



Biltmore Village attracts more upscale retailers

By: MBARRETT@CITIZEN-TIMES.COM

ASHEVILLE — A retail and office building now under construction in Biltmore Village is drawing the first store in the region for at least two national retail chains and expanded stores for two more.

Upscale kitchen store Williams-Sonoma and women's clothier Coldwater Creek will locate their first Western North Carolina stores in the 70,000-square-foot building going on up the north side of Brook Street, said Bob Spratt, president of Charlotte-based developer Hill Partners. The project is scheduled to be completed in early 2008.

Talbots, which sells traditional women's clothing in a store a few yards away, and women's apparel store Chico's, which also has a Biltmore Village store, will add floor space by moving into the development, Spratt said.

A spokesman for The Talbots Inc. said the company would put one of its J. Jill women's clothing stores into the current Talbots space. Chico's FAS will put a White House Black Market women's clothing store — the chain is a Chico's subsidiary which sells only black and white clothing — in the 3 Kitchen Place spot Chico's now occupies.

The changes will alter the mix of locally owned and national chain businesses in the historic village, started in the late 1800s to serve George Vanderbilt's Biltmore Estate. One merchant in the village thinks the shoppers the new businesses will bring will help other stores in the village while others worried about the changes.

Biltmore Village advertises itself as a group of unique businesses, but that special character is diminished as chains come in, said John Cram, owner of New Morning Gallery and Bellagio.

"It will change the flavor of the village," said Matt DeRobertis, owner of Chefcargo.

He said he is uncertain what impact Williams-Sonoma will have on his kitchen store.

Some chain businesses have been located in the village for years, noted Stan Collins, owner of Once Upon a Time children's book and toy store.



The new stores “will add to the number of people who shop in the village,” bringing customers to existing businesses who would not have visited otherwise, he said.

Spratt, whose company is developing the project along with longtime village businessman John Bell, said the village is a central location for retailers planning only one area store.

With the entrance to the Biltmore Estate at one end, the village is “where the tourists come, so if you add that onto the normal demographics ... it all points to Biltmore Village,” he said.

The area’s population growth and attractiveness to higher-income residents are attracting upscale retailers, Spratt said. “Asheville’s time has come.”

Spratt said Hill Partners and Bell have bought an older strip shopping center nearby at 63 Brook St. and are in the preliminary stages of planning a building of around 26,000 square feet with retail space on the first floor and apartments or condominiums upstairs. Office space will be located on the upper floor of the project now under construction with 160 parking spaces underneath.