

LouisBoston heads to Fan Pier

Move could help attract more shops to developing area



LouisBoston, a retail icon on Newbury Street in Boston, plans to relocate to Fan Pier on the South Boston Waterfront. (George Schnee/Schnee Architects)

By Jenn Abelson

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Back Bay fashionista LouisBoston is vacating its historic digs next spring for a spot on the waterfront at Fan Pier, making it the first retailer to sign on to the struggling project and leaving a big hole on Newbury Street for at least a year.

Owner Debi Greenberg, who took over the high-end designer business from her father in 2003, announced plans last year to move Louis from its stately building and create a new, edgier identity away from Newbury Street. She searched the South End and South Boston and settled on the Fan Pier location about five months ago.

“Luxury has been so commercialized, and it needs to be redefined. This new spot will offer customers a change in attitude, a more approachable space,” Greenberg said yesterday at an event at Fan Pier to unveil the project. “This new store will set the tone and personality for taking luxury into a new direction.”

The arrival of Louis to Fan Pier marks a major coup for the developers, who have faced financing challenges and had to scale back the project. Many merchants have long resisted

the South Boston Waterfront, a largely undeveloped neighborhood cut off from the rest of the city. LouisBoston, with luxury brands, a restaurant, and premier stylist Mario Russo, is a shopping destination that could help attract additional shops, according to retail analysts and real estate experts.

“Someday it will be a great area. It’s been slowed down with the economy,” said Andy LaGrega of Wilder Cos., a Boston development firm. “But Louis will be a draw.”

The new, two-story, 20,000-square-foot LouisBoston will open next spring at the water’s edge, diagonally across from the Institute of Contemporary Art.

The shop, with a 10-year lease, is about half the size of the designer emporium’s location at Newbury and Berkeley streets.

Real estate specialists say Louis, which had a lease that was below market rates for the pricey Back Bay, probably scored a good deal at the Fan Pier site as one of the pioneer tenants.

Fan Pier developers declined to discuss rent details.

The Fan Pier store is being built on a site that was initially slated for a residential building. The developers anticipate moving forward with the residential piece once the market and financing rebound, and will then relocate Louis to another part of the development.

Fan Pier developer Joseph F. Fallon said he is hoping to sign leases for at least one restaurant and cafe in the coming weeks for the building where law firm Fish & Richardson is planning to move at One Marina Park Drive.

“We’re only just getting started here,” Fallon said in an interview yesterday.

While LouisBoston’s move to South Boston is a big gain for the waterfront, its departure from the Back Bay will leave a massive vacancy for at least a year, according to WS Development, which runs the property.

Thomas DeSimone, a partner at WS Development, said rehabilitation work is needed for the interior and exterior of the building, home to the New England Museum of Natural History until the late 1940s. The building has not been marketed, and the improvements could take from a year or two years once Louis moves out.

“We hope that by the time the building is ready, the economy will bounce back and be more favorable,” DeSimone said. “This is a one-of-a-kind opportunity.”

Retail and real estate analysts expect a high-end merchant that is looking to break into Boston, such as [Tommy Hilfiger](#) or Bloomingdale's, to take over the premier site ultimately.

“While LouisBoston moving to the waterfront will be a boost to the overall economic development of our city, the prime location of the Louis on Newbury and the beautiful architecture of that building would be a prize for any business owner,” said Mayor Thomas M. Menino. “The city along with the Boston Redevelopment Authority will continue to work hard in bringing new businesses to our retail districts.”