

Hammond retail center for three parishes

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HAMMOND — Hammond serves as the retail center for more than 100,000 people in three parishes, according to a study by the Southeastern Louisiana University Small Business Research Center.

The study was commissioned a year ago by Hammond Mayor Mayson Foster to analyze the city's retail market. Foster released the study last month at a City Council meeting.

"We went to Southeastern because we knew Hammond Square Mall was making changes," Foster said.

He added that the analysis was not done specifically for the mall redevelopment.

Foster said the purpose was to offer research for anyone wanting to open a retail establishment in Hammond.

Yet the study will help Stirling Properties sell the redeveloped mall to national retailers, especially because it is an independent university analysis, said Sterling Chairman Jimmy Maurin.

"There is not a lot of data on Hammond," Maurin said.

Stirling is redeveloping Hammond Square Mall for Palace Properties, which purchased it from Sizeler Properties last May. All but Dillard's, Sears and Rite-Aid have closed in the mall as it is demolished to be replaced by an open-air "lifestyle" shopping center.

Study sent out

Maurin said as soon as the study was released, he sent it out with his sales packets to national retailers.

The retail study includes an inventory of retail space in the city, analyzed purchases of residents from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Data and defined the regional "draw" of shoppers for Hammond.

A significant finding, Maurin said, is the definition of the "Hammond Retail Area," which scientifically verifies the shopping patterns Hammond retailers have encountered. The study defined the area by 17 ZIP codes and showed that the city draws shoppers far outside its limits.

The draw is from Amite to Springfield and Walker to near the city limits of Covington — an area that the 2000 U.S. Census shows as having 114,000 residents, the study says. There are about 20,000 people residing in the city limits of Hammond.

"Hammond is somewhat of an island," Maurin said. "It's got great connectivity to the rural areas because of the interstates."

Yet the closest shopping for higher-end retailers is in Mandeville, about 20 miles away.

Maurin, a lifelong Hammond resident with extensive experience in developing many of the city's large retail centers, said Hammond had once been considered a "Wal-Mart" city because of its large blue-collar base. Hammond is still a blue-collar city, but Hurricane Katrina has raised the per capita income by 5 to 10 percent, Maurin said.



Advocate staff photo by Bill Feig

Demolition crews are pulling down a large part of Hammond Square Mall as part of a major redevelopment project to convert the mall into an open-air 'lifestyle' center attractive to both shoppers and national retailers.

Katrina biggest impact

"There is no question that Katrina had the single biggest impact on Hammond than anything in my 59 years of living here," Maurin said.

"The dramatic help that Katrina did for the Hammond area is all the people," Maurin said.

Maurin said that Stirling's research indicates there are 15,000 additional people in the study's defined Hammond Retail Area since the Katrina struck on Aug. 29, 2005.

Other factors point to the fact that Tangipahoa Parish, and Hammond in particular, are among the places benefiting from the post-Katrina population shift in southeastern Louisiana. New shopping centers are being developed all over Hammond, particularly around the mall and near Southeastern's campus.

Myra Lamonte, who owns or is developing three shopping centers along University Avenue near Southeastern, said she sees the demand for more retail space increasing in Hammond.

Her most recently completed center, The Forum, filled with tenants immediately after construction, she said.

She has another development on University Avenue under construction that already has tenants signed.

As for the strength of Hammond's draw to outsiders, Lamonte said she believes a retailer that caters to its customers and builds a niche market will succeed. She said her belief is based on her husband's business, Teens and Queens Fashions, located on West Thomas Street in Hammond.

Create a market

"Sometimes you have to create a market or educate the consumer on what's available," Lamonte said. "As the population grows, higher income people will come here."

The Southeastern researchers surveyed 399 customers shopping at Hammond Square Mall, 204 customers in downtown Hammond, and 772 customers at the Stirling Mandeville Shopping Centre developed by Stirling Properties 17 miles from Hammond. This sample size has a margin of error of 4 percent, the study says.

The researchers were unable to get permission from other Hammond big-box retailers or the Walker Wal-Mart for its study, the study says.

The results of those surveyed follow.

- Of the people shopping in downtown Hammond, 43 percent reside in the Hammond city limits and 71 percent in the Hammond Retail Area. Data from the Hammond Retail Area includes those living in the Hammond city limits.
- The old Hammond Square Mall drew 30 percent of its shoppers from inside the Hammond city limits and 73 percent from the Hammond Retail Area.
- The Stirling Mandeville Shopping Center draws 8 percent of its shoppers from the Hammond city limits and 17 percent from the Hammond Retail Area. Of the shoppers in the Hammond Retail Area, more came from the north end than the south end, study says.

The study looks solely at post-Katrina data. Foster explained that is because everything that happened before the storm is now "ancient history."

The study is available for download at no cost on the city of Hammond's Web site, <http://www.hammond.org>.