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Ghazi's EpiCentre is rolling out new tenants for uptown

Charlotte Business Journal - by Ashley M. London

Here's the bad news: Lucky Strike Lanes is not coming to the EpiCentre.

The hot and hip Hollywood-based bowling lounge company has long been rumored as the taker for developer Afshin Ghazi's proposed 20-lane alley.

Here's the good news: Charlotte's Bar Management Group is unleashing its creativity to open its own bowling alley/lounge in the mixed-use center at College and Trade. It's called Big City Lanes Bowling and is being designed by Bar Management's Bob Durkin and crew.

Ghazi says more details will be coming soon on a specially designed Web site for the entertainment options at his \$100 million project.

Additional tenants for the 267,000-square-foot entertainment and retail complex include Bruegger's Bagels, The Fudgery and Wild Wing Café. Work begins this month on the movie theater as well as the bowling alley, Ghazi says. "We're hoping the hotel will be open in late August or early September."

The hotel will be the first or second Aloft hotel by Starwood Hotels to open in the country. "If we make it and become the first, Starwood will host a great, big unveiling here in Charlotte," Ghazi says.

When the folks at Bissell built the FAA-approved helipad at Ballantyne Corporate Park, they anticipated it being used only two or three times each month.

"Now it's used four or five times each week," says Barry Fabyan, Bissell VP of office leasing.

Frequent fliers include companies hosting events at Ballantyne Resort, execs at Mooresville home-improvement giant Lowe's and ESPN, which has its ESPNU channel based in the corporate park.

Looking for hot doughnuts now? You're going to have to hit the road. **Krispy Kreme** quietly closed its last Charlotte store, on Woodlawn Road, Dec. 23. In fact, the glowing red "Hot Now" sign can be found at only two stores in the area, in Matthews and Gastonia.

The iconic Winston-Salem brand has been experiencing financial and management woes over the past 24 months. Its stock price has tumbled into the single digits.

But frankly, who thinks about those business details when the craving for hot, luscious, tender, sweet fried dough hits? Brian Little, a spokesman for KK, says the Charlotte closings are all part of the company's turnaround strategy. For now, KK has no plans to shut down the remaining two stores in the area. It doesn't plan to open any either.

NHRA driver Ron Capps drives a Funny Car for a living -- and became a funny guy during a press conference unveiling plans for the new drag strip at Lowe's Motor Speedway.

Last spring, Capps attended the NASCAR Coca-Cola 600 at the track and was amazed at how prominent racing is in the Carolinas. Charlotte, Capps said with admiration, is "the only town where racing ranks above the football team."

Capps then fumbled for the name of said football team: "Is it the Panthers?" In the audience, two fellows with an interest in that statement rose in mock disgust: retired Panthers defensive back Mike Minter and active lineman Mike Rucker.

Informed of the identities of his would-be assailants, Capps offered a nervous chuckle. "I'm going to get beat up."

Playing hurt is a way of life in the NFL -- even in the executive suites. During a speech to the Hood Hargett Breakfast Club this week, **Carolina Panthers** president Mark Richardson fielded questions on topics ranging from possible free-agent acquisitions to network TV contracts.

Finally, though, an attendee got to the heart of the matter, inquiring why Richardson had a large bandage on his left index finger. It occurred while rescuing a small child from a burning car, the Panthers executive told the group.

Then he 'fessed up. "I tore a tendon packing my suitcase," Richardson said. "My daughter said I needed a better story, so she suggested the one I just told you."

Veiled threats are one thing, but promises are another. As renderings of his drag strip were recently displayed and questions arose over meeting a planned September opening date for the \$60 million venue, speedway CEO Bruton Smith offered a blunt assessment.

Turning to his lead engineer, Wes Harris, Smith answered a question about meeting construction deadlines for the project with another question: "Wes, you want to take that under penalty of death, or what do you want to?"

Bissell has landed its first tenant for the 530,000 square feet of spec office space under construction in Ballantyne. The Great American Insurance Co. is taking 10,000 square feet in one of the two six-story buildings going up on North Community House Road.

Bissell officials surveyed the construction site this week, riding to the top of the adjoining twin 10-story buildings aboard a red construction elevator named Big Dummy Jake. Million-dollar homes are on one side, and shops, restaurants and an award-winning golf course are on the other. Bissell is working with the Charlotte Chamber and the Charlotte Regional Partnership in the hopes of attracting a Fortune 500 company to the lavish spec office project.

And now there's just 520,000 square feet of Class-A space left to move.

Lowe's Motor Speedway execs are confident they won't have to do any home renovations on the Concord track's signs. Speedway President Humpy Wheeler expects Lowe's to renew its naming-rights deal that expires next year. The current Lowe's deal -- at 10 years and \$35 million -- was the first to put a corporate name on a NASCAR track.

"I don't think there's any question that we'll re-up it," Wheeler says. "It's just what kind of terms we'll come to."

Emily Haggart is now the full owner of Fresh, a Myers Park women's clothing boutique. She bought out longtime partner Julie Banchansky for an undisclosed amount. Haggart also owns Avalilly's, an upscale women's clothing store in Cornelius. She and Banchansky had owned Fresh, at 813 Providence Road, since 2005. Banchansky will continue to be involved in the business, offering wardrobe consultations and personal-shopping services at Fresh and Avalilly's. Find Avalilly's online at www.avalillys.com.

alondon@bizjournals.com | (704) 973-1131

