

Chelsea Piers Expands, Staying Close to Home

By SANA SIWOLOP

STAMFORD, Conn. — When Chelsea Piers, the sports emporium on the Manhattan waterfront, began looking more than a decade ago for a location where it could expand, the hunt centered on major cities like Boston, Philadelphia, San Francisco and Washington.

But in the end, Chelsea Piers settled on a site far closer to home: early last month the company started construction on a 400,000-square-foot facility in Stamford. It will sit inside what is currently one of the largest industrial re-use sites in the area, a 33-acre office and manufacturing complex that once belonged to the hair products company Clairol.

Chelsea Piers executives first saw — and later bid — on the property in 2009. David A. Tewksbury, a company co-founder, said they quickly realized it offered everything they had been unable to find elsewhere: a large, well-maintained property that was near a major highway exit (Exit 9 on Interstate 95), and also in an area where the demand for sports complexes far exceeded what was available.

"We were immediately taken with it," said Mr. Tewksbury, who is now also the president of Chelsea Piers Connecticut. "Fairfield County is very densely populated, and it's wildly enthusiastic for sports."

The company's 1.2 million-square-foot site on the Hudson River, which it opened in 1995, already attracts about four million visitors a year. Chelsea Piers hopes to draw visitors from a 20-mile radius around Stamford, a city of 122,000 in Fairfield County, which has a population of nearly 900,000. Westchester County, with about one million people, is about 15 miles to the west.

Over all, the complex has 711,000 square feet, and consists mostly of a single-story building connected to a two-story building. It was Clairol's world headquarters for more than 40 years, and after the company was acquired by Procter & Gamble in 2001, it also served as Clairol's main manufacturing plant for its hair coloring products.

In 2008, Procter & Gamble announced plans to put its Stamford operations elsewhere. And last year, Clairol finally left, moving its manufacturing operations to various sites in the United States and Mexico, and its administrative offices to Procter & Gamble's headquarters in Cincinnati.

Still, when the property finally changed hands, in March 2010, it



JAMES ESTRINE/THE NEW YORK TIMES

From left, David Tewksbury, of Chelsea Piers; Clayton H. Fowler, of Spinnaker Real Estate Partners; and Steven M. Wise of Steven Wise Associates in what will be the new sports center.

went to another buyer, a partnership made up of affiliates of Spinnaker Real Estate Partners, in South Norwalk, Conn.; Steven Wise Associates, a Stamford-based real estate investment and development company; and the Connecticut Film Center, which is also based in Stamford. Together, the partners paid \$17.5 million in cash for the property, after an earlier bid fell through for lack of financing, said Clayton H. Fowler, the founding partner and chief executive of Spinnaker, which has a history of remaking older industrial, as well as urban, properties in the area.

Chelsea Piers will be an anchor tenant at the old Clairol site, spending approximately \$45 million on renovations. On the ground floor of the single-story building that once served as a warehouse for Clairol, the company is planning to build two National Hockey League-size ice skating rinks and its first squash center, as well as an Olympic-size pool, a recreational water park, a day care center, space for food vendors and a 20,000-square-foot gymnastics center. A 40,000-square-foot mezzanine floor will sit above, offering space for events and an area to watch activities below.

Plans call for adding a second floor to what is now the roof of the old warehouse building. On that floor, which will be about 100,000 square feet, Chelsea Piers plans to put up two new buildings that will together house the company's first tennis courts (seven in all), basketball courts, volley-

ball courts and a 60,000-square-foot playing field that can be easily divided into four smaller fields for sports like football, soccer, lacrosse, baseball and field hockey.

Mr. Tewksbury said the new playing fields would be almost three times as large as the two "mini-fields" the company now offers in Manhattan.

In Manhattan, Chelsea Piers now also has a 150,000-square-foot health club. But in Connecti-

cut was made up of buildings no more than 30,000 square feet in size, so the site might appeal to tenants like data centers. But another goal is to possibly attract tenants like sports medicine physicians, physical therapists and a membership health club, to create an indoor sports mall that would essentially offer sports enthusiasts one-stop shopping.

"Because of its size, and the ability to have multiple entries, this site can have multiple personalities, or users who are complementary to one another, or even a combination of both," said Stephen M. Wise, who heads the real estate company whose affiliate is an investor in the project.

The Connecticut Film Center is already planning to take on space at the site.

Kevin Segalla, the center's founder and president, said that since Connecticut began offering a sizable tax credit in 2006 for movies and television shows produced in the state, his center has spent the last five years either acquiring or leasing 340,000 square feet of production and office space in both Stamford and South Norwalk. Plans now call for offering an additional 81,000 square feet of production space, with at least a few more soundstages, on the second floor of the building next to Chelsea Piers.

"Frankly there is a shortage of space like this in the Stamford area, a shortage of warehouse space that can be easily converted to production facilities," he said. "Right now, we could easily add three new soundstages."

The new location is Clairol's old complex in Stamford, Conn.

cut the company wants to emphasize competitive sports; Mr. Tewksbury said the area had a shortage of space for them to be played.

"Many of the local ice hockey programs in lower Fairfield County, for example, are now driving for 30 to 45 minutes to places like Shelton and beyond to get ice time, and school teams are practicing at 5:30 in the morning," he said.

Some 450,000 square feet of space still needs to be filled at Clairol's old site, especially within the large, two-story building adjacent to where Chelsea Piers is building its new quarters.

Trip Hoffman, a senior director at Cashman & Wakefield of Connecticut, said much of the industrial market in the Stamford area