

Return of the Site Fight

By Tom Kirwan, Senior Editor
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Two upscale outlet centers planned in central Mississippi, focused on the booming Jackson, Miss., market, are reminiscent of the 1990s when the outlet industry was rife with site fights. The developers of the planned projects say they are anxious to get their sites open and that their efforts to lease the centers are going well.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2006 population estimate, the Jackson metro population is 529,456 people. Jackson, which is Mississippi's most populous city, is the state capital.

In all, the two centers – if both are built – are expected to open at least 140 stores, each center attracting about 70 retailers each.

The sites are only about 20 miles apart, in neighboring Madison and Rankin counties.

Both developers are new to outlet development, and both emerged last year with their offerings:

The Outlets at Bloomfield is sited in Pearl, Miss., about six miles southeast of Jackson at the intersection of I-20 and I-55.

Developed by Spectrum Capital and ProVisions of Jackson, Miss., the site is next door to a new Bass Pro Shop and Trustmark Park (home of the Mississippi Braves minor league baseball team), which together attracted 2.3 million visitors in 2006.

Asked by VRN if the market can accommodate two outlet centers, Jason Voyles, president of Spectrum Capital, says "Retailers will determine that. We're focused on our side, and we're very well positioned for an outlet center: We're located at the crossroads of the major east/west corridors in Mississippi, and we don't spend a lot of time worrying about other projects."

Voyles says the drawing ability of Bass Pro and Trustmark Park "shows our ability to attract big names who may not have considered locating in Mississippi — until now. We will apply this same philosophy when attracting big name retailers for The Outlets at Bloomfield. We will bring both stores already familiar to local shoppers and some names people have only experienced in other states."

Spectrum is aiming to create a family-oriented shopping, entertainment and tourist destination, especially with a shopping attraction that women will enjoy. Plans include developing entertainment for children, probably a water park or putt-putt golf facility. The ballpark and Bass Pro store are considered phase 1 of the project, the outlet center phase 2.

The city of Pearl in mid-May was preparing to advertise for construction of a road of less than a mile that will become the main entry to the outlet center by the fall. Sam's Club has just announced it will build a Sam's Club next to Bass Pro, with the outlet center sited on the other side of Bass. And Spectrum was in mid-May close to hiring a leasing consultant who was to move the center along at the Spring ICSC Convention in Las Vegas later in the month.

Neu Markt Designer Outlet Mall is sited between Gluckstadt and Canton, Miss, some 12 miles north of Jackson.

The Neu Markt property – part of a 230-acre project that includes restaurants, a big-box retailer, banks, a pharmacy and a grocery store – is west of I-55 near the Sowell Road interchange.

"Leasing is going extremely well," says Janet Grady, who heads Prism Co., which is handling leasing. "Every retailer who has visited the market so far is currently either in the process of negotiating their lease, or obtaining retail clearance for their store."

She too, like Voyles, says retailers will be the ones to decide whether the market can absorb two outlet centers. "That will be up to the retailers to decide," she says.

What's special about the Neu Market site? "It has the highest income demographics in the market," she says, "and unparalleled visibility and accessibility from I-55. We have a top-notch development team and plan, which will establish Neu Markt as a premier destination for outlet shopping."

James Weaver, who heads Ridgeland, Mississippi based Gluckstadt Properties, which is developing Neu Market, sees the development as an opportunity to bring something new to the mostly rural Gluckstadt area, where he was poised to raise \$20 million in TIF money for public improvements. "

For the residents of Gluckstadt, we hope this development will help meet their shopping needs," he told a local newspaper. "For the metro area, we will be a destination for the value shoppers." The goal is to attract shoppers within a 100-mile radius, he said.

Both developers plan to break ground later this year and open and open and open by the fall of 2008. Neu Markt plans to about 200,000 in its first phase, while The Outlets at Bloomfield is planning about 315,000 sf.