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Sporting goods store opens; Academy looks to benefit community

By Megan Mosher

Today at 8 a.m. Academy Sports + Outdoors finally opens its doors in the city of Hammond.

The lease for the store in Hammond Square and the ground breaking on CM Fagan Drive was done in early December 2010, although Stirling Properties had been working on the deal with the company for the past couple of years.

Six and a half months later, Hammond now boasts a 69,000- square-foot premier sporting goods store that is predicted to boost sales tax revenue for the city and create 165 jobs in the area.

“You see the number of jobs it creates,” said Mayor Mayson Foster, referring to the crowd of store associates gathered for the ribbon-cutting Thursday afternoon. “That’s what we’re interested in right now — jobs and taxes.”

John Hay, vice president of real estate and construction with Academy, said his company is committed to growth and being active members of the Hammond community.

“It’s another good feeling that we continue to add retailers to Hammond Square,” said Jimmy Maurin with Stirling Properties, “and I believe Hammond Square will be well-received.”

The store will hold a three-day grand opening event June 24-26.

The grand opening event will feature giveaways such as free Crocs and free T-shirts and registration for larger shopping sprees and other prizes.

That Sunday, former Saints player Michael Lewis will put in an appearance and Troy and Jacob Landry from “Swamp People” will sign autographs from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.

See ACADEMY, 2A

Based in Texas, Academy carries a wide variety of outdoors and sports equipment, ranging from team sports like basketball and football, to camping gear, jogging clothes and golf.

The store caters to a wide variety of people, from youth to adult and from men to women, said Store Director Danny Fletcher.

The store’s seasonal displays include a special back-to-school section with all the uniform pieces, back-packs and shoes kids will need to start back to school in August. Other seasonal displays include baseball goods and pool or swimming accessories. These will be switched out with football and hunting goods later in the year.

Each Academy store follows the same layout of sports equipment on the left wall, shoes in the left corner, camping and seasonal on the back wall and the back right corner, archery, hunting fishing and boating goods located on the right wall and all apparel goods in the middle of the store.

However, the Hammond store does boast a feature which the Covington and Baton Rouge stores do not - a golf

range and swing analyzer.

“We are the only Academy in the area that has the swing analyzer,” Fletcher said.

The golf range and swing analyzer allows a customer to try out different clubs with a live ball and determine how hard their swing is. A touch-screen computer monitor plays back the results.

The other unique feature of the Hammond store is an archery range for customers to practice shooting bows and arrows, measure their bows and even cut arrows.

The store offers services such as boar sighting, scope mounting, spooling for fishing rods, racket stringing for tennis rackets and CO2 filling for paintball guns. The store also offers delivery and assembly services for larger purchases, Fletcher said.

“This is another great, large format store, very much like when we moved Best Buy in. It was the first big electronics store,” Maurin said. “This is the first really big sporting goods store. I think they’re going to be very successful.”

One of the things that sets Academy apart is their reasonable prices, said Eric Herrera, senior communications coordinator with Academy.

“You’ve got options,” he said. “The price range varies so much.”

Academy held their official ribbon-cutting Thursday, with the new store associates, the store managers, Jimmy Maurin, Grady Brame and Ginger Guidry with Stirling Properties, Councilmen Lemar Marshall, Bobby Martin and Mike Williams and Mayor Mayson Foster.

The first shoppers at the new store were 25 children, each armed with a \$100 gift card and escorted by two of the new employees. The children were selected through the Boys and Girls Club of Covington to participate in Academy’s give back program.

The kids ran excitedly through the store, some stopping for clothes, many picking their favorite sport and all with huge smiles on their faces.

DeHanna Curry, 8, played with her shiny new purple hula hoop in the main aisle, deftly keeping the plastic ring twirling around her hips.

“She loves it,” said her mother Lauren Barker. “We’re very excited.”

DeHanna picked out an outfit, a soccer ball, a large plastic ball, a jump rope, a bag and a watch in addition to the hula hoop, said Barker.

Other kids had skateboards, shoes and almost as much variety in their selections as the store has merchandise.