



Bozard fuels up plans for auto-themed restaurant within dealership

By Colleen Jones
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As part of a larger expansion project, Bozard Ford Lincoln is developing an automotive-themed bar and restaurant at the site of the former Gander Mountain property near the St. Augustine Outlets.

Jeff King, vice president and general manager, confirmed to The Record Monday plans to lease part of the Gander Mountain site it owns to a Florida-based hospitality chain called Ford's Garage which carries craft beer and cocktails, burgers and other pub fare in a casual atmosphere decorated with vintage auto memorabilia.

Bozard Ford Co. purchased the former Gander Mountain at 550 Outlet Mall Blvd. for \$5.6 million in October 2018, according to St. Johns County property records.

The St. Augustine store, which previously operated under the Camping World name, was opened in 2007. It was acquired by Gander Mountain in 2017. The company filed for bankruptcy later that year.

King said the long-term plan is to reconstruct the 65,000-square-foot Gander Mountain building to house not only the restaurant space, but also a separate Lincoln showroom and 48 service bays, more than doubling the bays it has at its existing dealership adjacent to the property. The new building will also include 15,000 square feet for administrative offices and a day care center for children of employees.

The Ford dealership lot will remain unchanged.

The site is just off the intersection of Interstate 95 and State Road 16. Aside from a small food court, there are no restaurants near the mall complex on the east side of the interstate.

King said he believes the bar/restaurant concept will attract traffic from the outlets, as well as motorists from I-95 with such prominent visibility from the highway. But he is also hoping Ford's Garage will bring a boost to his own business as well.

“One of the things people hate is wasting their time, and so if you have something to do while they’re waiting [on a car] it’s a much more enjoyable experience,” said King.

With a glass wall dividing the restaurant from the Lincoln showroom, King added, “If we put hundreds of customers a day 40 feet from the Lincoln product, a good number will check out that inventory.”

Bozard did not previously have a dedicated space to display Lincoln models.

As the owners move forward in the permitting process with the County, King anticipated the project would be completed in full by the beginning of 2020.

Ford’s Garage currently runs 11 locations in Florida and one in Michigan. According to the company’s president, Marc Brown, the chain plans to open four to five more restaurants by the end of the year, including the one in St. Augustine, which Brown said will also be the first to open at a car dealership.

“As we’ve been migrating across the state, the opportunity to bring Ford’s Garage to St. Augustine was something we were very excited about,” Brown said in a phone interview with The Record Monday afternoon.

The entire build-out is expected to produce about 100 additional jobs with the dealership/service garage, as well as another 100 positions for the restaurant, according to King.