



BUSINESS

MARKETS 5

THE BLADE, TOLEDO, OHIO ■ SUNDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2004

SECTION D



New lifestyle for metro Toledo

Project in Perrysburg indicates recognition for area, experts say

By JON CHAVEZ

THE TOLEDO area, a community that enjoys shopping, has had its share of milestone retail projects over the last half century.

From The Colony outdoor center in the 1950s to the area's first enclosed mall, Greenwood, in the 1960s to Portside Festival Marketplace in the 1980s, a handful of projects are viewed as giant leaps forward.

To open in about a week is one that experts put in the same category. It is the Town Center at Levis Commons, set on 35 acres along State Rte. 25 next to its interchange with I-475/U.S. 23 in Perrysburg.

The development with 319,000 square feet of shops and office space is the area's first "lifestyle center," a concept industry experts define as an open-air center that mixes specialty stores, restaurants, and entertainment with the look of an old downtown street scene that encourages browsing.

But the \$55 million center, to open Oct. 26, is more than a collection of retailers — 27 at the latest count, 18 of which are new to the area. Newcomers include trendy women's clothing stores Coldwater Creek and Christopher & Banks, men's clothing store Jos. A. Bank, and restaurant Johnny Rockets.

"What it means is you've been recognized," said shopping center consultant Stan Eichelbaum. "You have a number of new retailers that now see the area as a place they want to be. And what they're recognizing is not Toledo, it's Perrysburg."

Size-wise, Levis Commons is the largest shopping complex to open in metro Toledo in three years. When finished, its retail space will equal only a third of the expanded Westfield Shoppingtown Franklin Park in Toledo.

The Perrysburg center is smaller than or about the same size as several centers that have opened locally in the past 10 years.

The latest was the 750,000-square-foot Crossroads Centre shopping plaza, which opened in 2001 off U.S. 20 near Thomp-

son Road in Rossford. But Pete Shawaker, a retail expert at the Toledo commercial real estate firm Michael Realty Co., said the opening of Levis Commons does something those others don't. Its allows the Toledo area to shed the negative image it had from the closing of Portside in 1990.

Some national retailers, he said, would laugh when he would suggest putting a store in the Toledo area. "But this ... seriously raises the Toledo area from the old 'Rustbelt' status to, 'Wow, you have a lifestyle center here?'" he said.

Nationally, lifestyle centers are increasingly popping up, with about 30 in existence as of last year. They are a reaction to enclosed malls, which have gotten "gargantuan" in size, and have become to some shoppers too mundane, said Mr. Eichelbaum, head of Marketing Developments Inc., in Cincinnati.

The nation's first such lifestyle center was Country Club Plaza in Kansas City, built in 1954. It continues to thrive.

Toledo had its own small plaza-like development, The Colony, in the 1950s on Central Avenue just east of its intersection with Monroe Street, but it was nearly vacant by the 1980s and has been partly torn down.

The new centers are different from malls and traditional strip centers in part because they cluster similar stores. At Levis Commons, that means the women's clothing stores, for example, are near each other.

The restaurants, however, are spread around. The center also is to have a 12-screen Showcase Cinemas complex, operated by National Amusements Inc., which is to open next month.

The chief project developer, Larry Dillin, said the center is targeting adult shoppers, particularly women. It will have little to offer teenage shoppers, he said.

"I like to say we are taking a rifle approach, not a shotgun approach," he said.

See PROJECT, Page 2

OPENING NEARS FOR LEVIS COMMONS

The concept and the mix of clothing stores, home furnishings stores, restaurants, and a theater complex set the area's newest shopping village apart from other local centers. More than half of the shops in the first phase are leased and are to open Oct. 26.



SOURCE: Hill Partners Inc.

THE BLADE

SCOPE OF OVERALL PROJECT



BLADE PHOTOS/DIANE HRES

A fountain surrounded by a courtyard will add to the town square feeling at the center where the mix of retailers is targeted at adult women shoppers.



## Project

Continued from Page 1

Consequently, the center is heavy on adult apparel shops and home furnishings, with Kirkland's Home, which specializes in home accessories and is new to the area, and Arhaus Furniture, which is moving from West Central Avenue in Sylvania Township.

Mr. Dillin said Levis Commons wasn't competing for tenants with existing area retail centers. The newcomers were deciding whether to open stores in his center or a center in a different city. "For us, our competition is ... Corpus Christi, Texas, or Scottsdale, Ariz., and places that size."

The suburban Toledo center is being developed by Dillin Corp., of Perrysburg, and Hill Partners Inc. of Charlotte, N.C. Mr. Dillin said he has been surprised by the attention his project has gotten from national chain stores and restaurants.

The first phase of the center, 250,000 square feet of retail, is about 70 percent leased, Mr. Dillin said. Four stores he declined to identify recently joined the



THE BLADE/DIANE HIRES

**A 12-screen Showcase Cinemas complex is scheduled to open next month at Levis Commons.**

center and are hurriedly trying to ready their sites, he added.

He said he expects 90 percent occupancy by spring and said he has received numerous calls from prospective tenants about the project's second phase: 200,000 square feet of retail to the west of the first part.

The intense interest could balloon the project beyond the planned size, but Mr. Dillin said Levis Commons, from the outset, was to be selective and intimate.

Rather than a mega-retailing center, it was to be a development where people could shop, work, and live.

The overall project, a \$250 million development to be on 200 acres, is to have stores, housing, and offices.

That approach appealed to Coldwater Creek, a Sandpoint, Idaho, retailer that is much sought after by shopping center owners.

"We've had phenomenally good response in this type of format," said David Gunter, head of investor relations for the chain.

Plus, the company has 66,000 catalog customers within 50 miles of Perrysburg, he said.

The company also likes to go where its rivals are, and was sold on the Perrysburg project when Chico's, J. Jill, Christopher & Banks, and Talbot's signed on.

Mr. Dillin said he had the idea for Levis Commons since the mid-1990s.

"In my original concept, I had it strictly as a pedestrian mall," he explained. "But the retailers convinced me otherwise that we needed parking directly in front of the stores."

He became convinced to build two-story buildings and put retail on the ground floor and offices on top, and preferred to have housing nearby to help feed the retail project.

About 22 percent of the 69,000 square feet of office space in the first phase is leased, he said.

Work has begun on an adjoining community of 332 apartments and townhouse units, and plans call for an additional 120 loft condominiums and 140 houses to the south and southwest of the initial shops.

The nearby housing is shrewd because it will help keep people

at the center every day, said Dave Long, a commercial real estate agent at CB Richard Ellis/Reichle Klein in Maumee.

"I really believe what Larry's succeeded in doing is creating something totally different and unique for this retail trade area," he said. It will be a catalyst for other retail projects in that part of metro Toledo, he said.

A proposed million-square-foot mall a few miles away in Maumee struggled to gain local approvals and since has refashioned itself as a lifestyle center.

The Shops at Fallen Timbers, developed by General Growth Properties Inc. of Chicago, has yet to begin construction but has announced that it has letters of intent or signed leases from PF Chang's China Bistro, Barnes & Noble bookstore, an Irish pub, and an unnamed gourmet grocer. Dillard's Inc. said it intends to locate there. The project is to be off U.S. 24 near the I-475/U.S. 23 interchange.

Levis Commons, with its blend of high-end specialty retailers, likely won't affect the metro area's other big centers, such as the ailing Southwyck Shopping Center or the robust Westfield Shoppingtown Franklin Park, said Mr. Long.

Stores that might go into Southwyck have found their spots elsewhere in the market, and Franklin Park has established itself as fashion mall with something for everyone, he explained.

The Perrysburg project could hurt the General Growth development, Mr. Long added, but Mr. Dillin disagreed.

The retailers he courted liked smaller projects, Mr. Dillin said, and the Fallen Timbers center is large.

Mr. Shawaker said he likes Levis Commons' approach and expects it will not compete with existing or planned retail centers.

"It's smart," said the Ottawa Hills resident. "My wife and I are not going to drive down there for typical meat-and-potatoes shopping. That's already near me. ... But as it is now, I would drive down there."

Contact Jon Chavez at: [jchavez@theblade.com](mailto:jchavez@theblade.com) or 419-724-6128.