

MALLS & MAINSTREETS

MONDAY, August 19, 1996

SHOPPING CENTERED



Behind the scenes: Somerset Collection manager Tom Miles (left) describes the action shoppers will find on the North side's third level - the family floor, while Malls & Mainstreet editor Susan DeMaggio takes notes.

Why all the fuss over the new Somerset mall?

BY SURAN DEMAGGIO
STAFF WRITER

Have you been? Will you go back? What did you buy?

I've been covering the Coming of The Mall, since the ground-breaking two years ago. And whether you care to admit it or not, EVERYONE'S talking about it. You'd have to be from Mars if you didn't know that the city of Troy was getting Nordstrom, Henri Bendel's, a moving sky walk, and a new Hudson's that would be "just like the old one downtown."

Watching a modern tri-level shopping center rise from the cornfields and Christmas tree lots that once occupied the northeast corner of Big Beaver and Coolidge roads, has been an amusing curiosity for motorists and area residents.

I've overheard teens talking about crossing the sky walk, doctors inquiring about clinic space nearby, and transferes from the west coast counting the days 'til their beloved Nordstrom opened in Michigan.

I've listened to independent retailers voice concerns about the new shopping center's impact on their local business. I've reported on the "counter moves" by other malls to remain vibrant and competitive - Twelve Oaks' \$10-million renovation over the summer, and Oakland Mall's new freeway pylon, due to debut on Aug. 28.

I've donned many a hard hat to check on construction progress at Somerset North. I've attended dozens of press conferences hosted by the developers, Forbes-Cohen of Southfield.

Why? Why all the fuss about another mall? Because it's more than a mall.

The Somerset Collection is an architectural delight. A public town square. A new place to visit. Be seen. Acquire the finer things in life. Sample new tastes. Discover new innovations in the marketplace. View the creative work of designers and artists in galleries like Tiffany's, Neiman Marcus, Warner Bros. The Disney Store, Mont Blanc, Pottery Barn and Hear Music.

At the Somerset Collection you can walk. Work. Meet a friend. Slip away from the cares of the world in a climate-controlled, protected environment. Buy a comfortable, cool pair of shoes - on sale. Rejuvenate at a spa. Spend an afternoon with your sister.

Dare I go on?

During a recent promotional visit to Saks Fifth Avenue at Somerset Collection South, menswear designer Alan Flusser of Wall Street fame, strolled through the center amazed. The sky lights, 40-foot palm trees, marble stone columns and marble floors are not your average mall building blocks.

"This is truly one of the most elegant, beautiful shopping centers I've ever seen, anywhere in the world," he told me. "I'm awed."

Wow. I, too, as both a consumer and retail reporter, see the Somerset Collection as an inspiration. The attractive homewares in stores like Crate & Barrel and Williams & Sonoma tempt me to expand my culinary abilities. The exquisite writing papers at Crane & Co. make it fun to surprise old friends with a letter. The special events that the mall schedules, plus the designer visits that the mall hosts, provide good copy for these pages. And the view from Nordstrom's Cafe over the bustling cityscape three floors below, simply makes me smile.

Oh, I know there's the money issue. After all, the mall was built to be profitable for its owners and tenants. But then again, I've inherited a wonderful attitude from my mother...

Whenever she bumped into dad with her arms loaded with packages from a day of shopping, she'd cut short his budget speech with the line:

"I'm doing my part to support the economy, dear."

You can borrow mom's line when you get home from the new Somerset Collection. I did.

Nordstrom Troy: high expectations for store's success



Dan Nordstrom came to Troy last week to attend the opening of his family's first specialty fashion store in Michigan.

BY SURAN DEMAGGIO
STAFF WRITER

Dan Nordstrom, 34, co-president of Seattle-based Nordstrom and great-grandson of the company founder, told the Women's Economic Club, Monday night, that the new Troy store would become a "hometown store."

"We've got 40 underpaid buyers in this store who are forced to work on the sales floor on commission. They make sure they buy right for their Troy customers," he joked. "Other retailers have just a handful of buyers in a central location. We want this store to become a hometown store."

The club was invited to hear Nordstrom's comments during a pre-opening shopping event, the first for the new store, which doubled as the club's membership night, Aug. 12.

Nordstrom charmed the audience with tales of how the retail giant came to be, why Nordstrom plans to expand across the country, and how it succeeds, with sales of \$4-billion in 1995.

"We have been working on coming here (Somerset Collection) for years and years before that moving escalator was invented that could link both sides of the mall together," he teased. "We're a family business where we keep growing and growing so all members can be a part of it."

Nordstrom said the business's success "is a classic immigrant story." His great-grandfather came to America from Sweden in 1901 with \$5 in his pocket. He became a Minnesota coal miner and logger, then moved to Seattle to become a farmer.

"After a few weeks of moving dirt and clearing the land, he decided that he really hated it," Nordstrom laughed. "And took off to Alaska and the Gold Rush."

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He returned to Seattle a few years and \$20,000 richer, met up with his old friend the town's cobbler and the two decided to pool their resources in a shoe store. By the 1950s, Nordstrom had the largest shoe store in the nation.

In the 60's, looking to grow, the company bought Best Apparel across the street. Nordstrom was now a specialty fashion retailer. At the end of the 1970s, Nordstrom expanded into southern California and the rest is retail history.

"Now our growth is in the Midwest, in places with family and traditional values which mirror our company philosophy," he said. "We are an accountant's nightmare. We have far too much inventory for our stores and far too many buyers."

"We just have two rules - no gum; no stealing. We feel the freedom we give our sales associates stimulates creativity to serve the customer. Our service stories are legends. We hire the best people, then get out of their way."

Nordstrom said the company deals with 15,000 different vendors, compared to other retailers who may have 1,000 vendors at most. He said Nordstrom realizes that shopping "is a fun, social and recreational experience."

When asked how Nordstrom can expand and build new stores while other retailers are closing or merging, he responded, "We have a very conservative capital structure that has kept us stable in changing retail times."

He questioned the audience, "Do you have any idea how much a store like this costs to build? Well, it's lots and lots! So please, please, please shop here."

Club president Barbara Rom said while the Women's Economic Club does not endorse or recommend businesses, it was supportive of a company like Nordstrom that "recognizes women as full partners in business."

Maureen Monte, a club member, said Nordstrom left her with a positive feeling about the store.

"I'll be more likely to shop here because I enjoyed his sense of humor," she said. "He was fun."



PHOTO BY VALERIE BLONQUET PHOTOGRAPHIC

"Just a shoe salesman": Dan Nordstrom addresses the Women's Economic Club of Detroit last week, speaking in the petites department of Michigan's first Nordstrom store at Somerset Collection North in Troy.

ADDED ATTRACTIONS

WEDNESDAY, AUG. 21

Traveling Teen Show

Hudson's presents Big Life Semi-Truck Show, featuring dancers in full fashions, live music, sports demonstrations on a huge stage that folds out from the tour truck. Johnny Lang performs today at 7 p.m. at the Oakland Mall stop. Motown's Lndale performs one hour show at Summit Place stop, Telegraph/Elizabeth Lake on Aug. 22 at 7 p.m. Product giveaways, radio personalities visit. Sponsored by Calvin Klein Jeans and Union Bay.

Oakland Mall, 14 Mile/John R. Troy.

(810) 597-2200.

THURSDAY, AUG. 22

School fashions

Jacobson's hosts back-to-school runway show 7 p.m. in the Children's Store. Kids origami workshop from 1-3 p.m. with Don Schall. On Aug. 25 enjoy the antics of master ventriloquist Todd Gale and his troupe of characters, 1 p.m. Complimentary program.

338 W. Maple, Birmingham.

(810) 644-6900.

Designer Shows

Hudson's hosts Michael Kors and his fall collection. 1 p.m. Seating limited for complimentary event, reservations required. On Aug. 23, designer Cynthia Rowley presents her fall collection during a runway show at 1 p.m. On Aug. 24 fashions from Byron Lars informally modeled 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Enzo's fall shoes 1-2 p.m. Somerset Collection North.

Big Beaver/Coolidge, Troy.

(810) 443-6332.

Family Fun

All Thumbs People and Puppet Co. perform 6:30-7:30 p.m. in front of the Birmingham City Hall. Free. Part of summer series.

Merrill/Pierce, Birmingham.

(810) 433-5550.

FRIDAY, AUG. 23

Music Program

Kids learn about The Magic of Music, 1-3 p.m. at Jacobson's. Complimentary. Public invited. Great Oaks, Walton/Livernois, Rochester.

(810) 651-6000.

Virtual Reality Exhibit

As shown on MTV and 20/20, enter the full-color, 3-D quadraphonic, 360-degree world of Virtual reality. Noon to 8 p.m. through Aug. 25. Tel-Twelve, 12 Mile/Telegraph, Southfield.

(810) 353-4100.

SATURDAY, AUG. 24

Author Visits

Waldenbooks hosts Stephanie Mallen, Troy author, specializing in can-do books 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Repeat visit on Aug. 31. Summit Place, Elizabeth Lake/Telegraph.

(810) 689-3076.

Shoe Show

Hush Puppy devotees won't want to miss at trunk show of the fall collection, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Refreshments. Prize drawings.

Orchard Mall, Maple/Orchard Lake, West Bloomfield.

(810) 851-5566.

Fashion Concert

Ron English Quartet performs 1-2:30 p.m. while mall presents a fall runway show in Center Court. Free samples from Coffee Beanery to guests. Public invited.

Laurel Park, Six Mile/Newburgh, Livonia.

(313) 462-1100.

Farmer's Market

Both downtown Farmington and Plymouth have small produce, bakery and craft stands from the morning until afternoon each Saturday in the heart of their business districts until late October.

(313) 453-1540.

Kids Show & Cafe Concert

Borders Books & Music hosts Bob Gerics and his guitar. 8 p.m. At 11 a.m. it's William and Di Schuler and their "Magic of Reading by Baffling Bill" show. Appearance by Gus the Bunny. 30995 Orchard Lake, Farmington Hills.

(810) 737-0110.

MONDAY, AUG. 26

Health Test

Free blood pressure screening and health information, 8-10 a.m. in Jacobson's Court Area. Courtesy of Botsford General Hospital.

Laurel Park, Six Mile/Newburgh, Livonia.

(810) 462-1100.