

THURSDAY OCTOBER 2, 2008

## Heroes of Hammond

The new Hammond Square's first new store, JC Penney, is back in town. It's big and beautiful. The local Dillard's and Sears stores continue to do well, and other new retailers are preparing to locate nearby.

Meanwhile, the surrounding streets have been widened and improved; they provide easy access and finally even make sense.

Hammond is starting to reclaim what was lost for so many years — its place as the center of retail growth and activity for the region.

Credit has been given to Hurricane Katrina for the population growth that made retailers start noticing Hammond again. JC Penney's decision in 2004 to leave Hammond has been described as "wake up call" to the community.

Events and timing have indeed been factors, but getting Hammond back on track doesn't just happen. It requires leadership and hard work. Despite many difficult storms, two men are making it happen.

To be sure, they get help and cooperation from others, which is essential and appreciated.

But today we applaud and thank these two heroes of Hammond, Stirling Properties owner Jimmy Maurin and Mayor Mayson Foster.



**HAPPY OCCASION** — Mayor Mayson Foster, at right, and Jimmy and Lillian Maurin listen to local Penney Manager Kevin Daigler, at left, discuss opening sales during the "meet and greet" event at Hammond Square's new store Wednesday evening. The local store had the most successful "soft opening" of all 13 new JC Penney stores that opened across the country on Saturday, Maurin said, and that's a positive indicator for other new retail businesses that are preparing to locate in Hammond Square and Hammond.