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WHAT'S DEVELOPING: DirectBuy franchise moving to Natick

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By Greg Turner/Daily News staff

GHS

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Natick — It's not a secret society, but it is a private club whose members pay a fee for exclusive access to a showroom and home design center where goods are sold without a hefty retail markup.

It's not hidden from the main shopping drag, but it does accept prospective members by appointment only to an open house where the savings are explained and the membership fee and yearly dues are finally revealed.

It's called DirectBuy and the business is doing so well it's ready to move to the "Golden Triangle" retail district of MetroWest.

Siblings Christine and Joe LaCascia plan to move their DirectBuy franchise from Rte. 9 in Shrewsbury to just off Rte. 9 in Natick.

They're leasing 14,000 square feet of space at 2-4 Mercer Road, a building located behind the Dick's Sporting Goods store at the end of Sherwood Plaza. The move is scheduled for May.

The bigger space - DirectBuy currently has about 3,500 square feet at 422 Boston Turnpike - will allow the franchise to expand its showroom and provide more room for open house activities.

"We wanted to be more centrally located to population centers, to be closer to retail developments," Christine LaCascia said last week.

The franchise's territory - where no other DirectBuy can operate - stretches from Boston to Worcester, so that makes Natick the center of it. The franchise has several thousand active members, according to LaCascia.

There are about 130 DirectBuy franchises nationwide, with the corporate headquarters in Merrillville, Ind. The Shrewsbury location opened seven years ago, and the LaCascias bought it about two years ago.

Members gain access to about 700 brand-name manufacturers and authorized suppliers in the United States. Purchases for everything from furniture and flooring to toilets and watches are made at "confidential insider prices," direct from the producers. Savings off of retail prices can range from 15 percent to as much as 70 percent.

"It's really the factory's catalog, and that's why it's considered a private, members-only club," said LaCascia. "It's a one-stop shop."

In the Natick lease deal, DirectBuy was represented by Glickman Kovago & Co. of Worcester. The Mercer Road building is owned by Stonegate LLC of Natick.

BigBand Networks Inc. is playing a different tune in Westborough.

Well, not really. But the provider of network platforms for video, voice and data services does have a bigger stage: it recently leased more than 87,000 square feet of space at 8 Technology Drive.

The company, which is headquartered in Redwood City, Calif., had been subleasing about 62,500 square feet of

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space at the same place. Now it's a direct tenant of RREEF Inc.

The two-story building has a total of 104,822 square feet of space and is now fully occupied. The lease was brokered by CB Richard Ellis/Boston and Mohr Partners.

Over in Waltham, a joint venture has started speculative development of Overlook Center, a 110,000-square-foot, first-class office building overlooking Rte. 128 (aren't they all?).

The partnership - Neelon Properties and Normandy Real Estate - tapped Jones Lang LaSalle of Boston as its leasing agent for the 21 Hickory Drive property.

The project is scheduled to start with the demolition of two buildings this spring and construction shortly thereafter.

Neelon, a third-generation real estate firm based in Waltham, put up the existing buildings on the three-acre site about 30 years ago. Normandy is based in Morristown, N.J.

Overlook Center will be a glass and steel tower with a cul-de-sac driveway, on-site covered parking, cafe and fitness center.

Do you have tips or comments on commercial real estate in MetroWest? Contact business editor Greg Turner at 508-626-3909 or gturner@cnc.com.

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