

MONDAY JULY 28, 2008 Last modified: Sunday, July 27, 2008 9:57 PM CDT

J.C. Penney's construction complete

By Joan Davis

Construction on the new J.C. Penney store is done. The contractor is completing a punch list of last-minute items and will hand over keys on Aug. 1.

The store opening is still two months away, but the city, owners **Stirling Properties** and Hammond Chamber of Commerce are already planning a grand opening meet and greet for Oct. 1.

Project Superintendent Louie Foy said construction of the J.C. Penney store at Hammond Square has gone extremely smoothly the past five months, and he'll be ready to pass the keys to General Manager Kevin Daigler. He and his crew have been working from about 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. each day, seven days a week to complete the project on time.

Foy oversaw construction of the entire **Stirling** mall in Covington, the Tanger Outlet Mall in Gonzales and said the "little" Hammond store was "an easy job" in contrast. This week his crew completed last-minute electrical and trim work.

A "soft" opening of the 84,038-square-foot Hammond store is set for Sept. 28 without fanfare and the grand opening Oct. 3. Until then, Daigler will be busy interviewing, hiring and training employees and then stocking the shelves.

Latest Penney's Model

The Hammond store is the eighth for Daigler, the second he has watched built from the ground up, he said. A native of Gallatin, Tenn., his last store was in South Haven, Miss. Daigler has spent 18 years in retail, all with J.C. Penney.

Daigler walked the store Wednesday, talking with Foy and other Donahue-Favret construction crew members. The walls are up, tile and carpet installed, bathrooms working. Employees of H.J. Martin & Son of Green Bay, Wisc., were busy setting up the latest up-to-date fixtures, including shelving, bins, display cases and checkouts.

The store is looking like a store.

Daigler said shoppers in Hammond will see the latest Penney's model with updated colors and customer-friendly checkouts off to the side out of the flow of traffic, causing less congestion in aisles when there's a huge event like holiday shopping. Different departments of the store will be marked with eye-popping colors, so a shopper can stand at one end of the store and see where he or she needs to go, aided also by directional finders at every intersection.

See PENNEY'S, 8A

Departments include women's, children's and men's clothing (including big and tall sizes), home decor including appliances, bedding, jewelry, shoes, handbags and more. A separate entrance at the rear of the building allows quick access to the catalog shopping center where customers can place or pick up orders. At the rear of the store also is a styling salon, complete with a manicure and pedicure area.



Inside the new J.C. Penney store in Hammond, Superintendent Louie Foy talks on a cell phone with workers at the new J.C. Penney in Lafayette that is scheduled to open this weekend. Photo by Joan Davis

“This is extremely nice for the customers,” he said. “They can go right into the salon without walking through the store, just dodge in and out.”

Fitting rooms in the clothing departments are spacious with couches and flat-screen TVs, and restrooms are located strategically in different areas of the store.

In the women’s department, 10 certified fitters will help the ladies find the perfect fit in a bra, and in the home decor department, designers will be on hand to help with purchases.

“They’ll even come out to your house for made-to-measure blinds and drapes,” he said.

A bank of computers in the catalog order department will allow shoppers to shop online for special order items.

Job Fair seeks 145 employees

A job fair to find J.C. Penney employees will be held from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Aug. 31 and Sept. 1 and from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Sept. 2 at the Quality Inn, the former Landmark Hotel, he said. The store will have 145 employees on staff, and he’s looking for full- and part-time sales associates and stylists for the salon. He also has two supervisor positions available. He’s looking for outgoing, friendly people.

Those hired will undergo training at the Hammond store and get practical experience at the Covington store, he said. Employees will start stocking the store Sept. 1. Three or four tractor trailers per day will deliver inventory seven days a week until the opening.

Daigler, who is still commuting from Mississippi until the closing on a new home in Covington, said he had his first glimpse of **Stirling Properties** “lifestyle center” when **Stirling Chairman Jimmy Maurin** spoke at the Hammond Chamber of Commerce meeting in June.

“I was impressed with the look and set up of the mall,” he said. “I was also impressed with the excitement in Hammond. I was told it was a sold-out luncheon, one of the few.”

City, **Stirling**, Chamber party

On Tuesday, Daigler will meet with a **Stirling Properties** representative, Hammond Chamber Director Charlotte Lenoir and Hammond Mayor Mayson Foster to plan the meet and greet at the store.

“We’re sharing in cost,” said Hammond Mayor Mayson Foster. “We believe it’s an important event to bring J.C. Penney back to Hammond. We believe it will be a catalyst to kick off the success of Hammond Square.”

Details are not finalized yet, but Foster said the party will be open to the public, and live entertainment and refreshments will be provided.

Penney’s across U.S.

Tim Lyons, spokesperson with the Plano, Texas, corporate home office, said Lafayette is opening a new J.C. Penney this week. Presently, only two new stores are being built in Louisiana. Penney’s has slowed the pace of building, with 50 new stores last year, 36 this year and 20 next year. Currently, there are 1,074 Penney stores across the nation.

Penney’s focus is on convenience.

“Our new stores are designed to be very convenient to shop, single-level stores with wide aisles for baby strollers and wheelchairs,” he said. “We definitely have a goal to make it convenient. Checkouts are in the front of the store, so when you’ve finished shopping, you go to one place to make purchases.”

While the Hammond store is smaller than Lafayette’s 100,000-square-foot store, the Hammond store will have all the major national brands, like Levi’s and Nike, and its own brands and exclusive brands, like Chris Madden.

“Our own brands of merchandise are very competitive in quality, style and price,” he said. “We’re very excited to be coming back to Hammond opening a brand new store.”