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Workmen walk past a large poster for an upscale store at Royal Hawaiian Shopping Center. The center is in the middle of renovation.

Royal Hawaiian makeover takes shape

The Waikiki hub is 92% leased

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Kamehameha Schools offered a preview yesterday of its \$84 million makeover of Waikiki's Royal Hawaiian Shopping Center, freed from the center's old concrete, fortress-like structures, obstructive elevators and clunky three-level pedestrian bridge.

In their place are new escalators, open view planes, the skeleton of a single-span bridge and beginnings of the royal coconut grove.

"This is not only a physical and economic transformation, but a spiritual one," said Susan Todani, director of development and planning at Kamehameha Schools.

Todani said the project's "piko" -- Hawaiian for navel, center or crown -- is the royal coconut grove. It will offer a performance space and gathering area, a tribute to the 10,000 trees that once stood in the grove at Helumoa. Kamehameha Schools is transplanting the coconut palms from its other properties.

About 92 percent of the leases at the center are in final negotiations. The center will offer more than 310,000 square feet of leasable space, including 110 stores on four levels.

Only about eight spaces, including one for an anchor restaurant, remain available. Rosalind Schurgin, principal of the **Festival Cos.**, the center's leasing director, said those spaces should be filled by opening time.

Renovations of the central Waikiki complex began two years ago. The first phase, which includes most of two buildings and the coconut grove, is slated for completion by the end of the year. The rest of the project is expected to be done by next summer.

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