

Breakwater Chicago: A floating entertainment complex

By Matt Lindner – June 9, 2014



Entrepreneur Beau D’Arcy paints a romantic picture when talking about his latest venture, a floating entertainment complex called Breakwater Chicago.

“When you’re on Breakwater, you have the ability to have a great dinner, a glass of wine and watch the sunset drop down behind the buildings to the west,” the 33-year-old Lincoln Park resident told RedEye on Monday. “That vantage point is something that we offer that very few places in Chicago can offer.”

He can’t offer it just yet, but he’s hoping he’ll be able to soon.

D’Arcy and his two co-founders, 40-year-old Lakeview resident Ashvin Lad and 32-year-old River North resident Liz Bell, are launching a fundraising campaign to turn Breakwater into a lakefront destination by this time next year.

“We think this will continue to help Chicago be a world-class city and be very competitive

in the tourism landscape by having that ‘a-ha’ thing that you must see,” Lad said.

Once completed, Breakwater will offer amenities such as a public pool, three restaurant concepts, retail stores, a health spa and a private party venue—all of which can be used year-round.

“The pool is a big element that we provide because there really aren’t a lot of pools to go to in downtown Chicago that are open to the public,” D’Arcy said.

On Tuesday, D’Arcy and his partners will kick off a funding campaign in conjunction with Seed Chicago, a partnership between the mayor’s office and Kickstarter that helps local entrepreneurs drum up funding.

“The idea of Seed Chicago is to seed great projects that are happening in the city that are community development or small business development projects,” said Seed Chicago spokeswoman Betsy Neely-Sikma. “Breakwater is both of those things. It’s going to create lots of jobs, boost tourism in the city, both in the winter and summer months.”

The privately funded, \$23 million Breakwater project is expected to create 200 full-time and 200 part-time jobs. Once completed, it will be open year-round and able to accommodate more than 2,800 visitors, D’Arcy said. During the summer, it’ll be anchored about a mile off the Lake Michigan shoreline. Visitors will be transported via water taxi or their own boats. D’Arcy said there will be room for about 30 boats to dock at Breakwater.

During the winter months, Breakwater will dock at a yet-to-be-determined location and covered with a heated dome that will allow visitors to artificially sun themselves by a pool.

“People are just desperate for anything that feels like it’s not winter, just to escape winter for even a short period of time around here,” D’Arcy said.

Visitors will pay a to-be-determined cover charge, which the partners expect to be around \$20.

“In the summertime, the admission fee will cover both your entrance to the venue as well as the water taxi ride if you don’t have a boat to get out there,” D’Arcy said. “In the wintertime, you pay an admission fee to get on board. It will probably be a little less in the winter than in the summer.”

D’Arcy said the idea for the project was born from a desire to make the city’s summer boating scene more accessible to the average Chicagoan.

“I have so many friends that didn’t have boats, I don’t own a boat and it was frustrating that if you didn’t have that buddy that had a boat, it was really hard to get out onto the lake itself,” he said. “I wanted to create something where people could go to without having a boat but yet you could feel like you’re a part of that culture, that boating community.”

One of the main concerns that comes with building such a massive entertainment complex is ruining the existing lakefront aesthetic.

Lad said the team is working closely with architects to ensure Breakwater’s presence doesn’t take away from the lakefront’s natural beauty.

“We don’t want an eyesore out there,” he said. “It’s going to be white, it’s going to be very slender, very sleek, very appealing. The architects, they’ve always said they want to make it so it’s rising above the water, that it’s part of Lake Michigan and blends in perfectly.”

The group still must clear a number of hurdles before their plans turn into reality. So far they’ve raised only about \$1 million. There’s also the myriad permits they must secure through the Coast Guard, the city, the state and the liquor commission.

D’Arcy said if all goes according to plan, they’re hoping to begin construction on Breakwater by Labor Day weekend with the goal of opening by the beginning of summer 2015.