

## BOUTIQUES OPT FOR A CO-OP

Excerpted

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The Garment District, with eight locally owned boutiques and one national jewelry designer, will open this Saturday.

It's been 15 years or more since downtown has had much of any destination retail stores.

A few shops are huddled together in the Crossroads Arts District. Others, such as Slabotsky & Sons Tailors, have carried on by themselves.

So along with bringing new entertainment and restaurants to the area, developers of the Power & Light District were determined to make downtown "destination" retail again. That got more challenging when the economic downturn made for "desperation" retail, as shopping centers struggled to find tenants.

Even so, the Power & Light District has come up with a way to fill some of its retail space, support

local retailers and bring new draws to downtown. The Garment District, with eight locally owned boutiques and one national jewelry designer, will open Saturday at 1350 Main St.

During a heavy snowfall Friday, I got a pre-opening gander. The Garment District has soaring ceilings, cement floors, custom chandeliers (put together by the tenants), and large windows that let in loads of natural light.

It takes the hot new "store within-a-store" trend (popularized by the major department stores) and makes it a collective, with the retailers circling a center bar/concierge desk. Each "shop" also showcases some of its wares in a complete outfit.



“So it really brings us - in the Power & Light District - a critical mass of retail. Downtown is like it used to be: a shopping destination,” said Nick Benjamin, the district’s executive director. “It’s a really exciting mix, and I think the bar in the middle, and just the general aesthetics of the space ...with the high ceilings, the mannequins, and the location right on Main Street, make for a great combination.”

Boutique owners will pay rent to the district but pool their funds to employ a general manager, Randall Schneck, and three or four part-time employees, and to pay overhead costs, Benjamin said.

The name pays homage to Kansas City’s historic Garment District, a textile hub that operated just blocks from what today is the Power & Light District. The new Garment District will display a rotating collection of artifacts from the Kansas City Garment District Museum.

Most of the shop owners have other stores. The new co-op allows them to expand while having lower overhead costs and more cross-promotional opportunities.

Two new tenants were recently announced.

Christian Micheal Shuster, a Kansas City native, launched his own clothing line, Christian Micheal, in 2007, which he sells in boutiques and the Halls department stores. Shuster said he hoped his first co-op

store will be a platform to bring back the necktie and blazer as the “centerpiece of men’s fashion.”

New York-based Zani Gugglemann will sell her Santo line of pendants, which have been featured in Elle, Vogue, Bazaar and other international magazines. The pendants feature chains that hold several silver-cast bullets. The top of each bullet unscrews to reveal a small scroll. The wearer writes down a goal to put in the bullet, reminding the wearer not only to reach that goal but that there is a “silver bullet” to solve every problem.

The other boutiques in the 4,000-square-foot space are:

- City Girls, a contemporary women’s boutique with other stores in Gardner and Salina, Kan.
- Denim Couture, a men’s and women’s contemporary clothing boutique that has another store in Overland Park.
- The second area boutique for Imagery, a designer clothing store for men and women. The shop was a Westport mainstay for 25 years before new owners moved the store to Mission Farms in Leawood.
- The first store for Label, a men’s boutique that sells T-shirts, button-ups and designer denim.
- The first store for Polka Dot Petals, a men’s and women’s boutique that sells such clothing brands as Nicole Lee and Chinese Laundry.
- Two Chic Blvd., a women’s boutique that has another store in Overland Park.
- Urbantique, which sells modern custom accessories and apparel with vintage touches. It also is branching out to collegiate items.

Benjamin said the collective concept had been in the district’s plans from the beginning. The idea was based partly on the famed Fred Segal store in West Hollywood, Calif., which features several designers in stores-within-the-store.

“We really have limited space that’s left for retail, and this is a way to get a concentration of different offerings in one space,” Benjamin said. “And it complements the other stand-alone stores like Polished Edge, Zafar and Jos. A. Bank, and a few more that we will be announcing in the next couple of weeks.”