

# 140,000 shop weekly

## Maurin negotiating with more retailers

By **JOAN DAVIS**  
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Anchor stores at Hammond Square, nervous when they signed with Stirling Properties two years ago, are dumbfounded at their success, reporting 15 to 20 percent better sales than projected.

Records show 140,000 people shop at Hammond Square every week, Jimmy Maurin, Stirling Properties chairman, told members of the Hammond Kiwanis Club on Tuesday.

Target reports that 5 percent of its sales come from residents traveling from Mississippi.

Penney's, Ulta, Best Buy and Target are doing well, as are AMC Palace Theatre and longtime tenants Sears, Rite-Aid and Dillard's, evidence that the gamble developer Jimmy Maurin took razing the old

mall and building a new one is paying off.

Positive news of the center's success is making the rounds in the shopping center industry, helping Maurin with the challenge of filling retail space.

The developer said he is in lease negotiations with 25 retailers. The shopping center is 91 percent leased with 70,000 square feet remaining, all on Main Street. Conservatively, it will take one to one and a half years to have full occupancy.

One company in talks is a "big box" store that bought a building permit then used its "get out" provision to back out of the deal at the 11th hour.

"Home Depot is back at the table," Maurin said.

Home Depot, an early signer that cut and ran when problems

See **HAMMOND SQUARE, 2A**



Photo by Joan Davis

**AERIAL VIEW** — Stirling Properties Chairman Jimmy Maurin shows a schematic of Hammond Square and talks to Hammond Kiwanis members on Tuesday about where new stores are going up.

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## HAMMOND SQUARE CONTINUES TO WOO STORES

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developed within the company, is again building new stores, he said. Because the store acquired its building permit through the city previously, he thinks a store could be built quickly. The plan is for a 125,000-square-foot store to be built on the corner north of Sears and south of North Cypress Fitness Center.

The deal is not signed, and the company is still doing a retail study of the area, but Maurin is hopeful.

"We have a chance with Home Depot," he said.

Stirling recently announced the coming of Academy Sports + Outdoors, a 70,000-square-foot freestanding store to open north of C.M. Fagan Drive for back-to-school shopping in 2011. Construction on that store will begin in the next 30 to 45 days.

Maurin said he is lax to make announcements of new stores before the deals are signed, but he did indicate that corner stores at the north end of Palace Drive between Dillard's and Rite-Aid may be open by next spring.

Sam's Club, originally considered, will probably locate in Covington instead of Hammond, he said.

Clothiers Gap and Old Navy "are on our list," Maurin said, but the companies "have a bad opinion of Hammond," probably a vestige of the old days of the languishing mall.

However, he said those stores located in malls Stirling has built in Covington and Mandeville report 20 percent of their sales come from Tangipahoa Parish. The company is opting to replace stores rather than build new ones, but he added that he hasn't given up on the retailers coming to Hammond.

Maurin recently met with officers from the Dillard corporation and said he is hopeful Dillard's will soon make an announcement of renovation and expansion.

In addition to retailers, Maurin said

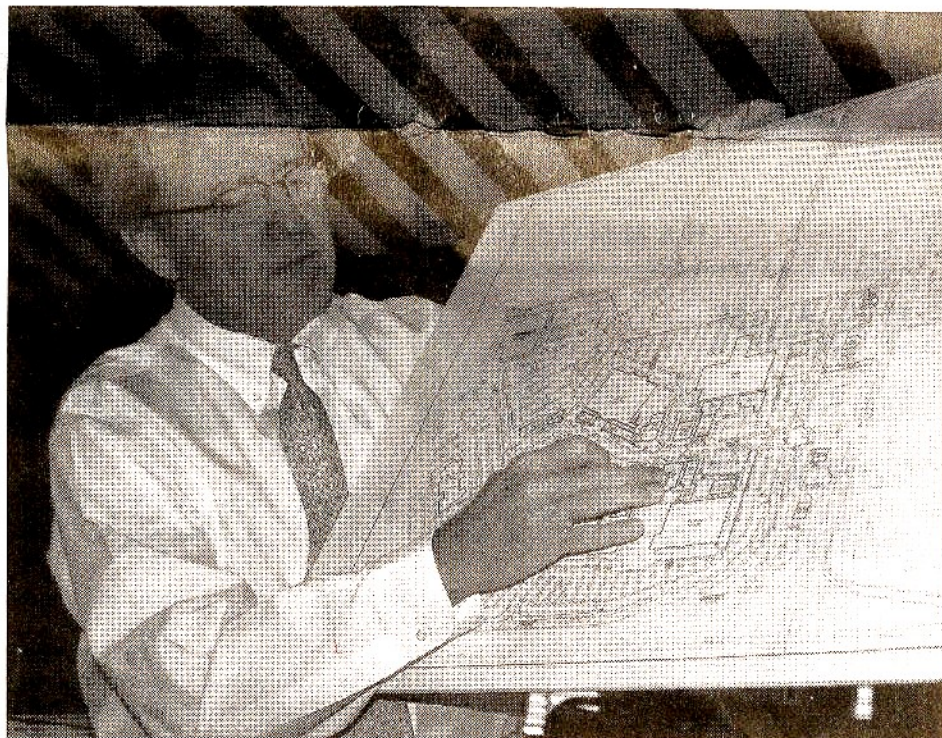


Photo by Joan Davis

### JIMMY MAURIN SHOWS A MAP OF HAMMOND SQUARE STORES

the six restaurants added at Hammond Square are all packed on Thursday through Sunday, though naysayers said Hammond couldn't support anymore restaurants.

The six restaurants — Nagoya Japanese, East of Italy, Albasha Greek & Lebanese, Phil's Grill, Santa Fe Cattle Company and Raising Cane's will be joined by one or more restaurants near Hwy. 51 north of the big oak tree. Stirling is in talks with "every major restaurant chain," and Maurin said in the end he may locate two restaurants in the location instead of just one.

He gave a brief history of the old Hammond Square and how he acquired the old mall building, the last 50 acres, from Sizeler Realty after a four to five year fight

over rights of access. He said he hadn't planned on buying the old mall but building a peripheral mall west of Hammond Square. However, the influx of population after Hurricane Katrina changed his mind.

The old mall had 430,000 square feet of retail space, and the redeveloped hybrid power-lifestyle center, when complete, will have 700,000 square feet.

A shopping center "is a living, breathing thing that must evolve every day to be successful," he said. "Hammond Square is one of my treasures. I will not let it sit stagnant."

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