

Progress continues at Centre of Tallahassee mall



TaMarvyn Waters, Democrat staff writer 11:54 p.m. EDT July 29, 2015



(Photo: Joe Rondone/Democrat)

Work progresses daily at the Centre of Tallahassee mall. Some changes are tweaks. Others, colossal.

By Jan. 7, the School of Arts and Sciences expands here. A new roundabout intersection at John Knox Road opens in about two weeks. So will Music Alley — the main cobblestone road in the mall's outdoor area. The alley, a once enclosed breezeway, will give residents a hint of the open town square concept developer Alex Baker has imagined.

Around back, the roof of a 6,500-seat amphitheater is up and noticeable from a distance. The skyline is forever changed.

"Now that the roof is on the arena, people see it from (U.S. Highway) 27 and they're pulling in here and finally saying, 'Wow, they're doing something,' " said Baker, owner of Alabama-based Blackwater Resources LLC.

Dozens of suggestions, emails or calls stream in daily. Baker uses feedback to shape the mall's look and appeal.

"The message that I think we've gotten is that there's not a single one place that really has something for everybody," Baker said. "We didn't realize when we picked the name how appropriate it really was. People are looking for the center of the place to go."



TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

Tallahassee Mall rebirth

<http://www.tallahassee.com/story/news/2015/03/06/tallahassee-mall/21341353/>

New life after 'dead mall' designation

As the mall progresses, anchor tenants — AMC Theaters and Belk — are undergoing major renovations complementing the overall goal of bringing more customers, more life and more money into a limping mall once listed on a national web site for "dead malls."

AMC is half finished with a \$9-million renovation plan. In the traditional auditoriums, all seats are tagged to be replaced by plush, powered seating, ideal for reclining. A new sound system and huge screens are coming in, too.

"The first phase started toward the end of June," AMC spokesman Ryan Noonan said. "What we're doing is enhancing the movie experience across the board.

"People want to be wowed. People want to be able come out and get that great experience, whether that's at the movies or shopping at the mall."

At Belk, a \$4-million renovation plan forges on, and work should be wrapped up by mid September. A grand re-opening celebration is scheduled for Oct. 14, when the first 300 customers have a chance to get a gift card valued at \$5 to \$500.

Renovations run the gamut, including upgrades and a relocation of the cosmetic area to the store's mall entrance near AMC. Store manager Glenda Morris said renovation designs are modern with millennials in mind.

"Hopefully, we will have some funky vendors coming in," Morris said.

She added she's "excited to no end" about the mall's renovation into an indoor-outdoor venue.

Customers often recall the mall in its prime decades ago with hints of nostalgia and the blues. She noted a conversation shift as signs of progress continue — from inside Belk to outside where piles of rubble and hard-hat construction crews work all day long.

"This used to be the place of choice. I think what they are feeling is the excitement," Morris said. "Now what I'm hearing is 'I can't wait.' "

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Dreamland BBQ coming to Centre of Tallahassee mall

[\(http://www.tallahassee.com/story/news/2015/07/22/dreamland-bbq-coming-centre-tallahassee-mall/30543137/\)](http://www.tallahassee.com/story/news/2015/07/22/dreamland-bbq-coming-centre-tallahassee-mall/30543137/)

Plenty of progress, minor delay

Recently in the leasing office, a hollowed office cavern acting as the brains of the operation, Baker sunk into an isolated sofa under dim lighting. Down time is rare considering his whirlwind days — endless meetings, trekking back and forth from his Alabama office, recruiting notable tenants and monitoring construction schedules.

There's a lot going on.

Baker said amphitheater construction is about a month behind schedule as a result of erecting the arena's roofing system, a premier amenity under which concerts, rodeos and other crowd-pleasing events will take place.

He's not thrilled about the delay.

But, the veteran developer said his team often reminds him that he didn't own the property just two years ago.

In time, the enclosed area has been refreshed with new paint, signage and food court renovations, which pleases the more than two dozen mall tenants.

Cobblestone streets are carved out for the outdoor town center. Existing and vacant parcels are about 80 percent leased or secured by letters of intent.

"When you keep it in that context, we're pretty happy," he said.

Baker goes on about amenities and features still in development stages, such as an app that helps find available parking spaces at the mall. Another app allows customers to hitch a ride in an electric cart from their location to the mall or vice versa.

"What we're doing is making it so that parking is always convenient," he said. "It will be very important on event days. It may not be that important on a Monday at 10 o'clock. Then you might be able to park wherever you want to, unless it's the Monday before Christmas."

The addition of the School of Arts and Sciences, a top charter school, was a big score for the plan to create a town center. Early on, Baker said he had envisioned a school, but the School of Arts and Sciences made the first move by inquiring about the space.

"We think of this property as an urban town center that's going to be vertically developed with several components that fit the elements that create the feeling of a town."



TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

Mall owner denies Cheesecake Factory rumor

[\(http://www.tallahassee.com/story/news/local/2015/06/08/mall-owner-denies-cheesecake-factory-rumor/28709803/\)](http://www.tallahassee.com/story/news/local/2015/06/08/mall-owner-denies-cheesecake-factory-rumor/28709803/)

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