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Hammond Square to open Oct. 1

By Joan Davis

One day is not enough for **Stirling Properties** to celebrate the long-awaited grand opening of Hammond Square.

A star-studded ribbon-cutting and VIP ceremony at 5:30 p.m. Oct. 1 will kick off four days of activities that will conclude at dusk each evening with a spotlight show, lending the event a red carpet flair.

More ribbon-cutting ceremonies, a Harley show with music, an Estee Lauder event, a car show, belly dancing, story-telling, promotions, salon demonstrations, gift giveaways and live entertainment will continue through Sunday.

Hammond Chamber of Commerce has joined with the developers to plan a mega event during which 90 percent of the shopping center will be open for business, said Grady Brame, executive vice president and partner with Stirling Properties. Though technically, the big stores — Target, T.J. Maxx, Best Buy and J.C. Penney's — are already open, the celebration will mark a milestone with the opening of most of the Palace Drive stores.

Between 30 and 35 stores will open between Oct. 1 and Thanksgiving, and as many as 15 or 20 more sometime during 2010.

It will all begin next Thursday on a stage set up at the head of Palace Drive between Sears and Dillard's, Brame said.

Stirling Properties Chairman of the Board Jimmy Maurin, Mayor Mayson Foster, Council President Mike Williams and Tangipahoa Parish President Gordon Burgess will each give a short, 10-minute welcome, all sharing their excitement over completion of the project.

Haley Taylor, a graduate of St. Thomas Aquinas Regional Catholic High School and a university freshman, will sing the National Anthem.

The Hammond High School Band and Junior ROTC Color Guard will provide music and spirit for the second line dance down Main Street, Brame said.

Then, the shopping experience will begin as stores open their doors. A radio remote will continue throughout the weekend, and broadcasters will announce gift card giveaways from all the tenants.

Foster, always vocal about the welcome of the new retail stores and the accompanying sales taxes, said he will enthusiastically join the second line as he represents the city of Hammond.

"I am so excited about what's going to be happening, celebrating the opening of Main Street Hammond Square," Foster said. "While Main Street does not incorporate the 'big boxes,' it is a continuation of the development and creation of atmosphere at Hammond Square."

Tenant-sponsored events and giveaways will continue throughout the entire four days, either in conjunction with or separate from the opening ribbon-cutting,

See HAMMOND SQUARE, 2A

Brame said. For instance, Rue 21 will hold its own ribbon-cutting ceremony on Thursday morning, and Books-A-Million is planning a similar ceremony on Friday morning.

On Thursday, J.C. Penney, the first store to open in the redeveloped shopping center, will celebrate its one-year anniversary with cake and balloons, salon demonstrations and drawings for door prizes.

“We’ve been in the community one year, and friendships have formed and a real sense of family within the store,” said Kevin Daigler, store manager. “We do want to thank Hammond and the surrounding communities for welcoming us.”

The store staff will dress in J.C. Penney colors of black, white and red and will serve cake and distribute balloons, Daigler said. The store will also offer free 10-minute manicures, salon demonstrations and drawings for door prizes. The store manager is especially excited about new access from main street with the completion of the back patio.

“We’ll have cake at the front of the store and celebrate main street at the back door,” Daigler said.

Donna Hellmers, membership and marketing coordinator for Hammond Chamber of Commerce, said Chairman Daryl Ferrara and Executive Director Charlotte Banks were involved in the planning, working to help organize, providing points of contact and phone numbers. The entire chamber membership, including representatives from parish tourism and the Downdown Development District, will be on hand for support as well.

“We helped put all the key players together, put them in contact with the right people,” Banks said. “On behalf of the chamber, we’re excited about bring this new commerce to town and getting the whole community involved.”

New stores opening Oct. 1-4 include Books-A-Million, Maurices, Rue 21, Hibbett Sports, Coach House Gifts, Paris Parker, Foot Locker, Phil’s Grill, GNC, Great American Cookie, Merle Norman and Purse Bag Pattie’s. Coming soon are Zale’s, Nagoys Sushi &Steak, East of Italy, Shoe Dept. Encore and Smoothie King.