



Alexandra Clough

Big Time boost for Clematis coming

Looks like Clematis Street is making a big-time comeback — with a little help from the **Big Time Restaurant Group**.

The hip West Palm Beach company, owner of **City Cellar** restaurant at CityPlace and **Nobles Bar** on Clematis, is making another bet on the downtown West Palm Beach district. Big Time plans to open the Mexican-themed **Rocco's Tacos** eatery by November.

And here's the big news: Big Time is moving back into its former **Big City Tavern** space at Clematis Street and Olive Avenue, 10 years after it first opened in the space.

But don't look for a pricey American grill. Big Time's **Todd Herbst** said Rocco's will not be expensive. "But it won't be a taco stand, either," he said.

The idea is to serve a moderately priced menu to cater to as many diners as possible. In these tough economic times, Herbst said, it doesn't make sense to do an expensive concept. "This will be easier on people's wallets," he said.

Big City Tavern on Clematis opened in 1997 and was among the first restaurants to signal the street's 1990s revival. But soon after CityPlace opened in 2000, Clematis fell on tough times. Big City Tavern was sold in 2004 and became **L'Opera**, which closed last year.

But now the new city hall complex is going up. And **Clematis Street Live**, a restaurant and bar complex, is opening soon, too.

Big City's move signals real confidence in the street, observers say.

"They know the business better than anybody," said **Jonathan Satter** of **Compass Realty**. (Satter is involved in a partnership that owns the Rocco's space.)

■

Clematis Street is also seeing interest from new retailers: The former **Banana Republic** clothing store will soon become the only Florida store of **Maine Cottage**, a furniture retailer.

The home furnishings store has two other locations, one in Yarmouth, Maine, and the other in Charleston, S.C. Satter, whose partnership also owns this space in the 300 block of Clematis, said Maine Cottage officials were impressed by downtown West Palm Beach's character.

"They could have gone to CityPlace or Palm Beach Gardens, but they loved the authenticity of Clematis," Satter said. Maine Cottage sells home accessories and custom furniture painted in a range of beachy hues.

Helping boost the deal is a \$75,000 incentive grant from the **Downtown Development Authority**. The DDA recently launched a new program designed to lure retailers back.

■