

# **THE DISTRICT AT COMMERCIAL CENTER: Power of reinvention**

## **Business owner starts association aimed at cleaning up retail complex**

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To put it delicately, Commercial Center has a certain reputation. Generally, at best, people view it as run-down, and at worst, as downright dangerous.

"I've had a problem with staffing over the past couple of years because people didn't want to work in the area," said Paula Sadler, who owns A Harmony Nail Spa in Commercial Center, 953 E. Sahara Ave.

This is only one of the reasons Sadler decided it was time to turn Commercial Center around. It was time, in her opinion, to create the Commercial Center Business Association, which she did in January 2007.

### **HOW IT USED TO BE**

People visiting Commercial Center today may well wonder how such an odd arrangement of shops came to be. A great ring of storefronts surrounds a large parking lot, which surrounds yet another building of storefronts.

"Until fairly recently, there were 50 or 60 owners," said Chris Giunchigliani, Clark County commissioner for District E, which includes Commercial Center. "In recent years, several larger parcels have been bought by single owners. Now, it's down to a more manageable 22 or 23."

The short answer to how Commercial Center happened is bit by bit. Not long after it opened in 1960, it was the valley's premiere shopping center, but it was built around the time that the first enclosed shopping malls were being built in America, before all the bugs had been worked out of mall design. It was an odd hybrid of a ring of squared-off strip malls and originally included an enclosed shopping mall, as well, called Village Square.

"Village Square had a grocery and a bunch of shops," said longtime Las Vegas resident Bob Ball, who recently shopped at Commercial Center. "It was here when I moved to town in '69. I think it closed in '78 or '79."

## **CREATING CHANGE**

Ball has been shopping at Tiffany Cleaners since the store opened in 1970. The store still is owned by the same family. Tiffany Cleaners and the adjacent John Fish Jewelers are among the longest running businesses in Commercial Center, and were among the first to sign up for the business association.

"Paula's doing some great work over there," said Elaine Fish, who started John Fish Jewelers with her husband in 1955. "The center looks better than it has in years."

Only 20 of the more than 250 businesses in Commercial Center have joined the business association, but that fraction has made great strides in the past year. The first order of business was cleaning the center up. There are a number of alleys that made attractive targets for graffiti taggers.

The association pulled together funds from member businesses, as well as an all-volunteer crew who painted over all the offending spray can work. It did similar work with the curbs and posts.

By an odd arrangement set in place more than 30 years ago, Clark County owns the parking lot and sidewalks, and private owners own the buildings in Commercial Center.

"The county just ignored it for 20 years," Sadler said. "When we finally got them to do something, it was done badly." The curbs and posts now shine with fresh paint, courtesy of the Commercial Center Business Association's volunteers.

## **WHAT'S IN A NAME?**

The business association is trying to rebrand the location as The District at Commercial Center. A new Web site, [www.thedistrictatcc.com](http://www.thedistrictatcc.com), reflects this.

"We had to change the name using part of the old name," Sadler said. "We're trying to project a new public image because the old image was very bad, as we all know."

Officially, the business association is calling it The District at Commercial Center International Village.

"There are 250 stores here, and representatives from at least 14 nations and diversities," Sadler said.

The diversity of the businesses also led to one of the business association's revitalization projects. Because there is essentially no back to Commercial Center, the communal Dumpsters are located in partially shielded enclosures in the parking lot. The Dumpsters were a frequent target of graffiti. The solution? Beat taggers to the punch with paint.

An artist was hired to paint flag-based art on six of the Dumpsters, which has effectively stopped the tagging, according to Sadler.

The District at Commercial Center will hold an open house from noon to 7 p.m. on Saturday, which will introduce a number of weekly events, including live music, a ribbon-cutting ceremony and the Fresh Air Walk @ the Center, a 1-mile, outdoor walk around the interior of the center, followed by refreshments and gourmet coffee.

Also at the open house, Sadler will begin her weekly free Sidewalk Tai Chi and Meditation, which will be Saturdays from 8 to 9 a.m.

In addition, the Fabulous Sin City Rollergirls have a game at 8 p.m. in the Las Vegas Roller Hockey Center in Commercial Center, and will present cast members from "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" at the Onyx Theatre, also inside Commercial Center, at 11 p.m.

For more information about events at the center, visit [www.thedistrictatcc.com](http://www.thedistrictatcc.com).



Photos by dale dombrowski/viewTop, A Harmony Nail Spa owner Paula Sadler centers her spirit in the meditation room in her business in Commercial Center, 953 E. Sahara Ave. Sadler is the president of the Commercial Center Business Association, which is working to market the center as The District at Commercial Center. The group has funded improvement projects, such as painting over graffiti in the center. Bottom, an aerial view shows the center, which houses more than 250 businesses.



Photo by: Dale dombrowski/viewA Harmony Nail Spa owner Paula Sadler stands next to a giant, purple hand chair, while a spa foot bath runs in the foreground. The "hobbit hole" in the background is one of the features of her spa in Commercial Center, 953 E. Sahara Ave.



Photos by dale dombrowski/viewTop, A Harmony Nail Spa owner Paula Sadler centers her spirit in the meditation room in her business in Commercial Center, 953 E. Sahara Ave. Sadler is the president of the Commercial Center Business Association, which is working to market the center as The District at Commercial Center. The group has funded improvement projects, such as painting over graffiti in the center. Bottom, an aerial view shows the center, which houses more than 250 businesses.

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