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Watchung's Blue Star Shopping Center Sees 40% Surge in Visits as Redevelopment Draws New Restaurants and Entertainment



More than 23,000 square feet of new leases — including Raising Cane's, honeygrow, iSmash and Back Nine Golf — underscore the Route 22 center's transformation into a regional destination.

WATCHUNG, N.J. (June 23, 2026) — [Blue Star Shopping Center](#) is drawing 3.8 million visitors annually, up 40.1% year over year according to Placer.ai, and [Levin Management Corp.](#) (LMC) is building on that momentum with more than 23,000 square feet of new leases. The additions bring fast-casual dining, experiential entertainment and a diverse mix of regional and national quick-service brands to a 420,000-square-foot Route 22 property that already counts ShopRite, Kohl's, Burlington, Marshalls and Planet Fitness among its tenants.

The new tenants reflect a deliberate shift in how LMC is positioning the Watchung center. With 269,000 residents within a 5-mile radius and average household incomes above \$208,000, the surrounding market is strong. But consumers increasingly expect more than convenience from a shopping center, and LMC has responded by curating a mix of dining and entertainment concepts designed to drive repeat visits and longer stays.

Leading the new dining additions is Sakura Teriyaki, which just signed a lease for a 4,000-square-foot freestanding restaurant with a dedicated pickup drive-thru. The New Jersey-based quick-service concept, which operates locations in Belleville and Jersey City, offers a menu of teriyaki, bento boxes, poke bowls and sushi rolls made with fresh ingredients. Also now open is honeygrow, a 2,400-square-foot restaurant. The Philadelphia-born fast-casual concept specializes in wholesome, fully customizable stir-fries, salads and honeybars made with locally sourced ingredients. Construction is underway on one of Blue Star Shopping Center's most anticipated additions: an approximately 4,000-square-foot Raising Cane's Chicken Fingers restaurant featuring an outdoor patio and drive-thru service. The rapidly expanding quick-service chain has built a loyal following with its streamlined menu of chicken fingers, crinkle-cut fries, coleslaw, Texas toast and its signature Cane's Sauce.

On the entertainment side, iSmash will open in a 7,234-square-foot venue offering a range of immersive experiences, including rage rooms, black light splatter painting and axe throwing, designed for individuals, group outings and corporate team-building events. Back Nine Golf will bring a 5,465-square-foot indoor golf simulator experience to the center, giving members 24/7 access to industry-leading simulator technology in a climate-controlled setting suited for players looking to improve their game or simply enjoy a social

outing year-round. Together, the two concepts give Blue Star a differentiated draw that goes beyond traditional retail.

Burlington recently opened at the property, and the new Marshalls store is expected to open soon, further strengthening an established roster of national and regional tenants that includes Five Guys, Taco Bell and a growing lineup of dining, retail and entertainment options along one of New Jersey's busiest retail corridors.

"The visit numbers tell the story," said Matthew K. Harding, chief executive officer of Levin Management Corp. "A 40% increase isn't a blip. It reflects a fundamentally more compelling place to spend time. We've been intentional about building a mix where dining, entertainment and convenience retail reinforce each other, and the retailer demand we're seeing confirms that strategy is working."

E.J. Moawad, senior leasing representative at LMC, represented the landlord in all transactions.

"Blue Star has real momentum right now, and it's attracting exactly the kind of retailers and entertainment concepts that today's consumers are seeking out," Moawad said. "The diversity of what's coming speaks to how much the center has evolved and how strong the demand is from tenants who want to be part of it."

Co-brokers in the transactions included Joe Brendel of Newmark representing iSmash; Danielle Brunelli of RJ Brunelli & Co. representing Raising Cane's; Chad Littleton of Morrow Hill representing Back Nine Golf; and Jeff Howard and Matt Grundy of RIPCO Real Estate representing honeygrow.

Located along a high-traffic stretch of U.S. Route 22 with convenient access to Interstate 78, Blue Star benefits from strong demographics and significant daily traffic. Current leasing opportunities include spaces ranging from approximately 1,600 to 27,000 square feet, as well as an 8,200-square-foot second-generation restaurant pad site.

North Plainfield, N.J.-based Levin Management Corporation (LMC) is a full-service commercial real estate services firm with more than 70 years of experience. The company's portfolio includes approximately 125 properties totaling 16 million square feet across the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic, primarily focused on grocery-anchored open-air retail centers. LMC provides leasing, property management, construction, accounting and financial reporting, marketing, and acquisition/disposition consulting, delivering tailored strategies to maximize asset value for institutional and private owners.

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