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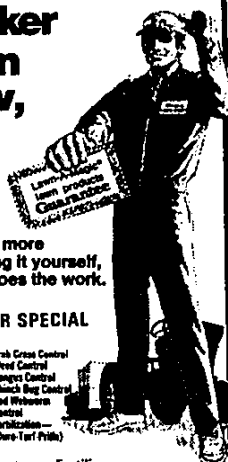
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Shopping Centers Offer Good Grazing For Suburban Autos

The automobile, the machine that built and unbuilt Detroit, is primarily responsible for the form of shopping centers which have mushroomed throughout America's fertile suburbs.

The centers have attached themselves to the periphery of big cities bleeding the cities of their commercial blood, often only to find themselves bled by bigger shopping centers further out or smaller neighborhood centers.

Shopping centers offer three big pluses most downtown shopping centers can't provide -- free parking, separation of cars and pedestrians, and security.

Most people are willing to walk across a football field of asphalt to save a couple bucks on parking.

Isn't it enough you should pay for gas and oil and parts and insurance and car payments without having to pay to let the car just SIT THERE?

And there aren't any carbon monoxide fumes or crazy drivers in a shopping center. Not only are the hazards eliminated but many shopping centers offer tropical greenery, exotic animal exhibits, a controlled climate, trade shows (everything from pottery to house trailers) telephone and rest rooms.

And security. The crime rate at your average shopping center doesn't approach the muggings and purse snatchings that go on downtown. But there are problems. Northland, the granddaddy of all regional shopping centers, was hit by crowds of restless teenagers a few years ago and shoplifting has been an increasing problem.

Other centers admit to problems with shoplifters, bad check passers and theft from parked cars.

Wonderland, a small open regional center, claims a negligible security problem. "We have the lowest crime rate of any center in six counties," said promotion director Del Yanetta. "We have some minor incidents but they are insignificant compared to other centers."

The June issue of Shopping Center World, a five month old trade journal for the industry, warns about the "declining center" which metropolitan growth and business has passed by. Livonia Mall General Manager Robert Roris said the suburbs will probably follow the fate of the cities as the population expands and stretches city services to the breaking point. There is the possibility the now thriving shopping centers may become ghost centers as the population moves on.

But suburbs are set up differently than cities and that may make a difference in their life expectancy, he said. Where downtown Detroit is a focal point for all types of city

functions -- commercial, civic, recreational, business, industrial -- newer suburbs have separated these functions and placed them at different locations.

"A shopping center isn't like a downtown," he said. "It may be like the retail district of a downtown. We have stores, restaurants, services and entertainment here but we don't have offices or churches or a wholesale industry like a downtown."

"We also have a definite geographical boundary -- we are limited to 54 stores. We can't expand outward like a downtown," he said.

Merchants within a center also must stick together like no downtown merchants ever did. Besides paying rent of their own stores they share the cost of heating, cooling and lighting the rest of the mall, maintaining the parking lot security force and mall promotion. They must pay dues to a Merchants Association which elects officers to make certain promotional decisions.

The Mall owners have a stake in the success of their tenants because they get a percentage of their profit.

The shopping center outburst began after World War II with small "strip centers" -- a row of neighborhood stores housed in the same building and sharing a common parking lot. Some housing developers made provisions for these centers near their developments.

The first attempt at a giant regional center was made by the J. L. Hudson Co., in the early 1950s. In 1954 it opened Northland, the shopping center that urbanized soggy Southfield Township and is the epitome of planning as far as shopping centers go.

"Everything is planned to bring the people here to shop," said Bruce Andrews, director of Shopping Centers Inc., for the Eastern Region of Dayton Hudson Properties. "The people who work in the offices can shop here in the daytime and the people who live in the apartments can shop here at night."

The incredible Northland complex includes several office buildings, hotels, restaurants, a night club, theater, apartments, a medical center.

Hudsons acquired 500 acres of land in Southfield Township just touching Detroit in the early 1950s and planned every acre of it to bring business into their store.

Armed with market research studies they leaped ahead of the population surge to the northwest suburbs.

Continued on Page 7

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