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New Penney's under way soon

By Brennan David

Construction on the new J.C. Penney department store is scheduled to begin Monday at Hammond Square.

The mall's completion date has been moved to March 2009.

Jimmy Maurin, Stirling Properties chairman, said construction equipment will start arriving at the J.C. Penney site sometime Monday.

Construction will move rather quickly, he said, and the store is scheduled to open in the fall.

Construction of the new Target will also begin sometime this spring, and the store is scheduled to open in spring 2009.

“Our focus has been trying to get the site ready,” Maurin said. “We have pretty exciting tenants coming in.”

Stirling Properties has not disclosed the names of those tenants, but Maurin said an announcement will be made within 60 days.

Complications during demolition of the current mall have delayed the work close to 90 days, Maurin said.

Demolishing the mall while keeping Sears, Rite Aid and Dillards in operation has been challenging, he said.

Demolition began in late October at the rear part of the mall, and the crew is working

towards the front to not disturb the operations of the remaining stores.

“This is a huge demolition project,” Maurin said. “When you start demolishing and you see things that don't go as planned, it sets you back.”

Maurin blamed most of the complications encountered to issues involving the integrity of the 30-year-old mall.

“The entire mall had one system,” he explained. “It had one sewer, air conditioner and electricity. All this had to be removed with tenants at the mall. It has actually gone better than imagined.”

While the mall continues to present new obstacles each day to construction crews, Maurin said renovations did not stop shoppers from visiting the mall of the Christmas holidays.

“You have to remember,” he said. “This project is twice the size as Hammond Square at its peak.”

Demolition is scheduled for completion Feb. 15.