while Bacchus Management Group opened Mayfield Bakery & Cafe on Feb. 9.



VICKI THOMPSON

TASTY: Charlie Ayers chose Town & Country for his cafe because it's a bustling location that's more affordable.

Following closely are plans for Menlo Park-based Lulu's to open a Mexican restaurant in March and Marché restaurant founding chef Howard Bulka to open Howie's Artisan Pizza in the summer. This will round out retailers Books Inc., which recently moved from Stanford Shopping Center to Town & Country, and Sur La Table and Kara's Cupcakes, also new to the outdoor mall.

San Francisco-based Ellis Partners LLC purchased the run-down center in 2004, sinking \$25 million into renovations.

As a result, Town & Country is updating its image from frumpy to a more family-friendly neighborhood destination.

Jim Ellis of Ellis Partners said he understands the property is near and dear to Palo Alto residents, so instead of bulldozing the center and rebuilding with something more dense, he and his partners decided to keep the charm but update the center with more relevant retailers.

Ellis said he focused on attracting local businesses that the community would appreciate instead of national chains.

"Someone approached me last week and said, 'This is a real mecca now,'" Ellis said.

Situated on the corner of two of the busiest streets in Palo Alto, El Camino Real and Embarcadero Road, the center is located across the street from Stanford University and Palo Alto High School. Adding to the center's depth, a Trader Joe's market is under construction and scheduled to open in September.

Palo Alto Economic Development Director Susan Barnes said repositioning Town & Country is a positive move for the city.

"The new small, vibrant businesses that are opening up lend themselves well to the ambience, and the restaurants help to create more of a gathering place," Barnes said.

Mayfield Bakery & Cafe founder Tim Stannard grew up in Palo Alto and would ride his bike past the site, which was originally a pharmacy.

"It's an incredible location, and I think we're in on the ground floor of the redevelopment," Stannard said. "It's becoming more like when I was a kid."

Stannard is managing director for Bacchus Management Group, which also owns The Village Pub in Woodside, Spruce in San Francisco, and four Pizza Antica locations.

He said Mayfield cost a little more than \$1.5 million to build, and he con-



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LOCAL LINK: Mayfield Bakery & Cafe founder Tim Stannard grew up in Palo Alto and rode his bike past the outdoor mall.

servatively expects to make \$3 million in revenue the first year.

Nancy Pitta, formerly of Boulevard restaurant in San Francisco, will oversee the European-style bakery. Chef Andrew Hash from Spruce in San Francisco and Bacchus executive chef Gordon Drysdale created the menu, which features rustic American cuisine.

"As a parent obsessed with food, I wanted to create a place that people could go and take their families," Stannard said. "The kids can have a cheeseburger, and the parents can have a nice glass of wine and fish or a steak."

Calafia chef and owner Ayers said he chose Town & Country because it's a bustling location and less expensive than University Avenue.

Ayers said the idea for Calafia was born out of frustration from what's not currently offered.

"We have busy lives, and people don't have time to cook, but we should treat

ourselves when it's time to eat," Ayers said. "What we offer is well-made food sourced locally at affordable pricing."

The cafe offers global cuisine with plenty of options for vegetarians and vegans. The adjoining market is scheduled to open Feb. 23.

Ayers said the cafe is already serving between 350 to 600 meals a day, and he expects to generate \$5 million in revenue this year.

"We've blown the business plan out of the water," he said.

Bulka plans to open Howie's Artisan Pizza next to Sur La Table in the summer.

He said he wants to create a high-quality pizzeria that's casual and value-oriented.

"The time is right to do something that's family-friendly and wholesome," Bulka said. "It only takes one neighborhood to support a pizzeria, and this is a heck of a neighborhood."

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