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First Selectman Tim Herbst officially opens the new Teavana store in the Westfield mall Friday. The opening was the second in two weeks at the mall and at least three more are planned in the coming months. (Photo by Donald Eng)

It isn't just the structure of the Westfield mall that is getting updated. New stores continue to open, and General Manager Bryan Gaus said the pace of new development is accelerating.

Teavana, a seller of loose leaf tea and tea accessories, opened its doors for business Friday. Among its first customers were Gaus and First Selectman Tim Herbst, who ordered an herb and Ceylon combination Gaus recommended from the store's tea bar.

"Oh my God, this is good," said Herbst, normally a coffee drinker.

The ribbon-cutting also featured local business leaders, and within minutes the store had a line five deep at the bar.

Gaus said Teavana was the kind of addition the public had been clamoring for and was part of an effort to upgrade the mall's image and retail offerings.

"The renovation is making our location more attractive to the kind of stores we want, and that in turn leads to a turnover in our clientele," Gaus said. He added that Westfield

management was aggressively working with individual stores to upgrade their own spaces to match the \$35-million renovation going on in the mall.

As for the renovation, Gaus said there was a small army of workers toiling round the clock to meet the Nov. 19 public unveiling date.

“It may not look like it, but it’s actually very close, we’re ahead of schedule,” he said, standing on a bare concrete floor in the future food court. Located in the space formerly occupied by discount clothing store Steve & Barry’s the new food court will feature 11 food vendors, and a two-story glass wall on one side. Panera Bread, which is currently under construction in the space directly above the new food court, will have tables that overlook the food court in a two-story atrium-like setting.

Residents attending the mall’s unveiling will also see a holiday theme unlike any before at the mall, Gaus said.

But the heart of any mall is its retail offerings, and Gaus said Teavana and makeup store Sephora, which opened in late September, were just the beginning. Skechers and Temptations perfume store plan openings before November, Gaus said. In addition, Apple and J.Crew are in the earlier stages of opening a store, he said.

Outside the mall, LA Fitness has begun construction work on a new 45,000-square-foot sports club, scheduled to open in early 2011. The club will feature full-court basketball, racquetball, a four-lane lap pool, a whirlpool, locker rooms, and separate aerobic and stationary bike studios. These amenities will surround a full array of 75 pieces of the latest generation cardio equipment, select drive circuit training and free weight areas. Babysitting and personal training will also be available.

More information about the center’s \$35-million revitalization, including video renderings of the renovated center, may be found at westfield.com/trumbull.