

COUNCIL LOOKS AT 'BLUEPRINT' FOR S. VALLCO DEVELOPMENT

Decision pushed to Sept. 16 meeting

By MATT WILSON

Cupertino City Council got its first look at a broad "blueprint" for the South Vallco area at an Aug. 19 public hearing, but postponed a decision to Sept. 16 to allow major stakeholders such as Apple Inc. and Hewlett-Packard to further study the plan.

Sand Hill Property Co., which purchased 17.4 acres of the South Vallco site earlier this year, was assigned the task of developing a master plan for integrating development of the 125-acre site. The area is bounded by Stevens Creek Boulevard, the Cupertino Square mall, Wolfe Road, Tantau Avenue, Finch Avenue and Vallco Parkway.

The master plan is a proposed aesthetic and development framework that the city hopes will serve as a springboard to turn the partially barren site into a downtown district or "main street." The master plan emphasizes the creation of a pedestrian-friendly district with a seamless connectivity between future and current commercial properties. "This is the last 17 acres we have left in the South Vallco area. This is something that is very important to us and we take it very seriously," said Councilman Gilbert Wong.

Representatives from Apple Inc. and Hewlett-Packard brought up concerns during public comments about some specific language in the master plan document. Both Apple and HP have small campuses in the South Vallco area.

Apple and HP representatives brought up security concerns with a potential trail

Blueprint, page 7



Cupertino COURIER

Volume 61, Number 22 • August 27, 2008 • Cupertino, CA • Est. 1947 • www.cupertinoCourier.com



Photograph by Lisette Poole

Shop owners use 'Spy' for critiques page 14

Mistie LoNardo is the president of EyeSpy, a business that specializes in professional 'mystery' critiquing and consulting services for hotels, bars, spas and restaurants, including Armadillo Willy's BBQ in Cupertino.



Photograph by Lisette Poole

Mistie LoNardo, president of EyeSpy, orders food from Alberto Rocha, manager at Armadillo Willy's BBQ. LoNardo says the restaurant placed a menu in front of the cash register after her secret shoppers reported that the large menu, which was placed on a wall, was difficult to see.

Mystery Guests

'EyeSpy' anonymously gauges customer feedback

By TIFFANY CARNEY

When Mistie LoNardo walks into a restaurant she can't help but straighten out the silverware on the napkin placed in front of her. Her eyes dart around as she makes a mental note of how she was greeted, how her order was

taken and how the food was served.

For the average person, it's not hard to evaluate the service and quality of food at a restaurant, but for LoNardo, it is her career.

LoNardo is the founder of Eye-

Spy Critiquing and Consulting. Even when she is not on assignment, she can't stop herself from conducting mental evaluations.

LoNardo started EyeSpy, a company that sends employees to evaluate restaurants and other

businesses in the service industry upon a business owner's request. "Spies" will dine at a restaurant, go to a movie or stay at a resort. After the experience, the EyeSpy employee writes a review and submits it to that venue so manage-

ment can use the feedback to make improvements.

Willow Street Pizza was EyeSpy's first customer and remains a customer today. After hearing about her company seven years ago, the owners hired EyeSpy to

send a mystery diner to their restaurant five times a month to evaluate every aspect of the eatery.

LoNardo conceived the idea for EyeSpy after she went for a job interview at a local restaurant. She was asked to dine there, then to come back and share her experience.

LoNardo gave a full report on her experience, including a detailed account of what she did and didn't like about the atmosphere, service and food.

She was hired on the spot, but turned down the job to start her own business instead.

Right away, she recruited five "spy" friends and a handful of restaurants. EyeSpy now has many clients in and outside of the Bay Area, including Steamers in Los Gatos, Armadillo Willy's, and almost all the restaurants in Santana Row.

EyeSpy also employs thousands of evaluators who utilize services at a venue, then write a four- to eight-page review within 24 hours.

"Anything encountered in the experience, we evaluate," LoNardo says. "It is a report card for the servers. It is a report card for management."

That write-up is then edited and submitted to management at the venue within 72 hours of the evaluation.

"[Management] gets to see the overall customers' experience," which is often hard data to collect, says LoNardo.

For chain restaurants such as Armadillo Willy's, it is important not only to make sure that each customer has a positive experience but also to ensure that each site is up to standards. Thus, they hire EyeSpy to conduct training and bimonthly evaluations for all nine of their restaurants, including those in Cupertino and Sunnyvale.

"You want the restaurant to know how an outsider sees them," says an evaluator from Willow Glen who prefers to remain anonymous. "It gives them specific points to work on in terms of improvement."

Armadillo Willy's has taken action on EyeSpy's feedback. In response to observations that barbecue sauce was too messy for standard napkins, a roll of paper towels is now on each table.

Bob Deagen, president and CEO of Armadillo Willy's, enjoys the ability to tailor evaluations to cover specific aspects of the dining experience.

"Every company has different things they are looking for. For us being more of a counter service restaurant we emphasize service and how the food tastes," says Deagen.

If a restaurant wants to rate the way a server pours the wine, announces a weeklong special or



Photograph by Jacqueline Ramseyer

Jen Lemus (right), one of the managers at Willow Street Pizza in Willow Glen, shares a laugh with Mistie LoNardo. Willow Street hires LoNardo's 'mystery diners' to come to their restaurants on a regular basis to critique the food and staff. While the clients don't know who the diners are, they know LoNardo.

offers the bread, it can be noted on the evaluation form.

"That is the purpose of the evaluation: Is the server following the standard for the restaurant?" LoNardo says.

LoNardo says EyeSpy evaluators are asked to pay explicit attention to a business, from its walkway and ambiance down to the light bulbs or ashtrays on outside tables. They note the exchange with the host, the walk to their table and how the menus are handed out. Close attention is paid to customer-server interaction, whether managers are present and how food and drinks are delivered.

Evaluators may leave with a full stomach, but do not leave with full pockets. Instead of being paid for their work, they are reimbursed for the meal. On average, that covers the cost of two drinks, two appetizers, two entrees and two desserts.

The anonymous diner, who has been an employee for nearly two years, says the job requires a keen sense of observation, a good memory and the ability to write well.

"We have a certain level of expectations for our evaluators," says LoNardo, who personally screens each applicant.

The evaluator also says there is a downside. "Sometimes you get a server and your heart breaks for



Photograph by Lisette Poole

Paper towels replaced napkins at Armadillo Willy's BBQ after EyeSpy secret shoppers found that napkins weren't enough to help wipe away messy barbecue sauce.

them because you know it is going to be a disaster."

The evaluator doesn't enjoy writing negative evaluations, but says it is all part of the job.

The EyeSpy employee says it can be disappointing, but for the most part, 95 percent are positive experiences.

For more information about

EyeSpy, visit www.theeyespy.com or call 408.292.1612.

Intern Christina Schwartz contributed to this story.