

Building up for shopping slugfest Barrington to get another retail rival

By Robert Channick
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Barrington's quaint, sesquicentennial downtown has its charms. But developers of a South Barrington center are promoting expanded offerings and a pedestrian focus in hopes of bringing business about 7 miles south.

"Downtown Barrington works for the local residents very well, but as a regional draw it's got limitations," said Michael Jaffe, president of the Jaffe Cos. of Northbrook, which broke ground last month on the center, called Arboretum, scheduled to open next summer.

The \$200 million, 600,000-square-foot center won't be the only draw at Illinois Highway 59 and Higgins Road. Across the street in Hoffman Estates is Poplar Creek Crossing, a Target-anchored center that opened last year.

Outdoors retailer Cabela's also is set for a fall opening in the adjacent Prairie Stone Business Park, near the Sears Centre, and a groundbreaking is planned for a \$150 million conference center that includes a hotel and a water park, Hoffman Estates officials said.

Gary Skoog, Barrington's economic development director, said the crowd of businesses will be mutually beneficial.

"We're looking at it to be synergistic and helpful to the area," he said.

Barrington for years was the undisputed commercial engine of an area known for sprawling estates and forest preserves. While not quite ready to be displaced, with storefront vacancies and a struggling new mall, officials acknowledge that downtown may be losing ground.

"The development in the northwest area kind of leapfrogged over [Barrington]," said Janet Agnoletti, executive director of the Barrington Area Council of Governments.

Spread over 90 square miles, the group's members—Barrington, North Barrington, South Barrington, Barrington Hills, Lake Barrington, Tower Lakes and Deer Park—have about 30,000 people, according to the 2000 census.

"Everyone had their place within a larger regional land-use plan, with Barrington as the primary retail center," Agnoletti said. "The countryside communities, through their growing population, could support the downtown in Barrington."

In 2000 Deer Park opened the Town Center. Barrington responded with The Shops at Flint Creek, a 54,000-square-foot strip mall. Opened last fall near the heart of downtown, the development remains mostly empty, with a Staples office supply and an AthletiCo physical therapy facility as the only tenants.

With a tollway interchange, an array of nearby entertainment options and a roster of tenants, including Ruth's Chris Steak House and Coldwater Creek, Jaffe said the Arboretum's market will extend beyond the Barrington area.

"In the case of South Barrington, there is no real downtown," Jaffe said of the 48-year-old bedroom community of about 3,800 people. "This will be their downtown."