

# The Gadsden Times

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## Gander Mountain opens Tuesday in Gadsden

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Published: Sunday, May 4, 2014 at 6:01 a.m.

The River Trace Shopping Center development on Tuesday will see its first store opening.

Gander Mountain, a 52,000-square-foot outdoor specialty store, will hold a "soft opening" at 8 a.m., according to company and city officials.



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Employees' cars fill up part of the parking lot during final preparations Friday at the new Gander Mountain store in Gadsden.

Several other stores slated for the development are under construction, have submitted plans or have talked to city building officials about their plans.

Blackwater Resources has projected annual sales of \$30 million for the development.

The Gadsden City Council in November 2011 approved a plan to give Blackwater 50 percent of the sales taxes generated from the development, up to \$10 million over 15 years.

Ross Dress for Less, which will have a 22,400-square-foot store, and Hobby Lobby, which will be in a 55,000-square-foot building and is relocating from George Wallace Drive, already have been announced and are well under construction.

Brian Harbison, the city's chief building officer, said building permits have been issued to Shoe Carnival and to Ulta Beauty, a beauty supply store and salon. Both will be in spaces of a little less than 10,000 square feet.

Harbison said plans have not been submitted for all the space in the development.

Panda Express has submitted drawings, he said, but has not requested a building permit. The restaurant will have a drive-thru and will be located in an outparcel, as will a family medical practice office.

Harbison expects one or two additional restaurants to locate on outparcels. He said the Gadsden Fire Department has been contacted about possible apartments in the rear of the property.

Mayor Sherman Guyton said he is pleased additional tenants have been announced.

"It seems like they're picking up more tenants, which is a good thing, and that is what we want," he said.

Two turn lanes and a light has been added to the Fifth Street entrance, which connects to Coosa Town Center, and work will be done on Sixth Street, at the former entrance to the River Trace Golf Course.

There also will be an entrance in the middle of the property that can be accessed by westbound traffic.

Guyton expressed appreciation to the adjoining Coosa Town Center for allowing access from that development to help with traffic.

Lesa Osborn, director of the Gadsden Commercial Development Authority, said she is pleased with the development's progress and believes all the stores will be open by late summer or fall.

"I'm just excited that Gander Mountain has come along so quickly, and the other stores are fast paced," she said. "We'll have new places to shop by fall."

A company spokesman in an email said Gander Mountain is in the midst of a sizable expansion, adding more than a store per month over the past 18 months. He said more than a dozen new stores already have opened or have been announced in 2014. He said the Gadsden store's opening will give the company 136 stores in 25 states, and more will be announced.

He said the number of employees varies by the size of the store and the size of the market, but the average Gander Mountain store creates 50 to 70 jobs. Twenty to 30 of those will be full time and the rest part time and seasonal.

"Gander Mountain has long been a well-known and trusted name in Alabama among those who love the outdoors, and who enjoy great traditions like hunting, fishing, hiking, boating and camping," David Pratt, Gander Mountain's president and CEO, said in a press release.

According to a press release, the store will feature one of the largest selections of new and used firearms in Alabama, together with the best selection of gear and accessories for hunting, fishing, camping, boating and archery. The store will offer an extensive selection of men's and women's active performance outdoor and casual apparel, featuring brands like The North Face, Columbia, Under Armour, GSX, Carhartt, Guide Series and Kühl, and a wide variety of men's and women's active footwear.

Gadsden is the sixth Gander Mountain location in Alabama, joining existing stores in Dothan, Florence, Huntsville, Opelika and Tuscaloosa.

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