

GREATER NEW YORK

Roosevelt Island Stores Set

By Laura Kusisto

A bid to transform Roosevelt Island's windswept Main Street into a picturesque shopping strip is getting a boost, with recent deals by a new organic food market, wine store and a couple of food chains.

The narrow island off Manhattan's east side with a population of more than 10,000 has long been a middle-class enclave, but the Main Street was pocked with vacancies, giving it the feel of a ghost town, even on weekends.

Now Roosevelt Island is on the verge of major changes: New market-rate developments have been built, Cornell University is building a two-million-square-foot technology campus and a long-planned memorial to Franklin Delano Roosevelt on the southern tip of the island is slated to open this fall.

With the anticipated influx of students, tourists and new residents, the island's retail district

is playing catch up.

Part of the problem was that for several decades, the stores on Main Street were controlled by the Roosevelt Island Operating Corp., a state entity, which made it difficult to rent the space.

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A partnership of the Hudson Cos. and Related Cos. took over 33 stores in August and is starting the process of renovating it to emulate the feel of a traditional small-town Main Street, with new storefronts, signage, building furniture and information kiosks.

"It's been a huge bummer for the residents of Roosevelt Island that they have not had a proud

retail corridor to call their own," said David Kramer, a principal with Hudson Cos.

New tenants include organic market Wholesome Direct, a Subway sandwich outlet and Island Spirit, which will be the only wine store on the island. The Child School is opening a 7,000-square-foot fine-arts center on an upper floor, which will include art, music, drama and dance studios.

A Gristedes grocery store that has been on the island for more than 20 years is also being remodeled. The grocery will be the guinea pig for a new concept for Gristedes, in which the store will also include boutiques, such as an organic market and a sugar-free market.

"This is going to be a new concept that we're experimenting with on Roosevelt Island," said John Catsimatidis, the owner of Gristedes. "We do reasonably well, but we could do better."