

Get on the Bus, Gus, to the Land of Deals

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New York City has Seinfeld and Sex and the City tours, and savvy entrepreneurs in north New Jersey offer Tony Soprano-themed guided trips. In Hollywood, of course, there are maps that trace where celebrities live.

Now Tampa has its own excursion — only this one isn't for stars.

Instead, it's a map to commercial real estate deals through the Retail Bus Tour, the brainchild of a few southeast Florida brokers. The tour is one part networking extravaganza mixed with one part business, says Charlie Boscarino, vice president of marketing and leasing for Tampa-based RMC Property Group. RMC helped launch the first Tampa tour, a daylong jaunt on Oct. 4 that took 115 local brokers to 25 retail properties with vacant spaces in Hillsborough, Pasco and Pinellas counties. "We want to be a convention on wheels," Boscarino tells Coffee Talk, "but not make it so cost prohibitive."

Gary Brodis and Larry Brooks, brokers in Miami-Dade and the Fort Lauderdale area, created the Retail Bus Tour a few years ago. The concept was a big hit, and it led to multiple leasing deals. Boscarino heard about it, and met with the brokers earlier this year about a Gulf Coast expansion. He says the tour works for landlords, who can sponsor parts of the trip, because it gets prospective tenants in front of their buildings. Tenant reps and brokers, meanwhile, can see a month's worth of properties in a day.

The three-bus Tampa caravan, on luxury motor coaches, departed from MetWest International, a mixed-use development near the International Plaza mall. The tour cost \$99 a person, and included breakfast, midday snacks and a lunch voucher. Some stops were full-on property visits, while others were more of the "drive-by" variety, where everyone stayed on the bus. Boscarino and other tour guides read scripts written by landlords on the properties' features.

More tours are forthcoming, Boscarino says, both for other parts of the Hillsborough-Pinellas region, like Brandon, and Orlando. He also says a tour for the Sarasota-Manatee-Charlotte County area is in the works.

The Retail Bus Tour, while creative, isn't a total original. A group of real estate professionals, from mortgage brokers to Realtors, created a foreclosure bus tour for the Sarasota-Bradenton region in early 2008. That tour didn't have lunch, but agents did provide snacks, pens and paper while they touted a string of foreclosed homes and properties, not vacant retail space.