Area 15 in Las Vegas to offer an artsy, futuristic spin on retail and entertainment

By Mike Prevatt (contact)

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In a large, empty plot of land near Desert Inn Road on Thursday afternoon, an art curator conceived a wildly popular art festival that had once been the site of a large-scale sculpture that looked like a rusted Iron Giant sinking into the pavement. This could have purposed rush-hour passersby on the nearby I-15 — and they weren’t alone.

Plans for a 126,000-square-foot retail/entertainment venue called Area 15 to be built on that very site were announced, and its managing partners are keeping details to a minimum. A preview center for the project, which is slated to break ground in April and open during the last half of 2019, revealed the various sections of the future complex, a couple of large-scale artworks and the signing of Area 15’s first tenants: Mow Wolf, the multimedia art crew responsible for Santa Fe’s popular House of Eternal Return exhibit.

But what exactly the endeavor is supposed to be — other than an “immersive and unique experience” that would “appeal to a variety of clientele, including gamers, comic-con and sci-fi enthusiasts, artists, musicians and festival lovers,” as touted in its marketing — remains unknown. Which, of course, is by design.

"Area 15 will be a radical reimagining of entertainment and retail for the 21st century," said Winston Fisher of Fisher Brothers, one of the two New York-based companies behind the joint venture (Bennifer Studios creative agency is the other). "We've created a place with leasing for tenants that offer experiences, that are unique."

"The mall of America isn't dead," Michael Bennet of Bennet Studios later added. "It just needs to be reinvented. People don't want to go to strip malls. They want to interact with something different."

Area 15 is expected to be populated with amusement attractions like escape rooms and virtual reality, along with art exhibitions, bars, food options, themed events, live events from concerts to Ted Talks, and festivals — some of which will be offered in the 32,000-square-foot outdoor event space.

Mow Wolf, whose art projects incorporate narrative and fantasy (and have been partially funded by Game of Thrones author George R.R. Martin), will have three times the capacity for its Las Vegas exhibit than it has for the one in New Mexico. CEO Vince Kudlubek didn’t spell too much about what might fill that space, though local artists are expected to be among the contributors.

"We want to create the most incredible new media experience in the US," Kudlubek said. Local artist/designer Henry Chang will have his highly detailed, stainless steel Flux Capacitor art station — and driving people to Area 15 when it opens.

And lest any cynics were listening, Fisher reassured his audience that "this is happening," adding that money has been secured for the entire project. For one, the real mystery might not be whether something will open, but what that something will actually be.