

# One-stop gourmet spot

Grange Hall, in an industrial area near the Kravis Center, would gather food providers under one roof.



Grange Hall would draw inspiration from markets across the country, including Krog Street Market in Atlanta. COURTESY PHOTO A vision for a marketplace based on urban markets and food halls in Manhattan, New Orleans and Atlanta, is coming together in West Palm Beach.

Chris Vila, a real estate developer in Long Island, N.Y., and Palm Beach, is behind the Grange Hall project in the Old Okeechobee Road warehouse area.

It was born out of a need for a onestop market for fresh foods sold by locals, he said.

“When I moved down here with my family three years ago from Manhattan, we found ourselves going to several different places to shop for food. One place to get meats, another for produce, and another for specialty foods.

“There is the green market, but it’s only weekly and seasonal. We were looking for a place like Chelsea Market in New York.”

An opportunity presented itself, he said, with the Grange Hall building, a

1950s vintage, 16,000-square-foot building in a warehouse and industrial area southwest of the Kravis Center. A former floral import business, it was once a refrigerated warehouse space and lends itself perfectly to the project, said Mr. Vila.



Grange Hall would bring together food providers in a 1950s building that once was home to a floral import business. COURTESY RENDERING “We took ideas from the Chelsea Market — it’s an urban space market near Vanderbilt (a New York food hall), Krog Street Market in Atlanta, and the State Market in New Orleans. They’re all markets in old buildings. It’s adaptive reuse: repurposing these old buildings.

“A lot of these markets, in order to be as authentic as they need to be, they’re taking over these old buildings, putting in windows, kitchens, open spaces.”

They also give a “voice” and exposure to local vendors who otherwise couldn’t afford a retail space, he said.

Rents and percentages breakdowns will mean it “opens up to be an incubator for smaller vendors who might not want to go out to a green market, say.” These are sellers who can’t afford to give up staff or time out of a retail shop to sell for a few hours off-site, he said. Here, they get the small-shop experience, with multiple symbiotic businesses that complement their products.



He explained “adaptive reuse” as projects meant to rejuvenate whole urban areas, pointing to the Meat Market District in New York. It’s where the Chelsea Market spawned other businesses and restaurants to set up shop in an underused part of the city, attracting a variety of customers.

Reusing old buildings is popular with modern planners trying to curb urban sprawl and bring to life buildings still viable for commerce.

“I’m going to fill the space with all kinds of vendors. There will be a rotisserie chicken concept and others selling fresh and prepared foods: Porquettas, prime rib, for picking up for dinner that night. People in the neighborhood or workers getting off work could shop for a protein, or a rotisserie chicken, get their fresh vegetables, and coffee all under one roof.”

He envisions a variety of shoppers here. Some would come for coffee before work or after dropping kids at school and pick up lunch or come in for lunch with the office gang, he said. It is planned to be open daily, and from 7 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. most days. A late December opening is planned, with permitting awaiting approval from the city.

“A taco vendor — Zippy Tios, who provides the tacos at Subculture on Friday nights; they don’t even have a truck,” he said. “This will be their first brick and mortar.”

A butcher, a pizza vendor “who we’re excited about” that remains unnamed as yet, a baker, Rabbit Coffee roasters and the Steam Horse Brewery will have space in the market. A home design/ gift shop — Restated Style, with a mix of books, candles, jewelry, what Mr. Vila calls a “well curated selection” fills in nicely, he said. All are local entrepreneurs.

“You’ll be able to get anything here,” he said. “It’s a mix of vendors, but 90 percent is food.”

Yoga and cycling studios and a squash court will take up some of the

downstairs, meant to attract the active community. Social spaces will be built in, and some, organic. “There is a greenway out back next to the old railroad tracks where people can hang out, and a large outdoor space where the loading dock was for tables. We’ll be doing music and other entertainment on weekends,” Mr. Vila said. A wine bar is also in the works.

It’s an ideal location, he said. “We’re surrounded by good things. Completely leased office parks, Grandview Heights and Flamingo Park, the Kravis Center, the Armory Arts Center. We’re soundly in the middle of it all, which is perfect.”

Johnstone Capital is involved in the financing, but Mr. Vila declined to comment further on its involvement, instead focusing on the vendors.

“There will be one concept per market,” with only one butcher, one baker, and one florist spot available, keeping the spotlight on the individuals who are “an amazing crew of young people, whether it’s Celis with their produce or other individuals doing artisan products.”

Already other markets by Mr. Vila and his associates are in the planning stages; the first one is in Savannah. Other markets in Florida are not on the radar, though if the need is there and enough call for them exists, he’s not opposed to looking at other locations, he said.

Felipe Celis of Celis Produce in West Palm Beach says he and his brother, Alex, will have a sister storefront in the Grange Hall. They were one of the first vendors to be approached for the project, and are enthused about the chance to branch out, he said. Grange Hall is well planned and has a community appeal, he said, which means the growing produce company should do well and gain more customers.

“We’re going to carry a broader line of produce and groceries. The theme is like Chelsea Market,” he said. “There’s going to be a fish department, a meat department and us with produce. There are pizza and taco vendors and a

brewery going in.

“It’s exciting. The shell is already there. It’s a ‘ginormous’ warehouse,” he said. Another building will house business offices, he was told: Insurance, real estate and professional services will be housed there.

Refrigeration and the build-out is on the project owners, so the initial overhead for vendors is light. “They’re pooling everything. They’re asking us what we want and they’re building it out. My theory is it’s the best way to do it. Everybody is getting up to speed at their pace. It’s the best way so everybody will be open at once,” Mr. Celis said.

Celis Produce also will have fresh juices and some prepared foods, he said. “We’re curating our menu now. They’re going to turn the loading dock into a dining experience. Chris has an Airstream and he’s putting it at the end of the loading dock. We’ll have our juices there, not inside in the produce section.

“I think everyone will be interested in it — residents and tourists from the new Hilton and the convention center — a wide range of the demographic. It’s something so new for the city. I think it’s going to be busy all day.”

Holly Frey of Flower & Fringe, a floral design and workshop business now in the Uptown Art space in downtown West Palm Beach, is excited to be a part of the Grange Hall Market, she said.

She initially was approached to do a pop-up, small flower shop downstairs at Mr. Vila’s request. He found her through Celis Produce, where she also has a pop-up flower stand.

Then, she said, “I realized where I am, I’m running out of space and asked if there were warehouse space available. He said there would be a large space upstairs if I’d be willing to be up there, and I said yes, so it turned into me actually moving my space in there.”

The floral designer works mostly weddings and events, though her main

business is teaching wreath workshops for holidays and working with area businesses.

She's the entrepreneur Mr. Vila is targeting. "I want to stay a small floral company. I don't want to get into event planning and be a big floral entity. I think it will be good marketing for my business. I can still do pop-up shops — I have one a month in season — at Subculture, Celis Produce and one coming up in Abacoa."

She doesn't sell at the green market, so is looking forward to having a small retail space open daily in the city for exposure.

"I still want to be in West Palm Beach — it's really important for me," she said. "The community here is really growing and flourishing right now. It's exciting." |

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