

Northland celebrates its silver anniversary

BY JACKIE KLEIN

Northland, the granddaddy of shopping malls, was once called a 20th century bazaar with wiggling wire giraffes, fluttering copper peacocks, flower-filled courtyards and non-stop music.

That was in 1954, when the nation's first major regional shopping center was featured in Life Magazine.

This year the center, built at a cost of \$25 million and planted in Southfield farmland 12 miles north of downtown Detroit, is celebrating its 25th anniversary.

"Only Northland is Northland" is the theme of the silver anniversary celebration. Built on a 400-acre site at Northwestern Highway and Eight Mile, Northland opened March 22, 1954. First year sales were projected at \$50 million but reached \$70 million. This year projected sales are \$235 million.

In 1956, when the assessment level

was 30 percent of true cash value, Northland was assessed at \$5.2 million. The 1979 assessment, including the J.C. Penney store, is \$30 million (Northland remains Southfield's largest taxpayer).

Originally, Northland served the role of a community center featuring circuses, theater-in-the-round, antique shows, flea markets, used book sales, Red Cross Bloodmobiles and Christmas shows.

NORTHLAND opened with 70 stores, 28 of which are still tenants. Now in its 25th year, the center boasts 160 stores.

Life Magazine referred to the center as "a fantastic combination of modern efficiency, fine architecture and pure gaiety."

But trends and times changed and customers wanted malls to be enclosed and climate-controlled. To keep in step, in 1974-75 Northland invested \$25 million to enclose and expand the center.

Northland is the fashion center for

the Detroit area, according to Kenneth Oswald, center manager. About 65 percent of tenants are fashion retailers.

Since 1975, when the center was enclosed, 59 new tenants have been added, another 23 have remodeled or are remodeling and 35 others have expanded.

Hudson's Northland store is the most notable branch store development in the country, Oswald said. It's the largest dollar volume branch store in the world with revenues of nearly \$100 million.

Marking the 25th birthday celebration March 12 was a giant cake in the shape of Northland. Joseph L. Hudson Jr., chairman and chief executive officer of Hudson's, traced the growth of Northland for guests at the gathering.

"NORTHLAND was considered a bold experiment in retailing and the ultimate in shopping environment when it opened in 1954," Hudson said. "It was

compared to the creation of a new city and Northland's impressive size made it 25,000 square feet larger than its closest competitor.

"But Northland's growth isn't all in the past. We plan to dominate the fashion scene for many years to come and constantly upgrade our facilities to meet the challenges of the '80s."

Also speaking at the event was Richard Guidera, vice president of operations for Dayton Hudson Properties, who said the center is run just as Mayor Donald Fracassi, city council and city administrator, runs the city of Southfield.

One of the functions is maintaining a security force, streets and lighting to make Northland an increasingly safe place to shop, Guidera said.

Northland and the area around it is known as the "Golden Triangle" but center officials deny that anyone had the midas touch when the original dollars to build Northland were provided.

In 1954, the shopping center industry was being born.

In 1952, said Robert Jenkins, regional vice president of operations eastern region, Dayton Hudson Properties, the building of Northland was started by the J.L. Hudson Co. through a wholly-owned subsidiary, Northland Centers Inc.

HUDSON'S owned and operated

Northland until 1968 when Hudson's and Dayton's of Minneapolis merged and formed the Dayton Hudson Corp. The real estate arm of the corporation manages Northland Center.

Last May, Dayton Hudson sold nine of its real estate properties to Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States.



Northland today: shoppers rush by in a blur as others pause to watch. The weather is no longer a concern. (Staff photo by Gary Friedman)

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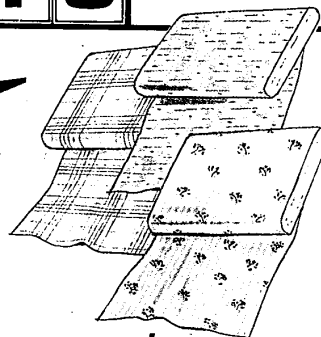
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