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For the Long Haul

By Katherine Field Boccaccio



Mixed-use isn't news, but it continues to make headlines anyway. After a several-year period when ground-up building has ranged from sluggish to practically non-existent, a number of mixed-use projects are beginning to stir with renewed life as leasing gains traction once again.

Part of the reason for the rekindling of the format is the amenities it offers and the convenience-oriented tenant mix. *Chain Store Age* talked with Steiner + Associates about the leasing and design strategies they employ that assure their projects not only get built, but have staying power.

Creating a sense of place: The expression "place-making" may be overused, but the concept will never grow old. In fact, the 10-year-old, 1.7 million-sq.-ft. Easton Town Center, in Columbus, Ohio, built its decade-long reputation on place-making—and the results are self-evident.

"For all of its brick-and-mortar appeal, Easton's success has been more about ideas than blueprints," said Yaromir Steiner, CEO of Steiner + Associates, which co-developed the project with The Georgetown Co. "The truly innovative foundational concept is that a 'town center' is not

just an architectural design concept, but part of a defining social contract."

That "sense of place" is no accident; the developers actually used storyboards to help plan Easton, and design themes from a range of eras create variety and a sense of a town that has evolved naturally over time. But behind the brickwork and period signage that give the project its signature Americana feel lies a very contemporary perspective and sophisticated strategic vision.

"If you want a true community destination, you have to make room for the community," Steiner said.

"There is no question that Easton is a fully realized mixed-use town center environment, but that doesn't mean that it isn't still a work in progress," he added. "It is that restless sense of 'Can it be better?' that has helped us maintain that feeling of dynamism and energy."

Easton Town Center is anchored by Nordstrom, Macy's and AMC Theatres—featuring 180 stores and restaurants in all—along with significant office space and three hotels. ■

