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## New luxury theater and bistro planned for Rotunda

Would include dining and 'expansive' wine list

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An artist rendering shows what the redeveloped Rotunda mall will look like. The rendering was shown at a groundbreaking ceremony Sept. 18, 2013. (File photo / March 31, 2014)

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By Larry Perl, [lperl@tribune.com](mailto:lperl@tribune.com)

12:51 p.m. EDT, March 31, 2014

The dinner-and-a-movie concept is coming to north Baltimore.

**Hekemian & Co.** has signed a long-term lease with Cobb Theatres to open **CineBistro**, a luxury seven-screen movie theatre with upscale dining at the redeveloped Rotunda mall.

Cobb Theatres CEO Jeremy Welman said he knows of no other such theater in Baltimore, at least on such a large scale.

"We're looking forward to hopefully being the first," Welman said. He would not say how much it would cost to build the

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Hekemian officially breaks ground on Rotunda redevelopment



Rotunda redevelopment groundbreaking [Pictures]

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theater, but noted that the cost is "significantly" more per square foot than for a traditional theater without dining.

Billed as a true world class "dinner-and-a-movie" experience, the 35,000-square-foot theater would have plush, oversized leather seats, full-service, in-theatre dining and "cutting-edge" stadium-style movie viewing.

CineBistro "will include upscale dine-in theatres, a chef-inspired menu, premium cocktails and an expansive wine list," Hekemian said in a press release Monday.

The concept is aimed at the "21-year-old and up sophisticated moviegoer," Cobb Theatres says on its website, [cobbtheatres.com/cinebistro](http://cobbtheatres.com/cinebistro).

Theater patrons would sit in high-backed leather chairs with swing-away dining tables. A bar and lounge would also serve theater-goers, as well as those not there to see a film, and would offers movie-themed cocktails and draft and bottled beers in a stylish setting.

"We are thrilled that Cobb Theatres is bringing this unique and exciting concept to the Rotunda," Hekemian President Robert Hekemian, Jr. said in a statement. "A movie theatre has been an integral part of the Rotunda from its beginning, and by bringing this new cutting-edge concept to the redevelopment, we are ensuring that the Rotunda will once again be the place to gather with friends, shop, enjoy great food and see a great movie."

The new theater would be built on what is now the back parking lot and the current Rotunda Cinematheque Theatres, a four-screen multiplex would close once the new theater opens, said Hekemian senior vice president Chris Bell. He said the current operator, Ira Miller would not be involved with the new theater.

Hekemian broke ground in September on a roughly \$100 million redevelopment project that will add 150,000 square feet of new and redeveloped retail space to the mall, with retail stores turned around to face an outdoor plaza.

A 379-unit apartment building would be located above the retail stores. The mall already features 140,000 square feet of office space.

Also planned is a MOMS organic grocery store that would replace a departed **Giant Food** store as an anchor for the retail portion of the redevelopment, as well as 20 new shops and restaurants. New retail tenants are expected to begin opening by the end of 2015.

The 41-year-old Giant store has moved to the nearby Green Spring Tower Square shopping center on 41st Street, along with Hair Cuttery and Radio Shack.

Cobb Theatres, based in Birmingham, Ala., is one of the top 10 movie exhibitors in the country, with 231 screens at 19 locations throughout the Southeast, according to the Hekemian press release.

Cobb's closest multiplex theater is in Leesburg, Va., and Cobb has seven CineBistro complexes, the nearest in Richmond, said Bell.

"They're one of the oldest and strongest in the business," Bell said of Cobb Theatres.

Filmgoers would reserve a seat for dinner and a movie, arrive 30 minutes beforehand and eat in the theater while watching the show. Dinner would be served before, not during the movie,

Bell said he wishes such a theater was in **Annapolis**, where he lives, because he thinks going to the movies is a hassle.

"That's the only way I'd see a movie," he said.

Bell said he is negotiating with other potential Rotunda tenant and that Hekemian has five letters of intent and two leases being negotiated. He said he won't say who they are until leases are signed, however.

Bell said redevelopment is a little behind schedule because of a bad winter, but that Hekemian expects to make up ground when the weather improves.

"We're out there in the muck," he said.

Redevelopment construction has been an issue lately, with Baltimore City **Councilwoman Mary Pat Clarke** telling the **Hampden** Village Merchants Association earlier this month that construction is having an adverse impact on residents on Elm Avenue and 38th Street.

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Clarke is trying to push through a proposal for a new Residential Parking Permit Area near the mall.

The redevelopment project — planned since the mid-2000s but stalled for several years by a bad economy that complicated financing — has been scaled back from earlier plans for a \$180 million project that would have included a 22-story apartment building and a 120-room hotel and 40 condominiums.

