

Auburn outlet center comes together



Taubman mall officials are scrambling to dot the i's on leases for the planned state-of-the-art family entertainment/shopping center in Auburn Hills set to open in November. Here is a construction update. A press conference has been set for Feb. 24 to announce all the players.

BY BARR PERT TEMPLETON
SPECIAL WRITER

Midwest shoppers may not realize it yet, but before this year's out, they will have a new major retail and entertainment venue within hours of their homes.

Great Lakes Crossing, a mega outlet center under construction in Auburn Hills, will likely attract consumers from all points north and south.

"People will treat this as a Disneyland for the family without the rides," said Fred Marx, Farmington Hills-based retail analyst. "This will be unlike other outlet developments of the past that focused just on off-pricing and value. Great Lakes Crossing will be about people and entertainment and it will be a lot more than just a place to get a pizza."

The Great Lakes development, which will include 1.7 million square feet of retail space at Baldwin and

Joslyn Roads, is a Taubman Centers Inc. project. The Bloomfield Hills-based developer has had the project in the works for two years.

"The center is under construction and is the first of its kind in Michigan," said Taubman PR Director Karen MacDonald. The company shared a partnership with The Mills Corp. in a similar development that opened in Tempe, Arizona in November.

"That site was very well received," said MacDonald. "The Mills Corp. has the concept down pat, having opened three or four similar developments. This (Great Lakes) is our first venture on our own."

The Auburn Hills center, opening in November, will include a total of 200 sites including retail shops, restaurants and entertainment venues. A press conference scheduled for late February will have Taubman officials formally unveiling plans for the center including which retailers will occupy space at Great Lakes.

"This is going to a very high-bred shopping complex that has multiple anchors, not the conventional mall look of having, say a Sears or Hudson's, at each end," said Marx, who worked on several similar developments with Mills Inc.

Great Lakes Crossing will house a 30-screen state-of-the-art theater complex and a food court that boasts seating for 800 patrons. Several family-oriented restaurants are also planned including the first "Rainforest Cafe" in Michigan. The popular outstate restaurant chain provides patrons with an elaborate family dining experience that includes an indoor thunderstorm punctuated with falling raindrops and flashes of light.

"The stores are not that large and the complex is heavy on themes," said Marx. "Many shops will present interactive activities for children and adults."

With so much to see and do in one spot, MacDonald anticipates the center quickly becoming a major Michigan tourist attraction.

"This center will provide a large shopping base for Michigan tourism and we anticipate it being a tourist destination," said MacDonald. She foresees some 30 percent of the center's patronage springing from shop-

pers traveling at least 100 miles to visit.

"This really isn't going to be competing against the conventional malls because the heavy target here is on tourism," agreed Marx.

"It's not a fashion center. Its locale won't be considered real handy to the average shopper. Visiting it will be an experience a lot different from visiting a conventional local mall."

The thought of all those carloads of eager shoppers heading north on I-75 to the already booming Joslyn and Baldwin Road areas isn't pressing any panic buttons in Glen Schoonfield, director of public services in Auburn Hills.

"We don't perceive any special problems there, although it will be busy like other malls during the holiday season," said Schoonfield. "There are improvements being made all around the mall to deal with that situation right now."

Those "improvements" include adding additional lanes for traffic at both the Baldwin and Joslyn Road interchanges adjacent to the outlet center, said Schoonfield.

Great Lakes Crossing will also bring 2,500 construction jobs; 3,200 permanent jobs; and tax revenues of some \$20 million to the city of Auburn Hills.



The staff at Geon's

Salon is home to its patrons

Behind every successful shop owner there's a story, and this is true of Mario DiPonio, one of the owners of Geon's Hair & Nails, Bloomfield Hills.

In 1960 DiPonio needed a job to pay his tuition at Oakland University where he was a freshman. But every time he answered a Help Wanted ad, he was turned away because he had no job skills.

"At that time, my English was very bad, so that didn't help either," said DiPonio, who immigrated with his parents and siblings from Italy to Detroit in 1956.

Someone suggested that he go to beauty school and learn to cut hair, because he was creative and could work well with his hands. DiPonio decided to give it a shot.

When he walked into the beauty school on the first day of class, he knew he had made the right decision. "I saw about 10 guys standing on one side of the room and about 150 girls on the other, so I thought I died and went to heaven," he said with a smile.

A year later, he got a job as a stylist at Geon's Hair and Nails, 2716 S. Woodward, one block south of Square Lake Road in Bloomfield Hills, and he's been there ever since.

Geon's opened in 1960, and is named after its two original owners, Gene Liner and Don German. DiPonio became a part-owner of the salon in 1969, and today it's owned by Liner, DiPonio, Dino DiCosimo and David McClellan. (German sold his part in the business and now manufactures Le Joy hair care products, which Geon's carries.)

The popular salon has five stylists, two nail technicians, two assistants, an electrologist and a receptionist. A hair cut costs about \$20, and a cut and blow dry about \$35 to \$37.

"For the area we're in, we're not expensive," DiPonio said. That fact, along with the salon's friendly, family atmosphere and experienced staff (all the stylists have been there for more than 18 years), are what make it popular.

Some of the celebrities who've had their hair cut and styled there, DiPonio said, include former General Motors Chairman Roger Smith, actress Bonnie Franklin, "Wheel of Fortune's" Vanna White, and pop singer Madonna, who was a frequent customer when she was a teenager and lived in the area.

Madonna wasn't famous then, "But she definitely had star quality," DiPonio said. "When she was in a room, people who she was there. She'd do whatever it'd take to make you notice her."

Hair styles have changed a lot over the years. When DiPonio started, the "beehive" was all the rage. Then came the "bubble" in the mid-60s. Both looks required a lot of hair spray, and women would wash their hair maybe only twice a week.

In the late 1960s came the Vidal Sassoon look. Its flat, geometric lines required clean, shiny hair, which meant every day washings and much less hairspray.

"That's when blow-drying came in," DiPonio said. "We didn't use blow dryers before that."

Next came the Dorothy Hamill and Farrah Fawcett looks, and of course, the Princess Diana look. Now, a lot of customers want to look like "Friends" cast members.

"Sometimes, I've come in at 10 or 11 at night, because a client was going to be on TV, or had to go to Washington on a last minute business trip, things like that," DiPonio said.



DONNA MULCAHY

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Hundreds of youngsters enjoyed breakfast with PBS-television hero Arthur the Aardvark at Nordstrom last weekend in the Somerset Collection North, Troy. They were treated to face-painting and a musical presentation by The Spoon Man before the store opened for business. Many followed the event with a shopping trip to the Children's department. (Top left) Kids pause to "touch" their furry pal. (Bottom left) Amanda Bayangich 5, of Troy, has a heart painted on her cheek. (Right) Elizabeth Raglin, 4, of Rochester gets a hug. The retailer hosts many well-attended Saturday morning breakfast events boosting business before the rest of the mall opens!

PHOTOS BY BILL HANSEN



Nordstrom welcomes PBS' Arthur

News of special events for shoppers is included in this calendar. Send information to: Malls & Mainstreets, c/o The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 East Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009; or fax (248) 644-1314. Deadline: Wednesday 5 p.m. for publication on Sunday.

SUNDAY, FEB. 1

Puppet show
Performed daily at 7 p.m. Saturdays 11, 1 and 3 p.m. Sunday at 1 and 3 p.m.

Meadowbrook Village Mall.
Adams/Walton, Rochester Hills.
(248) 375-9451.

Antiquo Show
Through Feb. 1, glass repair by Mr. Chips, plus exhibits showcasing furniture, books, dolls pottery, china, prints and cut glass throughout the mall during regular mall hours.

Tel-Twelve Mall, 12 Mile/Southfield.
(248) 353-4111.

Spring Home & Garden Show
Through Feb. 1, more than 300 exhibitors present the latest technology/products for home improvement. Admission \$5. Seniors \$4. Kids 6-12 \$3. Sponsored by the Building Industry Association of Southeastern Michigan. Treasure chest contest with daily prizes. Today and Jan. 30 from 2-10 p.m. Jan. 31 from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Feb. 1 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Novi Expo Center, 1-961/Novi Road.
(248) 737-4478.

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 4

Chef visits
Jacques Torres, pastry chef at LeCrique 2000 in New York City visits the Marketplace at Hudson's with secrets for combining luxurious desserts with ingenious design. He'll be signing his book "Dessert Circus," \$28. Beginning at 12:30 p.m.
Somersett Collection North.
Dig Beaver/Coolidge, Troy.
(248) 443-6263.

ADDED ATTRACTIONS

THURSDAY, FEB. 5

Winterfest event
Downtown Birmingham merchants and restaurateurs present an ice sculpture show in Shain Park through the weekend. Stores offer extended hours and clearance sales throughout the shopping district. Colorful banners line the streets in-store flyers and specialty advertising.
Merrell/Bates, Birmingham.
(248) 433-3550.

Winter makeovers
Neiman Marcus presents a spring colors event in Cosmetics through Feb. 7. With any \$50 fragrance/beauty purchase, shoppers get a NM signature black tite filled with sampling of products.
Big Beaver/Coolidge, Troy.
(248) 643-3300.

Trunk show
Hersh's presents an informal modeling of the Zelda collection for spring from 10 a.m. through Feb. 7.
The Boardwalk, Orchard Lake/S. Maple.
West Bloomfield.
(248) 626-7776.

FRIDAY, FEB. 6

Mustang car raffle
Mall hustis display and raffle of a red Mustang convertible to benefit Redford Union's Blue and Gold Club, a booster for the school's extra curricular activities, through Feb. 8 during regular mall hours.
Livonia Mall, Seven Mile/Middlebelt.
(248) 476-1160.

Sale benefit
Guests can take 50-percent off fine women's ready-to-wear lines with prices dropping throughout the sale noon to 8 p.m. repeated Feb. 7 from 10 a.m. to 4

p.m. Proceeds benefit Meadow Brook Center For Learning Differences. First time event. Call for more details.
Learning Differences Center, 411 Woodward.
Downtown Rochester.
(810) 656-3806.

SATURDAY, FEB. 7

Antique show and sale
Beautiful items for show and sale managed by Jennings & McMillan, Edgel and Eleanor Ford House Activity Center through Feb. 8 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission \$6.
1100 Lakeshore Drive, Grosse Pointe Shores.
(313) 824-4710.

Kids craft
Valentine creativity workshop for children 1-3 p.m. in center mall. Supplies provided by mall merchants. Instructor is Sharon Tenhoopen. Complimentary.
Livonia Mall, Seven Mile/Middlebelt.
(248) 476-1160.

Fashion doll show
Norita Bergmann hosts a all fashion doll show featuring Barbie Dolls 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. with appraisals for collectors during the event.
Meadow Brook Village Mall.
Walton/Adams.
(248) 816-8791.

Parenting workshop
Family Matters IV with more than 70 workshops 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Registration \$20, lunch \$8. Co-sponsor Hudson's selling \$20 Huggabee teddy bears to support program presenting bears to kids entering state's foster care system.
Oakland Community College, Auburn Hills.

MONDAY, FEB. 9

Valentine Promotion
Through Feb. 14 shoppers can earn a glass globe with a votive candle and matching floral when they spend \$150 or more at all stores. See Information Desk for details, receipt redemption.
Westland Center, Wayne/Warren.
(313) 425-5001.