

Hammond Square center taking shape



Show Caption **ROGER ZETTLER/Advocate**

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HAMMOND — The \$100 million transformation of the city's former indoor mall into the new Hammond Square shopping center is in the home stretch.

During the past two months, three big-box retailers new to Hammond have opened: Best Buy on June 10, Target on July 26 and TJ Maxx on Aug. 2, said Grady Brame, executive vice president and partner with [Stirling Properties](#), which is developing Hammond Square.

New-to-Hammond restaurants Arzi's Greek and Lebanese Food, of Baton Rouge, and steakhouse chain Sante Fe Cattle Co. of Brentwood, Tenn., also have opened.

The next round of openings are slated for fall, which includes a 15,000-square-foot Books-A-Million store and a 12,000-square-foot Shoe Department Encore store, Brame said.

Both of the stores already have facilities open in Hammond.

The so-called "main street" portion of the shopping center, a landscaped section of smaller shops, will open in the fall.

The final round of openings will be in early 2010, mainly for those stores that weren't able to open in time for the Christmas shopping season, Brame said.

The main street section will include some businesses that had stores in the old mall, such as health supplement retailers GNC and athletic clothing retailer Foot

Locker.

Other new restaurants will include a new sushi and Japanese steak restaurant and an Italian restaurant, Brame said.

Besides the new stores, J.C. Penney returned to Hammond when it opened its store in October, Brame said.

Two of the stores original to the old mall that remained open during the construction process, Rite Aid and Dillards, have received fresh paint and new signs.

What has ironically helped Hammond Square is the declining economy.

Hammond Square was able to move forward and get buildings out of the ground, Brame said.

Other projects, such as shopping centers slated for Covington and Denham Springs, have been put on hold, Brame said. Some tenants once discussing leases for those locations have come to Hammond instead.

Mayor Mayson Foster said he is pleased with the progress of the mall.

“The city of Hammond is estatic about the reception that the citizens of Hammond are giving to the new stores at Hammond Square,” Foster said.

That reception includes long waits at Arzi’s and Santa Fe. Managers at the new retailers have told the mayor that sales are strong, Foster said.

What has really pleased Foster is the opening of the new stores at Hammond Square has not affected the shops in downtown, Foster said.

“We’re looking for a total package, not just a focus on one particular area,” Foster said.

Hammond Square Mall had been in decline for many years but had received a post-Hurricane Katrina boost in sales.

The redevelopment process began in May 2006 when Palace Properties purchased the 30-year-old indoor mall from Sizeler Properties for \$14 million.

Stirling Properties managed the redevelopment process by knocking down the old mall and began building an outdoor shopping center with elements of big-box dominated power centers and landscaped lifestyle strip malls.

The city assisted the project by selling \$15 million in bonds for road and drainage improvements around the former mall site. The bonds will be repaid with sales tax revenue.

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