

A compelling southern living



'Our story is about the celebration of life
that we want to enhance the experience of our customers.'

JOY POLLOSO
Senior VP For Commercial Operations

FILINVEST LAND, INC.

By **BERNIE CAHILES-MAGKILAT**

There is a new development in Alabang that is yet to be explored, the expanded and refurbished Festival Mall, the largest regional mall in the south.

Joy Polloso, senior vice-president for retail commercial operations of Filinvest Land Inc., sees the new development not just as an added attraction, but a new component that enhances what Festival Mall has been known all these years: An entertainment venue for families, friends, and guests.

It is seen as an enclave in the south that offers substance in a more natural and organic setting.

The expansion area, which is connected to the already sprawling main Festival Mall building, is carved out of the natural terrain where the shopping complex is located. It retains the very contour of the area in its faithful construction.

ARCHITECTURE

The multi-billion peso expansion of the Festival Mall, which is designed after the Mall of America in Minnesota, is located within the sprawling Filinvest City in Alabang.

Since its early development, Festival Mall has always put nature a major consideration in its design. And it goes very well.

Filinvest area has elevated or hilly

crowds in general because we offer wider choices," says Polloso even as she noted of its fast growing middle class customers.

Polloso attributed this to the robust economy, which is a result of the Aquino government's thrust for good governance, huge OFW remittances, the BPO and the booming real estate sectors.

Contributing to Festival Mall's strength is the decentralization of the market moving towards the CALABARZON (Calamba, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon) that has opened the doors for companies to expand here. The two converging expressways — Skyway and South Luzon expressways, make travel to the south a lot faster.

"More residential developments are also sprouting in the area and the skyway make it more convenient for south bound consumers to do their shopping here," says Polloso. The South Station, which serves as the new transportation hub for public vehicles going south, provides convenience to passengers and buses plying back to Manila.

"We see a very strong secondary market where customers expand beyond Cavite, Laguna and Batangas and converge in this catchment area," says Polloso.

"We've seen traffic growing high double-digit of 10 to 12 percent because more than the psycho-graphic behavior,

"So we offer more choices in fashion and specialty brands. It is a good balance," adds Polloso.

One major distinguishing feature in the new wing is the presence of Landmark, a mall with unique positioning for its department store and a supermarket. Its selective presence in Metro Manila has made it compelling for shoppers to seek where it is located.

Landmark is going to cater to the south market as there is a good number of people who drive all the way from the south to shop in Landmark in Makati.

"We heard from our southerners that they welcome Landmark," she adds.

Their tenants must have been doing very well because most of them have been with the mall for the past 18 years.

"They still want to be with us and want to catch up so they align their plans with us. They appreciate what we are doing," Polloso said.

She noted that H & M, which straddles between the old and new building, is expected to be a big attraction. All the big international and local brands are there, too.

"Even as we have to really prepare ourselves for competition, we really ask what more can we can offer," says Polloso.

REBRANDING

The new developments have been extended to its logo.

green spaces than brick and mortar edifices to the point of sacrificing efficiency ratio.

"We respect the environment as we build around the natural terrain of the area, the natural flow of water," she adds.

This way, the development did not only integrate the natural scape of the area but enhanced it with more green spaces.

The natural river ecosystem has been preserved flowing all the way to Laguna de Bay. The River Park is teeming with fishes, turtles and migrating birds at certain times of the year. They are building five bridges, each with different character.

There are massive water features for the public to enjoy.

"We have jogging paths, bike paths as there are enough parking spaces," Polloso adds.

"Our story is about the celebration of life that we want to enhance the experience of our customers," she adds.

This is conveyed in its new logo which depicts a wholesome, work-life balance in the south.

Filinvest has embraced a sustainable dimension in all of its developments that Festival Mall has embraced the use of clean transportation with its patronage on the use of e-jeepney around the complex.

dream has been transcended unto the development of their commercial centers.

All Filinvest developments may not come as massive, but the value proposition of the brand is always present in all.

"Relative to the size, we always put that kind of experience that we are known for," she adds.

Filinvest is now the partner of the Clark Conversion and Development Authority for the development of Clark Green City. It has developments in Tagaytay and Cebu.

The retail aspect in any development is important because it is a recurring income.

PASSION

"I've always look at Filinvest being a Filipino firm that remains strong and a steadfast major player in the growing shopping center sector," says Polloso.

This is where her passion and expertise can come in to contribute even further to Filinvest's relevance in this market.

"That is why it is more fulfilling to be part of this organization," says Polloso.

She believes the social dimension in their projects to really make an impact to its customers. For instance, Festival Mall has best practices in terms of governance where shoppers are not shortchanged. Filipinos are well exposed to foreign brands.

consideration in its design. And it goes very well.

Filinvest area has elevated or hilly portions that have been preserved in its design, giving a feel for a countryside setting.

Since the design has followed the natural contour of the place, the view and ambiance is naturally relaxing.

The development highlights the river that runs through it and enhances its natural feature.

Set on a 2,300 square meter area and officially opened in December, 2014, River Park offers a very unique and refreshing dining experience. It combines 11 distinct dining concepts, making it the newest dining cluster in Alabang. The River Park Amphitheater has hosted some of the county's top music acts such as the Manila Philharmonic Orchestra, The Company, the Kundirana, and Rachel Alejandro.

The Festival Mall is interconnected. The River Park, which is separated from the ongoing new wing, is connected by the boardwalk, which in turn connects all the way to the South Station area.

"We just follow the terrain," adds Polloso.

The entire expansion area is expected to be operational by the third quarter this year. Some of the tenants have already moved in while some are in the final touches.

The lower ground with a gross area of 90,000 square meters and leasable space of 40,000 square meters is the link to the main mall.

Including its anchor store Landmark,

"We've seen traffic growing high double-digit of 10 to 12 percent because more than the psycho-graphic behavior, the basic reason is the location in relation to institutions in the area," says Polloso.

Aside from the business establishments, Alabang offers top notch medical care with the presence of Asian Hospital. It has a good number of basic education facilities and colleges. It has a huge business community and is host to a booming BPO operation, which congregates at the North Gate.

"On Sunday's we have a strong religious group and this is a different flow of people that adds dimension to the diverse community in Festival Mall," says Polloso.

The Festival Mall itself is surrounded by other retail strips of Filinvest such as the lifestyle component at the West Gate, the South Station for transiting passengers, The Tent area and a few clusters of opportunities and other zone developments.

So far, Festival Mall is the only mall with five anchor stores: Shopwise Supercenter, SaveMore, Robinsons Department Store, Ace Hardware, and Handyman.

COMPETITION

Polloso is confident, the new wing is expected to attract people from the upper segment of the market, where the main Festival Mall may be found wanting.

As more retail establishments are growing, competition is also becoming stiff. The expansion of Festival Mall will give its customers more choices in one huge mall.

REBRANDING

The new developments have been extended to its logo.

"We changed and refreshed our old logo so we can move with the times," says Polloso.

The new logo still features that fiesta-design but with a twist for freshness. The color has been changed, making it more classic.

"The logo is still festive but modern. It conveys more of a celebration," she adds.

"Filipinos are into family bonding moments and celebrate every occasion so we have distinct food concepts. That is why, we allow more outdoor experience for diners," she adds.

"What makes us different is we are massive, we have the completeness of a very strong regional mall," she adds.

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

"But more than these, our customers experience the family amusement concept of Festival Mall," says Polloso.

It is not only the expansion side that is making its customers excited but there have been lots of face lifting ongoing in terms of the interior feel and ambiance of the entire complex.

These efforts are geared towards re-invigorating the family-oriented concept of the mall.

Long before other malls have incorporate theme parks, Festival Mall has already a theme park inside the famous Pixie Forest. It boasts of its famous train ride inside the mall and the children's play zone.

"We have started with the carousel

clean transportation with its patronage on the use of e-jeepney around the complex.

"We have a pleasurable life here where people can work and play. This is where they can hang around with friends after work," says Polloso.

More BPO firms are establishing offices at the North Gate, more shops are opening up and Landmark will open by end this year.

Robinsons now occupies three levels with the addition of the children's department last year.

Shopwise has been drawing all traffic while Save More is a very strong brand.

"There is nothing more to ask for once inside this mall and Makati is just 15 to 20 minutes away using the Skyway," says Polloso.

"The completeness will always be there as we provide an avenue for all the compelling reasons for people to visit us. We found our element, a recreational experience and we would like to elaborate on that," says Polloso.

Festival Mall has become more of a lifestyle experience than just a massive retail center.

The expansion has new social dimension too. It will create more jobs. Landmark alone is expected to employ 500 workforce.

"There are 700 shops, which could mean a possible 5,000 to 6,000 jobs," gushes Polloso.

"We work hand in hand with local government as we give preference to constituents around this area," says Polloso, who has been with other big

where shoppers are not shortchanged. Filipinos are well exposed to foreign brands.

"We connect globally, so we cannot shortchange our customers, instead we provide a very superior, updated experience because Filipinos have sophisticated shopping perspective," adds Polloso, who espouses passionate servant leadership. Polloso always makes it a point to credit accomplishments as a group effort.

"I always make them feel that every accomplishment of the organization is a team effort," says Polloso, who believes that working in a shopping center enables one to branch out to a lot of opportunities in the consumer sector.

"You can actually circulate from one discipline to another, you can go into marketing, business development, property development and learn other dimensions in the business like customer service," says Polloso, who finished political science cum laude and always wanted to become a lawyer.

This Cebuana, who still lives in Cebu where her family, is also a fitness buff. She used to run. Now, she bikes a lot.

She was also grateful for having joined the Ayala company in Cebu becoming one of the company's pioneer in Cebu.

"Now I am very happy and fulfilled working with Filinvest because you are being recognized for the contribution that you do and continue to be very relevant to the organization. It is a good environment for me, of course there are challenges. But this is perfect because we are very

Including its anchor store Landmark, which is a four-story 50,000-square meter area, the total gross floor area in this new wing is about 150,000 square meters.

The mall is connected to the River Park via a walkway that leads customers to Crimson Hotel.

CATCHMENT

Being in the center of Alabang and a gateway to a more vibrant economy in the south, the Festival Mall is indeed a catchment area. Polloso sees lots of Filipinos converging in Alabang.

Those living in the southern part of Manila no longer need to go to Manila. BPO operations have been robust in the North Gate of the Filinvest City.

Festival Mall, which has been serving as a regional mall, expects to widen its clientele-base.

“We have wider ranges of ABC plus

huge mall.

There will be new brands, expanding outlets and new retail concepts happening in this wing.

“A few brands are even duplicating their presence here because of the business potential,” says Polloso.

Wellness is also a growing concept. “We have a couple of medical facilities that drive people to linger in the mall,” she adds.

“We are strong also in the digital concept, which is a growing category and has been instrumental in catching people.”

Festival Mall is also big in home concepts with the fourth floor dedicated to home furnishings.

The ground floor level is dedicated to food while the second floor is a mix of fashion and food.

“We have started with the carousel and we are planning to refresh the components of the Pixie forest, train area and the cinema so there is more to come and more to experience in a freshly-minted Festival Mall,” she adds.

The next move would be fixing the merchandize zone to ensure they are presented in a more cohesive manner and pleasing to eye.

ECOSYSTEM

The development did not alter anything, but preserved its original setting.

“We are trying to preserve the good memories in this area and part of that is respecting the landscape and creating sustainability,” says Polloso, who cited the preservation of the old Alabang Vaccine Laboratory as a heritage building.

In fact, the development was done in such a way that they provide for more

Polloso, who has been with other big shopping centers before.

INFLUENCE

An expert in the shopping/commercial center business, Polloso has studied the lifestyle and behavior of customers and their choices. And Festival Mall is expected to capitalize on this, on how to influence their lifestyle and impact on the family in a positive way.

“You’ve got to be passionate about it and care a lot because you contribute to social progress. So our programs should all be aligned with that,” adds Polloso, who is also a part-time lecturer in Ateneo for strategic development.

That may not be the thrust among other developers, but Polloso stressed that Filinvest, a mass housing developer, is anchored on building the Filipino dream of owning his own house. This

But this is perfect because we are very bullish in our developments,” says Polloso, who also had stints working abroad in the same real estate sector.

Her work experience is something she brings to the organization. She gets involved in a more diverse sector as Ateneo lecturer on strategic management.

“I believe we continue to impact and enhance so we also give back and become social agent,” says Polloso, who has embraced and is now espousing what she learned at Ateneo’s “Our Business is Our Country” mantra.

“This brings with you not just professional enhancement but a commitment to be part of social change. So I am bringing on my own capacity to create some changes and improvements to contribute to nation building in our own capacity,” concludes Polloso.