

FourPenn Partners lands GNC store, Bitty & Beau's Coffee at 1900 Smallman

Feb 2, 2023, 7:11pm EST



Tim Schooley

The building at 1900 Smallman in the Strip, where ply board shows where new stores for GNC and Bitty & Beau's Coffee are being built out.

After an affiliate of his FourPenn Partners bought the 20,000-square-foot terminal building at 1900 Smallman in the Strip District in late 2021, Mike Locke was all but fully leased enough to not need to make too many changes.

After all, much of the building was already leased to the night club Cavo on one end, with a 5,000-square-foot office for Legal Sifter next to it and a 4,200-square-foot store by Bass & Bennett Trading Co. furniture store.

Then he faced a new opportunity inspired by Covid-19 to shift a portion of the building from office use to retail along a busy stretch of Smallman.

"When Covid hit, they had people working from home," said Locke of Legal Sifter, who pursued the opportunity to get out of its lease. That enabled FourPenn Partners to establish a new GNC store as well as a new franchise location for Bitty & Beau's Coffee.

"This is a better use for the building," Locke said. "This is a nice fresh use of the space."

For GNC, it's a move in keeping with the nutritional supplements retailer's recent headquarters move from downtown to 3 Crossings, a change of address that resulted in the company closing its downtown store.

Meredith Klein, director of public relations for GNC, confirmed the basics of the new 2,400-square-foot store on Smallman, calling it a "hometown hub for the Pittsburgh founded-brand" that's less than a mile from its new office.

The new store is expected to open this summer across from the Strip District Terminal.

Next door to it will be a Bitty & Beau's Coffee shop, an expanding franchise [that's become a phenomenon as a social venture](#) that operates with the mission of providing job and career opportunities to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. According to the company, 80% of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the United States are unemployed.

The business was started in Wilmington, North Carolina, by Amy and Ben Wright, whose children Bitty & Beau for whom the shop is named were born with Down syndrome.

The Wrights have been featured as CNN Heroes, and Bitty & Beau's has expanded to 24 locations in 12 states.

Dan Heir is the local franchisee opening the shop, a venture that motivated him to leave his corporate career behind for the kind of enterprise in which he could find more value and meaning helping those who need it most.

He expects Bitty & Beau's Coffee will find its own clientele in a Strip District not exactly lacking in coffee shops.

"Our customer base that we are targeting is more than just your typical coffee shop customer base," he said. "Our hope is that the customers come in and appreciate their experience with employees in the shop."

He's shooting to open the new shop in the spring or early summer.

They're two retail newcomers to add to a five-block stretch of Smallman in which the Strip District Terminal is ramping up with new tenant leases and openings. Most recently, the Richard King Mellon Foundation announced it was moving into an 18,000-square-foot office in the terminal, joining the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission.

In terms of shops and restaurants there, Aslin Beer Co. recently opened an 18,000-square-foot craft beer hub in the terminal following a Chipotle Mexican Grill. Still to come are an 8,600-square-foot Novo Asian Food Hall this summer and a new Pittsburgh location of City Winery, a winery, restaurant and intimate performance venue.

"It just seems like there's something happening weekly up that way," said Locke of the Strip District Terminal.



Tim Schooley
Reporter - *Pittsburgh Business Times*