

## Storied Prado hotspot to be reborn as shopping center

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More than three decades ago, the Prado in Sandy Springs was brand new and teeming with Atlanta's young and fun generation. Now it's a place that was, and could be again.

Back when a music venue was called a bar, baby boomers crowded into Carlos McGee's. They drank and danced to rockers such as the Out A Hand Band. The name fit — what else would you call a band whose bass player had just one hand?

Back before Atlanta had much of an international flair, hipsters lined up at Joli-Kobe. It had a Japanese owner and three Japanese chefs who served plates with exotic names like "teriyake chicken."

This Prado of yore is being replaced by a new incarnation.

Publix will anchor the new Prado. There's to be a Target, Circuit City, Staples and Home Depot. This array of major tenants, and other smaller shops and restaurants, aims at baby boomers more interested in a store than a score.

The Sembler Co. has torn down much of the old Prado and an adjacent apartment complex. Sembler is providing free valet parking for customers of the remaining shops, which now are surrounded by a construction zone. The valet service is to end when a new parking garage opens in late May.

Jeff Fuqua doesn't claim to know all the storied history of the complex he's rebuilding. But as president of the Sembler development company, Fuqua knows enough.

"It was a real swinging spot," Fuqua said.

Sandy Springs Mayor Eva Galambos says quickly that she doesn't remember hot spots like Carlos McGees. After all, she says, she was a grandmother even then. But other places suited her well.

"I do remember TGI Fridays. That was a lot of fun, especially with the children and grandchildren," Galambos said. "Frankie's was for younger people than me, although I've been there. I think it's more a sports bar, where the food is secondary."

Both Frankie's and Joli-Kobe are open, along with other shops in a building surrounded by construction.

The Prado flanks a stretch of Roswell Road that has changed a lot over the years. It was a swinging precursor of Buckhead Village that stretched about a mile on each side of I-285. Like the village, the Roswell strip is showing signs of hard times and is ripe for redevelopment.

The corridor is pocked by a porn shop and a strip club with male dancers. The local dry cleaner locks its doors with a thick chain and padlock. Convenience stores charge a higher-than-normal premium in a neighborhood where there aren't many grocery stores.

Sembler's project is the first major redevelopment to come out of the ground along this stretch of Roswell Road. With the Prado, Sembler is continuing a strategy in metro Atlanta of picking overlooked sites in older neighborhoods that are just beginning to attract young, affluent residents.

Down near Little Five Points, Sembler took a parking lot with warehouses and oversaw development of a shopping center surrounded by apartments. Up near Perimeter Mall, Sembler tore down a tattered office complex and raised a shopping center with one condo tower that's already sold out and a second tower planned for construction later this year.

The company's next big intown project is proposed in DeKalb County, close to the corner of North Druid Hills and Briarcliff roads near I-85. The planned development, still being reviewed, includes homes, shops, offices and a hotel.

Fuqua expects the new Prado will have a dramatic impact on its neighborhood.

"We think it's a catalyst to change that quadrant of I-285," Fuqua said. "It's a tough area, but our project will change a huge portion of that."

Mayor Galambos said she and others can't wait. People are weary of the construction, she said. And they're ready for a new place to play.

"I certainly hope it will still be a fun place," Galambos said.



Phil Skinner/AJC STAFF  
(ENLARGE)

Construction crews work near Frankie's in the Prado.



Sembler Co.

(ENLARGE)

Sembler Co. plans to redevelop The Prado in Sandy Springs to add more retail and create a village feel.