

Mall will change North Oakland

BY GERALD FRAWLEY
EDITOR

As if any further evidence is needed of the urbanization of North Oakland County, consider Great Lakes Crossing.

The 1.4 million square foot facility, currently under construction on 300 acres on Interstate 75 between Baldwin and Joslyn roads, is southeast Michigan's newest regional shopping center.

The shopping center is described by Taubman Centers president Robert Taubman as an "upscale outlet mall," an "entertainment complex," and a "21st century regional shopping center with attitude."

It will likely forever change the face of North Oakland County, where large-scale commercial developments are non-existent. Taubman readily concedes it will change North Oakland, but he expects it will be a change for the better.

Great Lakes Crossing is born from the ashes of Auburn Mills, a nearly two million square foot outlet center first proposed in the mid 1980s. The project resulted in unprecedented opposition to a development from adjacent communities, communities as far as away Southfield, and even other shopping centers.

The controversy ultimately resulted in a regional impact study conducted by the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments that measured the impact the mall might have on other shopping centers, traffic and development.

The study and controversy were moot points, however, after the developer of Auburn Mills — Western Development — ran into financial problems and never got



Great Lakes: This is an artist's rendering of Great Lakes Crossing, a 1.4-million-square-foot mall under construction.

the plans off the drawing boards. Great Lakes Crossing, however, is not Auburn Mills.

"This is the refinement of the mills concept," said Taubman. First, Taubman said the project was scaled down, both in size and scope. While the original Auburn Mills mall was nearly 2 million square feet, Great Lakes Crossing is 1.4 million square feet.

Second, the road network that will serve the mall is far more mature. Road improvements have already been completed on Baldwin Road and there are future improvements planned for Lake Angelus Road.

Great Lakes Crossing will also continue the Taubman tradition of a "ring road" (a road that circles the development) and magazine roads (multiple entrances from major roads to the ring road).

When coupled with the existing almost unique advantage of having the mall situated between two freeway exits — Joslyn and Baldwin — Taubman said the traffic volume, while not insignificant, will flow well.

Taubman also said that the reduction in overall size will allow a far greater preservation of wetlands on the site — a key criticism when the Auburn Mills mall was proposed.

Great Lakes Crossing is even a refinement of The Taubman Company's first venture into the "value shopping center."

Its earlier foray, Arizona Mills near Tempe, Arizona, is more akin to the original "Mills concept." Great Lakes Crossing is being developed on a more pedestrian scale.

It may have a pedestrian scale, but it still dwarfs all other commercial ventures in North Oakland County, including the proposed Baldwin Commons directly to its north.

Taubman said while he doesn't know the exact figures, his company is estimating the \$200 million development will generate close to \$20 million a year in state and local taxes. The mall will also create 3000 full-time jobs.

Taubman also said that despite earlier reservations by other regional shopping center operators, Great Lakes Crossing has caused relatively little concern.

Taubman said Great Lakes Crossing will be complementary, not competition for other regional centers. As evidence, he noted that two of his anchors, Saks Fifth Avenue and Neiman Marcus, have shops at the new mall — only 15 miles away from The Somerset Collection.

Great Lakes Crossing, Taubman concluded, is really not that much different from the way retailers have always done business.

"When Hudson's was downtown, where was there outlet center — as my father would say, it's down the escalator."

Bosch Corp bringing 40 jobs to Hills

BY RICHARD PEARL
STAFF WRITER

A \$31 million expansion of the Robert Bosch Corporation in Farmington Hills is expected, following the announcement Thursday that the company has accepted a \$29.4 million tax abatement from the city and state.

It was announced at a press conference at City Hall that the expansion is expected to result in a net revenue gain of \$55.5 million for the state.

The Bosch Group, an automotive products-based manufacturing giant, is bringing the research and development for its recently acquired braking division to Farmington Hills from South Bend, Ind.

In making the Hills its braking division headquarters for North America, Bosch was credited by the state with creating 826 new jobs in southeast Michigan, including 475 company jobs and 351 indirectly related jobs, such as those in construction and the restaurant and retail fields.

Hans Weckerle, president of Bosch Braking Systems, said the decision will result in the direct transfer of 40 jobs from Indiana.

Anticipating that at least 10 to 15 percent of the new job holders will take up residence in Farmington Hills, Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi said, "We wish them well and offer

them a hearty welcome."

In referring to the Hills tax abatement, Vagnozzi said, "We're glad to be able to work this agreement out. Bosch has been in our community 15 to 18 years and they are being a good corporate citizen."

He told the gathering of officials he saw no losers.

"If there are any losers, it's the state of Indiana," he said.

State Sen. Bill Bullard, R-Milford, said he doesn't like tax abatements "but in the real world we're competing with other states and tax abatements is what we have to do."

The firm's decision to nearly double the size of its existing Hills Tech Drive campus development with a new 260,000-square-foot facility will mean a net state revenue gain after abatements and credits of \$55,521,000, according to a state analysis.

The Bosch decision was hailed by Doug Rothwell, Gov. John Engler's director of the Michigan Jobs Commission, as "the largest single economic development under our watch during the last four or five years."

"It is the 41st tax credit Michigan has awarded since the law took effect in 1995 and 25,000 jobs have been created," Rothwell said.

Speaking both of the city and

the state, he said that "without having cooperative governments and a favorable business climate, we wouldn't be here today."

Weckerle said Bosch, which first came to Farmington Hills in 1983 with about three dozen employees, will have 675 employees in the city once the new three-story office building and two-story research and development laboratory are completed late in 1999.

He said groundbreaking for the new buildings, which will consolidate Bosch operations now on Haggerty and Halsted into its 40-acre campus on Hills Tech Drive, will be held between April and June.

Weckerle said he and his family will relocate to Farmington Hills from Chicago. "We look forward to becoming your neighbors," said the executive, who is a mechanical engineer.

According to Weckerle, The Bosch Group employs 2,600 people in Michigan and has more than 23,000 employees in North America and \$5.3 billion in sales.

While the firm is automotive-based, its products range from telecommunications systems and components facilitating high-speed Internet access to household products, power tools and industrial equipment.

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