

Cathie Anderson: Diving into River District

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Just after the No. 11 bus from North Natomas exits Interstate 5 South and swings under the freeway and onto Richards Boulevard, a feeling of momentum takes hold.



Light cascades from the underpass in blues, greens and purples, an artistic salute to the nearby confluence of the Sacramento and American rivers. Before turning on North Seventh Street, the bus rolls by central command for the Sacramento Police Department, the new Greyhound bus depot and a head-turning light-rail station.

For the past couple of years, the No. 11 bus has bypassed the Richards Boulevard exit to avoid construction. It recently got back on course, and just one ride reveals big changes in the River District.

More than 1,500 employees have moved into new digs in this business district, nestled in a crescent formed by the two rivers. Its boundaries range from Downtown Ford and the Blue Diamond factory on the east to the I Street Bridge on the west. The changes haven't escaped local restaurateurs: JR's Texas Bar-B-Que set up shop on Jibboom Street in June. Krush Burger will open in the headquarters for the California State Lottery in December. Two national chains – Denny's and McDonald's – are investing more than \$2 million here.

"We've been here since 1996," said Ray Gallo Jr., McDonald's owner and operator, "and we've never seen business like this. We're experiencing double-digit increases in sales every month over last year."

Boy, those changes were easily missed in the years when the No. 11 bus whizzed by on I-5.