

CineBistro opens Friday at Westfield Southgate

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CineBistro is no longer Westfield Southgate's coming attraction.

Ticket sales went live on Monday.

The theater that combines the traditional concept of dinner and a movie into a single luxurious experience will show its first films Friday while serving up dishes that put a typical bowl of popcorn to shame. "Deadpool" will kickoff the lineup at noon. Showings of "How to be Single," "Zoolander 2," "Hail Caesar!" and "Brooklyn" will follow as craft cocktails are poured and plates are filled with miso-glazed black cod, Moroccan-spiced lamb and seared scallops.



SNN PHOTO / JASON RAVEN

CineBistro at Westfield Southgate is set to open Friday.

The Birmingham, Alabama-based chain emphasizes quality from both a movie and a dining perspective, Jason Waganheim, general manager for CineBistro Westfield Southgate, said Monday. Both the dishes and films are tailored to the local palate.

"It's the entire package that's going to make you want to come back," Waganheim said.

The seven-screen theater will host a mix of first-run movies, independent films and private events, said Matt Russell, CineBistro's regional operations director. The complex is closed to anyone under 21 after 6 p.m., so the movies typically aim for adult interests. Some animated films will likely fit into the line-up, but, in general, the movies will be more geared to those ordering a bottle of wine than the G-rated crowd.

"We listen to our audience," Russell said. "We want to make sure we're getting in the films that they want."

The drill, some rules

Guests hand-select their seats online and are asked to arrive 30 minutes before the movie to place their food and drink orders.

Tickets typically run \$12-18.

There are more than 80 inches between each row of seats, meaning a moviegoer would have to try to kick, bump or inconvenience another guest.

CineBistro managers say the emphasis on service also goes beyond serving a meal. Staff members aren't afraid to ask a guest to leave who's disrupting a movie by chatting or using cell phone.

The complex also includes a 150-seat restaurant with indoor and outdoor patios for anyone interested in dining without seeing a show.

The viewing experience

Three of the seven theaters are 3D compatible.

The screens are wall-to-wall at about the 16-by-38-feet and face an auditorium of roomy, leather, reclining seats with swiveling dinner trays.

Those dinner trays can morph into desks while the big screen rolls through slide presentations for corporate events. The screens are also compatible with some videogames for renters eager to play in a larger-than-life setting.

"If you haven't played Halo on the big screen, you haven't really lived yet," Russell said.

The mall impact

The 38,000-square-foot movie-and-dining complex was built on the site of the former Saks Fifth Avenue, which left Westfield Southgate for the Mall at University Town Center when it opened in October 2014.

CineBistro restores a second anchor to the mall but also brings something entirely new to the Sarasota region, said Jim Ralston, general manager for Westfield Southgate and its sister property, Westfield Sarasota Square.

Before now, moviegoers would have to drive to Tampa to have this kind of theater experience.

"I'm elated," Ralston said. "I'm ecstatic because I think this is something the Sarasota community really wanted, and it's something that we really wanted to bring to them."

The new theater is expected to give a much-needed boost in traffic to the mall, which has struggled to attract shoppers and replenish tenants since the Mall at University Town Center moved into the market.

Ralston described 2015 as a learning year for Westfield Southgate, but he says he has high hopes for the future. Westfield Southgate welcomed several new, local in-line stores last year, and Ralston said he expects to make several announcements in 2016 about arriving stores and restaurants.

CineBistro's opening, while pivotal, is just a piece of all the changes to come.

"What we're doing in the future will only tie in to the overall entertainment, dining and retail experience that's going to make Southgate a showcase property in Sarasota," Ralston said.

EARLIER

CineBistro, the Cobb Theater chain offering first-run movies with dinner and drinks that beat popcorn and candy like Thor beats bad guys, will open its Westfield Southgate location Friday.

Showing will be "Deadpool," "How to be Single," Zoolander 2," "Hail Caesar!" and "Brooklyn," with the first show of "Deadpool" at noon. Because of the adult beverages served, patrons have to be 21 or older for showtimes after 6 p.m. The dining room is available to all ages at all times.

Doors open 30 minutes before the first showtime of the day, according to the company's website.

Guests can choose to dine in its restaurant and bar even if not seeing a movie and are never required to order dinner when seeing a movie.

The menu includes appetizers popcorn chicken, shrimp or calamari and Korean BBQ Chicken Wings and a hummus plate. Entrees include Filet, Moroccan spiced lamb, seared scallops and broiled cauliflower steak, as well as sandwiches like burgers, a salmon BLT and a vaca frita burger.

And for those who just can't watch a movie without popcorn, the CineBistro website says, "We also offer traditional movie concessions such as fresh popped popcorn and candies."

Come back to heraldtribune.com soon for much more information.

Tickets are available at <http://cinebistro.com/sarasota/index.php>.

