

Mixed-Use Shopping Developments: Style of the Future

By T.L. Hamilton
Courier Staff

D'Agostino Companies has almost completed leasing out retail space in Highlands Plaza II, the shopping center adjacent to offices and Margarita and Pepper's Mexican food restaurant.

The 9-acre, mixed-use development located on North Loop 336 near Texas 105 West in Conroe, was designed to be a place where people can "work, shop and eat," said Chris D'Agostino, developer.

All 60,000 square feet of the development's office space has already been leased. The 10,000 square feet of retail space is about 80 percent leased.

Jim Blackwelder, owner of Premier Cleaners, said he is relocating his green dry cleaning business from a shopping center near Walmart on North Loop 336 and Interstate 45 to Highlands Plaza.

In addition to lower rent, Blackwelder says the center is easily visible from Texas 105 and his new space will have a drive-through.

"I am just thrilled to be moving there," he said.

Premier Cleaners will open in mid-October.

Blackwelder said he thinks the business's proximity to office space means he'll have built-in customers. His purchase of Columbia's Ipora dry cleaning machine reduces the amount of hydrocarbons released in the cleaning process, which is good for the environment, he said.

"When I bought mine about seven months ago there were only 300 in the state and about three in the Houston area," he said.

Other leases include Today's Vision and Mailboxes & More.

The development design includes walkways from the offices to the retail areas.

"There's been a lot of residential growth here and it's been a very good development for us," D'Agostino said.

D'Agostino Companies have also developed a 210-unit apartment complex by Conroe Country Club, another office park, a medical complex and the Sterling Place subdivision by Bush Intercontinental Airport.

"We're right in the crosshairs (of growth) here in Montgomery County over the next 10 years," he said.

Mixed-use developments like Highlands Plaza are "the future of development," D'Agostino predicted.

"People get to work and they don't want to have to leave to go to the cleaners or eat lunch," he said. "I wanted to try to create an environment where people really like to go to their office."

D'Agostino said the location gets good traffic and visibility and that the parking ratio for the shopping center is 10 spaces per 1,000 square feet of retail space, which he said is good for a center of this size.

"We do whatever we can to make our people happy," he said.

City Editor Nancy Flake contributed to this report.

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The new Highlands Plaza development off of Loop 336 is nearing completion. Workers installed the glass shop windows in Highlands Plaza's shopping center Tuesday. Staff photo by Eric S. Swift.



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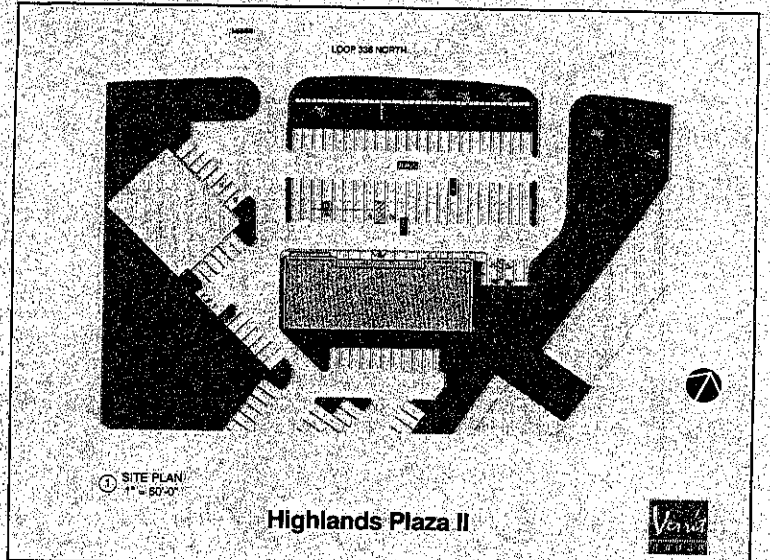
Retail leasing is 80 percent complete at the plaza's shopping center. Leases include Today's Vision, Premiere Cleaners and Mailboxes & More.



Highlands Plaza II



Pictured is Highland Plaza's shopping center, which is adjacent to office space and next door to Margarita and Pepper's Mexican food restaurant. Developer Chris D'Agostino said he wanted to create a place where people can "work, shop and eat." Courtesy photo.



Highlands Plaza II



Pictured is an aerial rendering of the plaza. The parking ratio is 10 spaces for every 1,000 square feet which is high for a shopping center of this type. Chris D'Agostino, developer, said. Courtesy photo.