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Movie-going changes on the way

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Dilworth resident Joley Freeman enjoys going to the movies with friends, but has long wished there was a closer place to see mainstream films.

“It turns into a logistical nightmare sometimes if you want to make a night of it,” said Freeman, 33, who frequents the Northlake Mall or Phillips Place theaters. “I have friends who live all over Charlotte, and it's hard to figure out a central place to go.”

Afshin Ghazi of The Ghazi Co. hopes to solve that dilemma.

The company, which owns the site of the EpiCentre, an entertainment-retail center at College and Trade streets, will launch a movie theater-restaurant concept that Ghazi hopes will change how Charlotte residents enjoy their movie-going experience.

“When you talk to people and ask what's on their minds for entertainment uptown, there's nothing more on the tip of people's tongues than a movie theater,” Ghazi said.

Ghazi describes the EpiCentre theater and adjoining restaurant, Mez, as a swanky lounge slick enough for young hipsters and luxurious enough for corporate CEOs.

The EpiCentre theater is set to open Nov. 14 with the release of the new James Bond film “Quantum of Solace.” Mez is expected to open two weeks later, on Thanksgiving weekend.

The lobby, currently filled with dust, rubble and other construction debris, will feature walnut floors, custom glasswork and elaborate chandeliers hanging from 30-foot ceilings, Ghazi said.

A nearby escalator ascends to a second level where visitors will be able to peek into the kitchen. Here, they'll also find lounge-style seating and the first of three bars spread throughout the restaurant. A mezzanine for private parties and VIPs resides on the third level.

Mez will have the capacity to accommodate about 250 people, Ghazi said.

Visitors to the restaurant also will be able to take their food and alcoholic beverages into the adjoining movie theater, located on the second level.

The theater, to be run by Fort Lauderdale, Fla.-based IPic Entertainment, will have five screens and will close after 7 p.m. to visitors under 21.

Ghazi and IPic officials said each theater will be filled entirely with “luxury” seats that are larger than those typically found in movie theaters. The top rows will feature leather loveseats.

IPic theaters feature VIP sections that allow moviegoers to buy their tickets online as much as a week ahead of time and reserve a specific seat – similar to purchasing a concert ticket, IPic company spokesman Jim Lee said. In other cities, IPic theater VIP seats cost \$14 in the evenings, compared to \$9 for general seating. Ghazi and IPic officials say the Charlotte theater's pricing will be different, but they haven't released details.

Uptown resident Marcus Talbot, 24, said he would love to have a closer movie theater. However, he was unsure whether he was willing to pay extra for some of the luxuries.

“It sounds like it might be pretty cool – it certainly would be more convenient,” said Talbot, who typically goes to Northlake Mall to see the latest films. “And I have to admit that being able to bring drinks in is a nice bonus.”

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