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Empty stores make mall merchants uneasy

By M.B. Dillon Ward
staff writer

Although retailers at Novi's Twelve Oaks Mall recorded December sales surpassing those of the previous holiday season, some merchants say sales would be higher if the center had more tenants.

The 150-plus store center is the major indoor shopping mall outlet for residents from Farmington, Farmington Hills and West Bloomfield.

Center Manager William Clogg estimates that the 10% to 11 percent of Twelve Oaks' retail space is vacant, but views the situation "as extremely positive."

"It gives us the opportunity to view new concepts and ideas developed here or in another part of the country. Because we have space available, we can go out and find the type of merchant we want."

Retailers whose stores neighbor Lord & Taylor in the mall's northeast corner, however, find it difficult to attract customers to the largely vacant wing.

"This wing is dead," said a Tuckerman Optical employee, who works near Lord & Taylor.

"You can go for days and not see anyone. It's bad. If there were more stores, more people would shop down here."

August Max manager Barbara Whitacre said the location in the wing "def-

initely affects our sales.

"We're stuck down here and no one knows we exist. If people come in our store, it's because they just happen to be walking by. It's the same with the Outfitter (a men's store) next door."

"We opened in 1979 and were told this end was supposed to be filled in a year or two. It hasn't. Only a shoe store and chocolate shop have opened up," said Whitacre. August Max sells women's apparel.

Mike Ansara, watch repairman at Precision Watch and Ring, where sales are down 20 percent this year, estimates the vacancy rate is "easily 25 percent in the mall — and the empty space is almost all down near Lord & Taylor."

The 1,159-square-foot jewelry store says about \$50,000 a year to lease space at Twelve Oaks — approximately \$43 a square foot.

"It's a lot; you have to do well in order to survive," said Fred Ansara, the store's co-owner.

"The vacancy rate definitely hurts us. There should be no vacancy, especially in a regional center like this. The cost of rent and utilities is just too high. People think 10 times before opening a business."

"We have to be more cautious in buying and have to go to lower-price items."

A number of new leases are now under negotiation "and we expect a number of new stores in 1983," said Jane Lynch, director of corporate communications for the Taubman Co., developer and leasing management agent for Twelve Oaks.

"We're very pleased with our retail mix at the center and feel we're well ahead of the industry in terms of performance."

Lynch declined to reveal what retailers pay to lease space at Twelve Oaks, saying it's a matter of policy to withhold those figures.

"That's something privately negotiated between the lessee and lessor," she said.

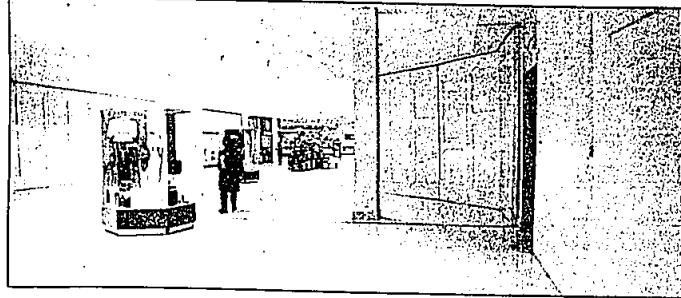
Large stores such as the J.L. Hudson Co. own their own space and have a working relationship with the mall, Clogg said.

Hughes & Hatcher, AS Beck Shoes, Ad Libs and Scholar's Choice all have discontinued their leases at Twelve Oaks in the last year.

In Clogg's view, the store failures are to be expected and in no way represent casualties of today's ailing economy.

"People will go out of business in bad or good times. When things get tougher, you have to know why you're in business," he said.

Twelve Oaks has never been com-



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

The barren concourse leading to Lord & Taylor at Twelve Oaks Mall is a sight which disturbs some of the merchants whose stores surround it.

pletely leased, added Clogg. Command Performance, a hair salon for men and women, has noted a sharp drop in traffic.

"It's not as heavy as it was last year. People are not spending as much, said Susan Walker, the salon's assistant manager. Dunn's City Camera, near the large

vacant space formerly leased by Hughes & Hatcher, also has felt the pinch.

"It's affected our business. It looks bad to have this huge white nothing there," said a Dunn's sales manager. "Everybody would like to see more promotion — at this time of year nothing's going on."

Agreed Fred Ansara, "you can always do better at promotion, but we can't put them down."

Sales promotion director Sheila Armstrong said the mall's management staff stimulates business by advertising, bringing concerts and fashion shows to the mall and sponsoring citizen and other activities, he said.

Schools buck the trend

By Craig Plechura
staff writer

Today's teachers are tougher and more likely to recommend a student repeat a grade if his work doesn't warrant promotion, said the president of the National Education Association (NEA).

"Many Americans have believed for years that schools were slipping in their standards, teachers were becoming too 'soft,' and so-called 'social promotions' were the order of the day," said Willard H. McGuire, NEA president. "But here is evidence that counters those images."

He cites as example statistics which show that in Oklahoma City, Okla. twice as many students were recommended for retention in grade — nobody likes to call it "flunking" — in 1982 than the previous year. After teachers made their recommendations, McGuire said, 608 students in kindergarten through fifth grade in Oklahoma City Public Schools were kept back, compared to 444 in 1981.

In Dallas, he said, 6,811 students in grades 1-6 were urged to attend summer school to rectify substandard grades. Some 47 percent of those 6,811 took advantage of summer instruction and 47 percent were promoted while the rest repeated the grade.

In Atlanta, he added, 7.8 percent of the entire school population wasn't promoted to a higher grade in 1982, up from 6 percent the year before.

FARMINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOL officials say they've seen no recent rise in the number of students repeating a grade because of poor performance. Lynn Nutter, assistant superintendent, said parents are more understand-



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

An uplifted feeling

North Farmington's Kim Edwards showed 'em how it's done at last week's gymnastics meet against the Troy Colts. She literally came off the

floor and was suspended in the air as she ran off with a first-place finish. To read more about the competition, turn to the sports section.

Brotherton aims for leadership in Legislature

By M.B. Dillon Ward
staff writer

With the advent of a new administration in Lansing, recently re-elected State Rep. Sandy Brotherton, R-Farmington, sees himself as one of the leaders in the Michigan Legislature.

Brotherton defeated Democratic challenger Aldo Vagoozi, a Farmington Hills resident, last November. "There have been a number of people who served in the Legislature before who have left, and they were the people who because of seniority... were sort of looked to, to carry the load in certain cases."

"Others like myself with a little more tenure are the ones who will automatically accept leadership roles," Brotherton said.

Having a Democratic governor (James Blanchard) at the helm renders Republican legislators more able to originate ideas, he said.

"As Republicans, we were almost bound to go along with Gov. (William) Milliken, and had to look to him to play that leadership role. Now we're going to be exercising a little more of our imagination and our own ideas with respect to different problems," said Brotherton.

ASKED WHETHER he has confidence in Gov. Blanchard, Brotherton said, "I basically don't know a heck of a lot about the people he's appointed, but there are a couple appointments that make me wonder in terms of qualifications and backgrounds. But I'm not at all prepared to condemn the man."

The 2-percent income tax increase proposed recently by Sen. William Faust, D-Westland, would be "devalued" with Speaker of the House Gary Owen.

The ability to pay its bills is the Leg-

islature's overriding priority, while costs incurred by the educational, health care and transportation systems will be scrutinized in the coming months.



Rep. Sandy Brotherton

"The biggest issue that's going to face us in the upcoming session is the state's fiscal situation. It's going to be tough to figure out how to put our house in order facing the possibility of a tax increase of some kind or other."

The state's accounting procedures — "something many of us have been complaining about for a long, long time" — soon will be examined thoroughly, Brotherton said.

"The Governor points out we're \$750 million in debt because of budget tricks that have been played over the last

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Salt mounts waiting for first storm

By M.B. Dillon Ward
staff writer

Director of Public Services Thomas Biasek took a little ribbing at last week's Farmington Hills City Council meeting while talking about snow removal. At the time, one would have had to drive 300 miles north to find a snow flake.

As Biasek explained how subdivision streets will be plowed under the city's newly proposed policy, City Manager Lawrence Savage and council member Jody Soronen complimented him.

"You're doing a good job," said Savage. "Yes, the service has been great," echoed Soronen.

A recently drafted Snow Emergency Ordinance and Snow and Ice Control

Plan put in writing for the first time outlines city policies, Biasek said. Among the major provisions are:

• Snow emergencies will be declared by the city manager or a designee.

• Radio, television and the Michigan Emergency Patrol Network will be depended upon to announce snow emergency conditions.

• Restricted parking will go into effect two hours after snow emergency announcements.

• Vehicles in violation of the ordinance will be ticketed and/or towed by Farmington Hills police.

Priorities for snow plowing were outlined by operations and mechanics foremen, equipment operators and administrative personnel who served on a Snow and Ice Control Plan Committee.

First to be plowed will be paved major roads and major school bus routes (if school is in session). Next will be major gravel roads after a three- to four-inch snowfall; problem areas such as drift-prone sections and steep hills, and "collector" or access streets after four- to six-inch snowfalls, to "help interior residents get to the major road networks."

When snowfall reaches six or more inches (a snow emergency), all local streets will be plowed. Contractors will be called in when snowfall exceeds DPW capacity.

"We wanted to put this in writing to inform the City Council and the residents of Farmington Hills approximately what would happen during a snowstorm or when the snow falls," said Walt Karolik, DPW superintendent.

Loudspeakers may be used by police to "indicate where the problem areas are," he added. Signs will not be posted, because in severe weather "they don't last anyway. This action is not aimed at removing every little car from every area. We just want to insure that police and fire can get through and rubbish is picked up," he said.

Karolik expects the City Council to review the ordinance and adopt it in the near future.

In the past, city snow removal crews have been hampered by cars parked along one or both sides of roadways," Savage said in his report to the Council. The Farmington Hills DPW has yet to put a dent in its salt supply, Karolik said.

The city used a total of 3,600 tons of salt last year.

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OVERWHELMING!

"Never had such good response to an ad, couldn't get off the phone! Over 20 calls between 7 and 9 p.m.!" C. Harvath was pleased with the results of the "Help Wanted Domestic" Observer & Eccentric classified ad she placed.

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