

[Back](#)

---

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Business boom expected

North side owners anticipate benefit from shopping center

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Most on Lafayette's north side know M&S Grocery on Louisiana Avenue for its Cajun boudin.

High school boys line up after school for a link at the meat counter, and adults stop in for a treat on their way home from work.

But in fall 2008, Stirling Lafayette Shopping Center will open just down the street. That's when owner Millard Degeytaire hopes everyone will know his boudin.

The 450,000-square-foot retail district, under way at the Louisiana Avenue and Interstate 10 intersection, is expected to draw massive traffic to the area, and business owners like Degeytaire are planning to capitalize.

"You create business by creating cash flow, and people coming into this area will bring the money," said Degeytaire in his family-owned convenience store. "I don't worry about the money. We just got to get the people here."

The shopping center will include a Target, J.C. Penney and other unnamed restaurants and retail stores. A groundbreaking is scheduled for Thursday.

When the shopping center opens, north side residents will have retail shopping options that are within reach. Many complain about traffic that lies between them and The Mall of Acadiana.

"Fighting Johnston Street traffic is a pain," said Priscilla Simpson, as she left her north side home Tuesday afternoon headed to the mall.

Soon, Simpson will be a stone's throw away from the new Stirling Lafayette Shopping Center.

New retail jobs also will be available to north side residents. Home values also could rise if growth continues, Realtors said.

Lafayette shoppers, and those who come from surrounding parishes, will be helping to fund improvements on the north side with every dollar they spend there.

With help from the state, City-Parish Council created a special taxing district called a TIF, which covers a thin strip of the north side.

Limited to basically the shopping center-area, businesses will pay an extra 1 percent for local sales tax, and the state will give back an extra 1 percent sales tax it normally would have collected.

All of the sales tax collected in a TIF district is saved just for that area, and spent only in that area for roads and other infrastructure needs.

"By shopping at those stores, you're investing in that community," said Dee Stanley, city-parish chief administrative officer.

It's unknown what kind of economic impact the Stirling Lafayette Shopping Center could have on St. Landry Parish, if shoppers are drawn from there to spend money in Lafayette.

The Interstate 49 connection between Lafayette and St. Landry parishes is forcing everyone to think on a regional level now, said Sue Brignac, chairwoman of the Opelousas-St. Landry Chamber of Commerce.

"But we still encourage our residents to shop locally," she said.

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