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by Steve Brown, Dallas Morning News

Open-Air Center is Planned

Town-square project in Denton County to cost \$100 million

Developers are starting work next month in Denton County on a \$100 million retail village.

Located in the town of Highland Village, the 45-acre town- square-style shopping center will include an AMC theater, shops, restaurants and open space.

Regency Centers – one of the country's largest shopping center owners – is building the project 4 miles west of Interstate 35E, at the northwest corner of Justin Road and FM 2499.

The site is now occupied by old storage buildings and housing.

"We will be starting demolition March 1 and will have a groundbreaking May 1," West Miller, Regency Centers' senior vice president, said Monday. "We are going to deliver the space in the spring and summer of 2007."

The Shops at Highland Village has 374,000 square feet available and will be anchored by a 52,000-square-foot AMC multiscreen cinema plus a 27,000- square-foot Barnes & Noble store.

Regency Centers is negotiating with potential tenants Ann Taylor, Banana Republic, Chico's, Victoria's Secret and Eddie Bauer.

"We have about 160,000 square feet of leases currently being negotiated," he said. "One of the things the retailers like about this project is it is in such a high-growth area."

The specialty shopping center will be located near the big Lantana home community, in an area south of Denton that's seeing widespread residential development.

Demographic studies done by the developer show that more than 140,000 people live within a 5-mile drive of the site. Average incomes in the area are over \$100,000.

"You have 50 percent more people living in that area than were around Southlake Town Square when it opened," said Mickey Ashmore, president of United Commercial Realty, which is leasing the project.

These open-air specialty shopping centers are the current darlings of the development industry, with new projects being built throughout North Texas.

Other corners at the intersection of Justin Road and FM 2499 have already landed big box retailers including Target, Lowe's, Office Max, Best Buy and Wal-Mart.

"When this is done, that intersection will have over 2 million square feet of retail," Mr. Ashmore said.

Architect O'Brien & Associates designed the complex around a series of landscaped plazas and pedestrian trails. At the northwest corner of the property a small lake and park space will be built.

About 33,000 square feet of professional and office space will also be in the complex.

Regency Centers is building the project in partnership with Hermansen Land Development Inc., which owns the property.