

WATERTOWN REAWAKENING

Arsenal Yards Reinvents Itself as COVID Recedes

Housing, Labs Complement Retail Center

By Bridget Beckeman | Special to Banker & Tradesman | Apr 25, 2021 | [Reprints](#) | [Unlock Link](#)



A 24,000-square-foot Roche Brothers grocery store opened at Arsenal Yards on April 9 featuring an expansive produce and prepared food section, cheese shop, Flatbread Pizza Bar and deli with made-to-order sandwiches. Photo courtesy of the Wilder Cos.

As the weather gets warmer and society slowly moves toward a new post-COVID normal, Arsenal Yards in Watertown is beginning to blossom into the neighborhood envisioned when the Wilder/Boylston Properties team first purchased the Arsenal Mall in 2013.

Between new store and restaurant openings, the debut of the Blvd. & Bond residences and the groundbreaking for 100 Forge, the new life sciences tower, each passing week will bring new developments to the property.

Arsenal Street has indeed evolved over the past five years. Watertown, and the East End in particular, is emerging as a major player in the life science space. What began as a small cluster of startup firms has become a veritable hub for the industry. This boom has brought new people, new companies, and new demand for dining, services and retail right to our front door.

Our team always saw Watertown as the connector between the cities of Cambridge and Boston and the suburbs. With COVID changing how people commute and spend their time, this connection point is more important than ever. We are excited to welcome shoppers, residents, workers and visitors to a truly transformed neighborhood.

A Year of Progress and Challenges

New streets, outdoor spaces, residences and tenants welcome visitors to Arsenal Yards. The site is unrecognizable from one year ago – the hole in the Arsenal Mall parking lot is now the site of new retail and several hundred apartments. The development and leasing team faced several challenges

in navigating what was truly an unprecedented year, but emerged in 2021 stronger, wiser and ready to put the finishing touches on the past eight years of work.

Our leasing and management teams have had to work tirelessly to ensure the success of not only future retail tenants, but perhaps more crucially, the several tenants who opened prior to and during the past 18 months. Constant collaboration with Wilder's marketing and management teams has kept all of those tenants open, operating, and prepared for the eventual return to normalcy.

A critical component to the success of these tenants has been adaptability. With online pickup increasing rapidly in popularity, and outdoor dining critical for food operators, the Arsenal Yards team has pivoted to accommodate tenants' changing needs. While we had already planned for the majority of restaurant spaces to have dedicated patio areas, we expanded those spaces and helped create three season outdoor areas for customers who prefer to dine outdoors. Additional 15-minute parking spots are now designated to facilitate individual pickup and larger delivery services.



Fitness classes returned to the River Green at Arsenal Yards on April 13 with the Pure Barre team kicking off the season. Photo courtesy of the Wilder Cos.

Remote Recruitment

As a result of the pandemic and ongoing construction, our marketing team has taken on the challenging task of building our customer base while ensuring customers feel safe and taken care of on site. Our marketing team embarked on a unique programming of as many socially distant events as possible over the past year.

Local residents flocked (in small groups) to Fire Side, where groups could book our outdoor fire pits and enjoy live music al fresco during the winter months. Outdoor fitness classes, significantly constrained due to social distancing requirements, booked up well in advance in the summer and fall. The team also developed a comprehensive social media campaign that informed the community of new openings, events, and construction milestones.

Boylston's construction team successfully managed the continued work of several general contractors on site, working with the Wilder management and retail development team to implement COVID safety protocols and enforce social distancing across the project. This intensive collaboration allowed work to continue despite the various states of shutdown over the past year, and has kept both the residential projects, life sciences and retail tenants largely on target with their projected opening dates.

Looking Ahead

While the final phases of Arsenal Yards will not be complete until fall, visitors can largely envision what the property will look and feel like when visiting the site today. As residents begin to move in over the coming weeks, they will have the benefit of a locally owned gourmet grocery store on site, as well as numerous retailers, restaurants and services. Roche Brothers' grand opening on April 9 coincided with a preview re-opening of the Majestic 7 cinema. Majestic will continue its soft reopening before fully re-opening to guests in May, just in time for summer's blockbusters.



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Pure Barre will open its Arsenal Yards location by Memorial Day weekend, but those eager to hit the barre before then will be able to take outdoor classes as part of the renewed Fitness Series, which returned April 13. Classes run Sunday through Wednesday through September and feature both Arsenal Yards fitness operators and several locally loved instructors on rotating days. Proceeds from these classes have been donated to local charities, including the Watertown Food Bank and local Boys & Girls Club.

An international brand will be bringing a new concept in a 16,000-square-foot space in the historical Arsenal building in June.

Several chef-driven restaurants, including Jason Santos' Buttermilk & Bourbon, will open throughout the summer. By fall, Bond Square, an open-air pedestrian-friendly courtyard between the residences, will open with additional shops and restaurants.

Just as the town of Watertown is evolving, so too is Arsenal Yards. We look forward to completing our transformation in the coming months and continuing to serve the Watertown and surrounding communities.

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