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# Inglewood real estate market expected to score as Chargers join Rams at new stadium

BY ROGER VINCENT

The Chargers' decision to join the Rams at a splashy new stadium in Inglewood has at least one builder even more pumped up about the city's prospects.

The promise of pro football in Inglewood, still three years away, has already given a lift to real estate developer Sandy Sigal, who is spending \$15 million to renovate a 1960s-era shopping center there.

The football buzz, which started a year ago with the Rams' decision to play at a \$2.66-billion sports and entertainment complex now under construction, has given Sigal clout with desirable tenants - the kind who might have turned their noses up at the city in the past.

"Once the Rams announced, it made a bunch of those retailers who didn't know where Inglewood was, or had a preconceived notion about it, think," said Sigal, president of NewMark Merrill Cos. of Woodland Hills. "It pushed a lot of guys over the edge."

New tenants he landed for the formerly rundown center on Crenshaw Boulevard set for completion this summer include Planet Fitness, Save-A-Lot, Chipotle, Five Guys and Ono Hawaiian BBQ, all national brands that are new to Inglewood.

Chargers and new Coach Anthony Lynn face a huge challenge: Making themselves relevant in L.A. "You can take the Chargers out of San Diego, but you can't take the Chargers out of the Chargers."

Days after unveiling and promptly retiring the most reviled logo in Los Angeles sports history, the new head coach of the perpetually stumbling franchise opened his introductory news conference Tuesday.

But if having one football team to your city's name is good, is having two really appreciably better?

Sigal thinks so, as does Inglewood booster Marc Little. He discounts studies that have shown sports facilities don't necessarily boost local economies and predicts that the presence of the Chargers will make a significantly greater impact on the community of 115,000 residents than the Rams alone would.

"With 20 home games instead of 10, we'll double the benefits for local businesses like retail and



**Sandy Sigal** is the developer of the Crenshaw Imperial Plaza shopping center in Inglewood.

hotels," said Little, the outgoing president of the Chamber of Commerce.

He also hopes the presence of two pro teams will improve perceptions some may have of Inglewood as unsafe or unfriendly to business.

"A lot of cities want to throw stones at Inglewood because of the journey of its reputation," Little said. "Inglewood is a vibrant city poised to take advantage of every opportunity coming this way."

Less convinced that opportunity is knocking is real estate agent and investor Leo Nordine, who said he rushed to scour the Internet for commercial properties to buy a year ago when he learned the Rams would be coming to Inglewood. But he said he didn't pull the trigger because he said he couldn't find a suitable deal.

The announcement last week that the Chargers would be leaving San Diego hasn't changed Nordine's calculations. He said that when he heard the news, he didn't start property shopping again. He doubts other investors did either.

"I don't see the same enthusiasm," Nordine said. "We already have a team."

Little's take on the matter? He claims there are few easy real estate deals to be had because people who own property in Inglewood are loath to part with it before an anticipated run-up in values still to come.

"Owners are holding," he said. "Ones who need to sell are getting two or three times what they paid a year or two ago."

Though the cache attached to having two pro football teams is being seen by some as an economic lift for the city, it's hard to measure how much of Inglewood's building surge has to do with the return of pro sports (the Lakers and Kings played in the landmark Forum arena from 1967 to 1999, and the WNBA's Sparks played there from 1997 to 2001) and how much is a logical turn of the real estate market.

Neighborhoods nearby have flourished in recent years amid the long recovery from the recession, and it was almost inevitable that investment would

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— Sandy Sigal, real estate developer

seep into Inglewood, where real estate rents and prices have been comparatively low, industry observers say.

A 2014 makeover of the Forum made Inglewood home to one of the region's most popular concert venues. There is also anticipation that the light rail Crenshaw/LAX Line that will serve Inglewood starting in 2019 will lift the city's profile and spark spending.

Real estate broker Kitty Wallace of Colliers International said Inglewood's apartment investment market is finally picking up speed after years in the doldrums.

She recalled selling an Inglewood apartment building for \$5 million in the late 1990s and discovering to her chagrin a decade later that it was still worth that amount. But prices have nearly doubled in the last four years. The average price of an Inglewood apartment has jumped from \$124 per square foot in 2012 to \$217 per square foot today.

Prices of apartments in nearby Playa Vista, Culver City and Baldwin Hills escalated after the recession, she said, and the wave is finally reaching Inglewood.

"Money really started to come to Inglewood a year ago," she said. Average apartment rents are up too, from about \$1,000 a month for a one-bedroom in 2012 to \$1,350 today.

Competition for real estate is getting more pronounced but most of the improvements, such as Sigal's neighborhood shopping center, are minnows compared to the whale that will envelop the Rams and Chargers.

The luxurious stadium for up to 80,000 fans will be part of a 60-acre sports and entertainment complex one team owner called "NFL Disney World" being developed by Rams owner Stan Kroenke.

The stadium project is part of an even larger mixed-use development by Kroenke and Stockbridge Capital Group on the adjacent former site of the Hollywood Park horse racing track. Work is under way on a new neighborhood with more than 2,000 homes and condominiums, as well as stores, restaurants, offices, a hotel, public parks, playgrounds and a lake.

Real estate broker Carl Muhlstein of JLL compared the Inglewood development slated to come together over the next decade to Warner Center in the San Fernando Valley, Playa Vista near Marina del Rey and burgeoning South Park in downtown Los Angeles.

"It looks like the next big thing," he said.

The presence of the Chargers ensures that Inglewood's reputation won't be tied solely to one team, Sigal said.

"It won't just be known as Rams stadium now," he said. "The idea that this is wider than one team super-validates the idea that Inglewood is a place to come and do business."