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Stirling close to signing deals

By Brennan David

It's a big shopping district, and someone is going to have to fill it.

That person, Stirling Properties Chairman Jimmy Maurin, told Hammond Chamber of Commerce members Thursday about the current state of Hammond Square.

While Maurin made only one new announcement, he assured chamber members that his staff is close to finishing several deals that will fill 60 retail stores to be built on 100 acres.

“The retail market is under stress right now,” Maurin said. “When Wal-Mart cuts back on new openings, believe me, they are hurting.”

A new Verizon Wireless store will begin construction next week between Hammond Mall Boulevard and the large oak tree in front Dillard's. The new store will double its size, said Maurin.

J.C. Penney will be the first new store to open its doors at Hammond Square on Oct. 1., and the shopping district will look much different by then.

Construction of six of the seven new restaurants will begin in the coming months, and Maurin expects those restaurants to open by spring 2009. Parking lots at Dillard's, Rite Aid, Sears and J.C. Penney will have new surfaces within weeks, and construction at both Target and Best Buy, which are scheduled for completion in July 2009, could be underway.

Maurin said he learned recently that Sears plans to do a full renovation and upgrade of its facility, but a time table has yet to be established.

Dillard's already has plans for a full renovation and expansion of its store.

“We are not just building another mall,” Maurin said. “We are doubling its size.”

As of Thursday, Target, Sears, Dillard's, J.C. Penney, AMC Theatre and Best Buy are under lease for the power center, which are large, brand name stores that will enclose the lifestyle center. Two power stores remain vacant on the south end facing Interstate 12, as well as a pair of stores north of C.M. Fagan Drive where The Home Depot was to be located.

The two stores north of C.M. Fagan Drive will open in late 2009.



BIG AND WIDE —The smooth dirt surface is the future site of Target. at Hammond Square A traffic light will be placed at its intersection with U.S. 51.

Maurin said he is making progress with tenants to fill the the 200,000 square feet of lifestyle center, which includes smaller retail stores divided by a main street, but he said he would prefer to announce all its tenants at one time.

“Just because you have signed letters of intent and leases, it does not mean you will be able to walk into a store,” he said.

Along with Hammond Square construction, infrastructure improvements on U.S. 51 are scheduled for an Aug. 31 completion.