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Crate & Barrel eyes Rookwood

By Lisa Biank Fasig

Home furnishings chain negotiating to open first local store at Exchange

Crate & Barrel, the popular home furnishings chain known for contemporary styles at moderate prices, has put Cincinnati back on its list of expansion sites, this time slating 2006 for a tentative store in Rookwood Exchange.

"We are in negotiations with them," said Bette Kahn, spokeswoman for the Chicago-based chain. "I think that Rookwood is the place."

Rookwood's developer confirmed that it has sent a lease agreement to Crate & Barrel, which sent comments back to be negotiated. "It's already been approved to move forward and to spend money on legal," said J.R. Anderson, director of development at Jeffrey R. Anderson Real Estate.

This turn of events helps to finally end speculation as to whether Crate & Barrel would open in Rookwood or Kenwood Towne Centre. The Courier first reported in August 2003 that Crate & Barrel wanted to expand into Cincinnati, possibly by 2005.

Real estate sources speculated Crate & Barrel would go to either Kenwood's new open-air expansion, called Streetscape, or to Rookwood Exchange. Architects for both projects drew the store into their designs. Kahn confirmed that Crate & Barrel had been considering both sites.

But a few key events have occurred since 2003.

First, the Rookwood project was put on ice after six home and business owners refused to sell their properties to make way for the new development. The city eventually won the right to take the properties through eminent domain, and hearings are now taking place to determine what the city will pay for each.

Meanwhile, Kenwood's Streetscape project moved forward, landing six new tenants.

"We have heard that they are pretty dead-set on the Rookwood project, assuming (Rookwood) can get over all their barriers," said Scott Saddlemire, vice president at Brandt Retail Group in Kenwood.

Sources at Kenwood Towne Centre could not be reached for comment.