

Downtown resident helps bring market to The Banks

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(Photo: Provided/Neal Sebastian)

Instead of complaining about late-night grocery options for Downtown Cincinnati residents, Neal Sebastian decided to do something about it.

Sebastian, who lives in an apartment at The Banks, is one of four investors working to open a grocery, beer and coffee-selling convenience store at the mixed-use riverfront destination.

The group plans to open a Street Corner, a Topeka, Kansas-based franchisee of C-stores, "urban superette" market this spring in a 1,500-square-foot space near Walnut Street and East Freedom Way. The previous tenant, the frozen yogurt-selling Orange Leaf, closed late in 2016.

"I know it's needed when it's 10 o'clock at night and you need milk or eggs; you have a choice of driving to Kentucky to Kroger and that's it," said Sebastian, an offshore oil rig worker who has lived at The Banks for more than three years.

Street Corner will sell fresh and packaged food, deli items, craft beer and coffee and other items. Sebastian said the market is working to develop an online portal that allows customers to build a basket of items they can pick-up later. Eventually, the market will offer baskets of curated items such as those that families can take to nearby Smale Riverfront Park.



Street Corner is opening a new grocery-selling convenience store at The Banks in Downtown Cincinnati in spring 2017. *(Photo: Provided/Street Corner)*

Retail planners at The Banks have worked for several years to recruit a grocery store to the riverfront destination. But Sebastian said it was his investment group that brought the convenience store concept to the development's retail leasing team.

"They told us there wasn't plan for Kroger or CVS to go in now," Sebastian said. "That doesn't mean they can't put one in later. In our lease, we put some protections in for ourselves. We came to them with the idea. We knew it was needed. We've lived it. We've lived with a lack of convenience down here."

Laura Griffin, an associate with Banks property owner Nicol Investment Co., said adding a fresh market to the mix of tenants fills an important need as The Banks evolves from solely being a destination for Cincinnati Bengals and Reds home games and bars and restaurants at night.

Nicol, which is based in Nashville, bought the nearly 300-unit Current apartments and more than 90,000 square feet of street-level retail space at The Banks development in 2013.

"The Banks has doubled our residential community in the past year, added 2,000 daytime employees at the GE Global Operations Center and will soon open the doors to the new AC Hotel Cincinnati," Griffin said. "That growth and the new demographics of the neighborhood have created significant demand for a fresh food market and Street Corner is an ideal fit."

GE workers adding life at The Banks

(<http://preview.cincinnati.com/story/money/2016/09/19/ge-workers-adding-life-banks/90696614/>)

Street Corner has more than 40 locations nationwide. The Street Corner Market at The Banks will employ about 10 people. The company has been expanding its "urban superette" format to capitalize on the needs and growth of urban areas and downtowns. The first Street Corner store opened in 1988.

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"People are coming back to downtown Cincinnati, from millennials and other young professionals to empty-nesters who want to live near where they work, dine and shop," said Peter LaColla, CEO of Street Corner. "But these city center, mixed-use developments are often lacking when it comes to traditional grocery stores. We're catering to those built-in urban populations with a combination of convenience, grocery and fresh food."

Sebastian said there's the potential for Street Corner locations to open beyond The Banks.

"We aren't doing this just to open one store," he said. "Our ultimate goal is to open up as many as we can reasonably run. We are probably going to look to expand where it might be needed around the Cincinnati area and possibly the Kentucky and Tennessee area."

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