

Breaking Ground at Fan Pier

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By Thomas C. Palmer Jr.

When you've waited almost 50 years for a groundbreaking, it has to be a memorable one. Fan Pier's kickoff today was a party to remember.

Almost five decades after restaurateur Anthony Athanas bought Fan Pier for development, Joe Fallon today played host to 300-400 guests, as he, his partners at Mass Mutual and Cornerstone Financial Real Estate Advisers, and public officials broke ground on an 18-floor office tower on the South Boston Waterfront.

Little bottles of cold water kept guests cool on a 90-plus day under two large tents – one for the speeches, and one, on the other side of a spiffy marketing center, for tables and tables of food.

“Today we break ground on the largest waterfront project in the city's history,” said Mayor Tom Menino, who charged that it would be the largest green, LEED-certified development in the nation. (Southie Sen. Jack Hart cracked that, to the late South Boston city councilor Jimmy Kelly, “green development would have meant only Irish people would live there.”)

“Fan Pier will enhance Boston's reputation as one of the world's great cities,” said Menino. Asked about his plan to move City Hall, he vowed again to abandon the lonesome plaza and put it on the waterfront during his tenure.

Everybody thanked Fallon, who two years ago bought Fan Pier's 21 acres for \$115 million and got busy making happen what had only been dreamed of for decades. He's a risk taker with a long-term, big-picture vision,” said WCVB-TV's Natalie Jacobson, who emceed the event.

With a loud pop, blue balloons burst overhead, and confetti rained down on the VIPs, who wielded shiny shovels to toss around a little sand that had been hauled in for the occasion

“Fan Pier is now a reality,” said Fallon, noting that it will have more than four acres of parks and a marina with “stern-to” docking, to accommodate the megayachts of those world travelers who might want to live or stay at Fan Pier.

During the entire event, models--each dressed to symbolize one luxury aspect or another of Fan Pier – stood motionless on small platforms. For “Food,” a woman was poised biting in to a lobster. For “Shopping,” one held a bouquet of roses and a red leather purse, surrounded by shopping bags from Neiman Marcus and Jimmy Choo. For “Spa,” a blonde reclined in a tub overflowing with rose petals.

A red and white Volvo racing vessel cruised around the harbor, as business people, government officials, media types, and hangers-on listened to the thank-yous and heard the promises of Fan Pier, the 2.9-million-square-foot mixed use center that is slated to materialize on eight blocks along Northern Avenue over the next decade or so.

“I played street hockey on these parking lots,” said City Councilor Michael Flaherty. “As a teenager I parked cars. This area has a great history and an even greater future.”

Mary Benoit of Sales Directors Inc., who is handling Fan Pier marketing for the Fallon Co., put today’s soiree together.