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New Interstate 12 interchange opens

Nord du Lac still pushing big box stores

by Polly H. Greene

An idea conceived seven years ago to convert the Interstate 12 rest areas on the west side of the Tchefuncte River, south of Covington, into a new interchange became a reality last week, when parish officials, developers and contractors gathered for the opening of the new roadways.

Though the new interchange had been open to traffic for several days, the ribbon cutting held on Nov. 18 marked the official opening of Pinnacle Parkway, which connects to Louisiana 21 on the north side of I-12 via the vast expanse of the yet-to-be completed Nord du Lac shopping center, and East Brewster Road, the connector road leading to the Stirling Shopping Center and LA 21 on the south side of I-12.

The two new roads are expected to initially carry about 5,000 cars per day, with that number growing to 15,000 cars per day once

Nord du Lac is complete and the Stirling development is complete. The intent is to provide shoppers with a way to bypass the existing interchange at I-12 and LA 21, which backs up during peak travel times.

The \$10.5 million project was completed with parish road bonds, including \$2.5 million put up by the developers of the two retail centers.

"This is a critical transportation project for St. Tammany Parish," said Parish President Kevin Davis at the ribbon cutting ceremony.

While the Stirling Center is a well-established retail center, the opening of the Colonial Pinnacle Nord du Lac center, which is being developed by Colonial Properties Trust, has been delayed several times since officials broke ground at the site in May 2008 and announced the 1-million-square-foot retail center would open to shop-

pers in October 2009.

Citing the national economic slump, the developer in January said work had stopped at the site. Mid-year they announced the project would be developed in stages, with phase one including a Kohl's store, Dick's Sporting Goods, and Dillard's, for a total of about 300,000 square feet of retail space.

Construction on phase one is set to resume in early spring, with its opening scheduled for November 2010, said Ken Marshall of Colonial Properties Trust after the ribbon cutting.

Concerning other prospective tenants, Marshall said Colonial Properties was talking to several, but failed to be specific.

Davis, however, was not so discreet. He told a handful of news reporters that a number of representatives of well-known retailers have visited the parish permit office over

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Participating in the ribbon cutting for the new Interstate 12 interchange between the Tchefuncte River and the Louisiana 21 exit to the west are, from left, Hal Lassen, of Brasfield & Gorrie; Tommy Buckel, of Duplantis Design Group; Mark Salvetti and Townsend Underhill, of Stirling Properties; Ken Marshall, of Colonial Properties Trust; landowner Bruce Wainer; Steve Price of Price Contracting; St. Tammany Parish President Kevin Davis; parish government CEO Bill Oiler; Richard Lambert, of RCL Consultants; Parish Councilman Al Hamauei; and, Franz Zemmer of RCL. (photo by Polly H. Greene)

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the last 60 days, including Academy Sports, Cracker Barrel, Hobby Lobby, P.F. Chang and Olive Garden.

Marshall said none of these retailers have committed as yet.

Marshall also said the possibility of a Sam's Club or Walmart Neighborhood Market has not been abandoned, despite opposition from residents in nearby Flower Estates and a legal

servitude agreed to by the developers barring big box retailers.

"I am getting some favorable feedback on the idea," Marshall said. "We are going to bring a responsible project to St. Tammany Parish, and it could include a Sam's Club or a Walmart. I've heard (the residents) concerns and comments. I hope to continue to meet with them."

On the south side of

I-12, Stirling is making plans for a mixed use development along East Brewster Road, with professional offices, single and multi-family residential options, and some additional retail space at the Stirling Center, said Townsend Underhill of Stirling Properties.

Site work is now underway at a 12-acre tract immediately behind Target for a 240 unit apartment complex.