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Maurin shows off new Hammond Square Mall for Kiwanis

by Alissa Cannon Brown

Posted September 18th, 2009

Jimmy Maurin of Stirling Properties in Covington was the guest of Kiwanis member Lana Hutchinson at the August 27 meeting of the Amite Kiwanis Club. Maurin and Stirling Properties purchased and redeveloped what was the old Hammond Square Mall.

Maurin was welcomed by the Kiwanis Club to explain how he and his real estate developing group bought land around the mall nearly 10 years ago in order to building an updated shopping center for the city of Hammond. However, a New Orleans company disputed the new development and tied up the developing process in courts by suing the city of Hammond, Stirling Properties, as well as council members and the Mayor. After four years in the courts, the New Orleans company released their CEO and then offered to sell the mall property to Stirling in order to completely re-develop the system.

Stirling and Maurin hesitated at first, but were given a very appropriate offer. Stirling jumped on board and began the demolition process in March of 2007. It took the developers almost one year and $1.5 million to demolish the mall, but saving Dillards, Sears, and Rite Aid. The company, in order to save money and recycle, purchased a pulverizing machine in order reuse the concrete for the new development.

By keeping the three stores listed above, the mall became what is known as a "hybrid center." There are less than 20 hybrid centers in the country. After the completion of the mall, there will be close to 850,000 square feet to enjoy, with 5,000 parking spaces around the center.

Maurin wanted to bring to the mall a "downtown main street" effect, therefore a road is being built through the center of the mall. "We are working diligently," Maurin said, to complete the mall. He also feels that the mall is "one of the things we have been missing." By completing the project, 1,200 new jobs were created for Tangipahoa Parish; and 900 construction jobs were filled to build the center.

Maurin was well supported by the city of Hammond and residents when proposing this project. The city voted to give $12 million towards the project by building the ring road around the center, by widening and making turn lanes on Highway 51, and installing new traffic lights at intersections.

A total of seven new restaurants will be open for business when the project is completed. Maurin mentioned a few highlights about new stores that signed on with the project. On October 4, 2008, JCPenney opened 15 stores nationwide. Of those 15 stores, Maurin said, the Hammond store is ranked at #2 in the country. Target also saw a boost with the mall opening. The corporation opened 23 stores across the country on July 22, 2009. Of those 23 stores, the Hammond store is ranked at #1. Best Buy, on its opening day, found that their sales were 38% higher than what was projected. Maurin is trying to educate shoppers of the importance of their tax dollars staying within the parish and within the city. He said in closing that, "This is the last significant project that I did with Stirling, and I am so glad I could have been a part of it for Hammond and for Tangipahoa Parish."

The official grand opening of the Hammond Square Mall will be celebrated on Thursday, October 1.

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