



Glen Lennox Stories: Coco Is Coming!

By Art Chansky

Of the positive impact Grubb Properties has already made in Chapel Hill through the early stages of the Glen Lennox redevelopment, there is no greater example than the first business to occupy the Gwendolyn office building adjacent to the first phase of apartments on 15-501.

In September, Coco will open in 3,000 square feet on the southeast corner of the four-story commercial center. Coco, formerly Coco Bean at East 54, will continue as a favorite plant-based coffee and pastry café while it expands to lunches and a full-service dinner eatery and bar with beer, wine and spirits.

Clay Grubb, the CEO of Grubb Properties, personally recruited owners Tamara and Steve Lackey to be the first tenants at the Gwendolyn. And while the building continues to lease its commercial office space, the almost full-to-capacity Link Linden apartments in the adjacent complex will instantly provide a regular customer base from tenants in the 200-plus units.



The Gwendolyn

Tamara Lackey, who is also professional children's photographer and animal rescue advocate, says the expansion is a natural progression from Coco Bean, which became a popular coffee shop at East 54 but needed more space to meet the Lackeys' plans and dreams. And Grubb remains an active and generous collaborator.

“They are perfect development partners,” Tamara said. “They encouraged us to move here and have gone way beyond what we expected them to do.”

For example, Coco will have an L-shaped brick patio for coffee, lunch and dinner. Tamara wanted to integrate the inside dining of 101 seats with the 8-month outdoor season. Grubb suggested turning the glass wall on the south side into accordion doors that open with the touch of a button. Customers outside will sit under a sleek steel overhang as those inside will enjoy the natural air that flows through.

“I didn’t even know such a thing existed before Grubb suggested it,” Tamara said of the folding nano walls. “It’s an example of their willingness to be involved to make it a wonderful experience for all of the people who come in.”



Tamara Lackey

Grubb Properties has been known for years as a pioneer in green building and always includes the latest technology in their office complexes. But the pandemic has caused them to upgrade even more so with key pads that require less human touch and providing more fresh air through their cooling units.

Grubb is also enthusiastic about Coco continuing to hold weekend events for animals needing homes on the adjacent grassy area just across the street. Tamara's photos of children and animals who are available for adoption will adorn some of the walls at Coco while the [Beautiful Together Animal Sanctuary](#) is also under construction on the 83 acres they bought west of town. She is the Executive Director of the safe refuge for animals in need and her almost all-female staff has rescued hundreds of dogs and cats from families who lost their pets during storms or other hardships and found foster homes for them. And now they are beginning to accept horses and donkeys that will roam the sanctuary when it is completed next year.

While Coco's plant-based menu is yet to be finished and released, Tamara says the state-of-the-art kitchen will include ventless cooking that improves taste and increases safety. Small plates will include a selection of salads and sides, and she raves about the lightly fried chicken sandwich which she knows will become very popular.

"We will have the same home-made breakfast pastries, but instead of being displayed under glass they will be warmed to order in the kitchen."

She wants Coco to become all things to all people, from the runners and bikers to stop in, to the casual Sunday brunch and daily lunch crowd, to those who want a unique experience for dinner and drinks.

The treated wood bar and finishes are an attractive complement to the polished concrete floors and warm wall coverings from the entrance lobby to the room at the back for private dinners and parties. Of course, plants will be plentiful.

"We're beyond excited about relocating and expanding operations to the Gwendolyn building," Lackey says. "We're looking forward to providing a first-of-its-kind atmosphere and space for the Glen Lennox and Chapel Hill community to connect and enjoy."