

Kids' holiday shop set

Kids 12 and under will be treated to a fun and inexpensive (\$5 and under) holiday shopping experience when West River Centre merchants and Target Department Store

co-host the fourth-annual Children's Holiday Shop 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday-Sunday, Dec. 16-17, at the center — Grand River and Nine Mile Road.

Farmington Observer

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Downtown Center to get new look

By LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Downtown Farmington's main shopping center will receive a facelift.

A large scale renovation is planned for the Downtown Center, which houses Farmer Jack, Shoe Carnival, Harmony House and H&R Block, among others, in three separate buildings along Farmington Road, between Orchard Street and Grand River.

Work is expected to start in spring, said Nadine Rafferty, managing director of Kimco Realty's Midwest Region.

Renovations will be done on one building at a time, concentrating on canopies and rooflines. Renovations should be completed by fall finishing up with the main strip, Rafferty said.

"What we want to do is make it look like a unified center," Rafferty said.

The center was constructed in 1959. Some of the canopies are 25 to 30 years old, Rafferty said.

■ 'What we want to do is make it look like a unified center.'

Nadine Rafferty
managing director Kimco Realty

No architectural rendering has been done yet to show what the renovated center will look like. Those plans would have to be approved by the Planning Commission.

Rafferty said the city's historical nature — as well as its aesthetics ordinance — will be taken into account when the design is rendered.

"The Planning Commission has always been interested in what would happen to the Downtown Center," said Councilman Jim Mitchell, who served on the commission. "We think Kimco has an opportunity to establish a theme for the city of Farmington that would go into the next century."

In past, city officials have been more occupied with what hasn't been in the Downtown Center's structure — tenants.

Council members complained in January about the number of vacancies, saying it expected more out of Kimco Realty, which bought the center two years ago.

Rafferty used the presentation to council to announce that the U.S. Post Office is planning to open a future store (see related story) where Shoe Town used to be located.

Downtown Cafe and Pagemaster have also opened in the center within the past year. Rafferty said a bagel shop and other businesses are looking to possibly locate in the center.

"There's momentum; it's start-

ing again," Rafferty said. "There was a long dry spell."

One prominent vacancy, though, is where Maple Drugs once operated. The drug store was bought out by Arbor and its operations absorbed into the Farmington Road outlet.

Arbor holds the lease on the spot. Only recently have rental agents been able to show it to prospective tenants, Rafferty said.

As far as possible tenants, Rafferty said she's looking for home improvement or decorating and children's businesses. Retail clothing outlets are hurting, she said.

Rafferty expects some Downtown Center tenants not to renew when their leases are up, but there's already interest in those 1,500 to 2,000 square foot spaces.

"If the shopping center were all 1,000 or 2,000 foot spaces, that wouldn't be a problem," she said.

"I have spaces 35 feet wide by 130 feet deep and it's very tough to lease."

Post office from page 1A

Downtown Center would provide accessibility.

Future stores include stamp machines and postal scales for self-service. The store would be staffed by three people for counter service and there will be post office boxes available.

As part of the lease being negotiated, the U.S. Postal Service has asked for a drop box in the parking lot, said Nadine Rafferty, managing director of Kimco Realty's Midwest Region, which owns the Downtown Center.

■ 'They do plan to vacate that building in one to two years. It's too small. They really want to build in Farmington.'

Frank Lauhoff
city manager

Councilman Bill Hartsock asked about potential parking problems.

"That can cause a lot of in and out traffic and block out others

who are going shopping," Hartsock said.

Rafferty said she didn't see it as a problem. People would only be in the post office for a few min-

utes at a time. Also, the future store would be on the aisle where there is the most amount of parking, she added.

The store will not only fill a postal need, but fill a vacant store front.

"I think it will be positive," Rafferty said. "People will go to the Hallmark and buy a card, sign it and then go down and put it into the mail."

"It creates a nice synergy for the whole area."

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