

Delta Center Fills Out This Summer

A Sonic Drive-In is first in line, with a June opening set; more phases coming

By BUFFY POLLOCK
for the Mail Tribune

MEDFORD — By early August, developers plan to debut the first of three retail phases at the Delta Center, perched at the corner of Highway 62 across from Olive Garden.

Phase one of the 30-acre site includes five buildings with a Sportsman Warehouse, which opened in November, a Sonic Drive-In set for June and three structures with restaurant-retail combinations planned to debut between Aug. 1 and early September.

Panda Express, a trio of phone companies, Starbucks, a pita restaurant and a handful of other businesses are planned.

The project has been on the horizon since 2000 but plans have developed slowly, said partner Chuck Martinez, one of three involved with Crater Lake Venture LLC. He blames a slowdown in the economy and a series of long-term lease agreements held by former tenants at the busy corner.

Martinez said they were careful in planning for the site's tenant mix and traffic impact. While a condition of project approval with local planning officials was a single right-hand turn lane onto southbound Highway 62, Martinez said, for the sake of tenants and customers, two lanes were added.

"We decided it would function much better and the intersection would clear much faster if we did two lanes," he said.

"We figured, if the tenants and customers can't conduct business then you really haven't accomplished much as a developer."



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Todd Virden of Medford pours concrete for Bill's Backhoe in forms around the parking area for the Sonic Drive-In that will occupy the corner of Delta Waters Avenue and Highway 62.

Doug Phillips, spokesman for Abre LLC, franchise owner for Sonic in Southern Oregon, said the company was pleased with the quality of the pending developments and looking forward to a Medford location. It will join another already doing a brisk business on Pine Street in Central Point.

"We are anticipating a similar response by customers who are appreciative of us bringing this well-known national brand," Phillips said, adding the restaurant will employ 60 and should open by June.

Kelly Akin, senior planner for the city of Medford, said Delta Center has given a face lift to a previously sleepy corner and generated interest from future business tenants. Across the way, a Carl's Jr. Restaurant is planned for a site of a former convenience store near Kaleidoscope Pizza.

Akin said construction of the Delta Center would give an entirely new look to the area of Highway 62.

"It's changing quite a bit. There had been a lot of old, junk buildings and all of a sudden we're seeing a lot more commercial," she said.

Martinez expects they won't have trouble filling the commercial space at Delta Center."

"I think that the location and these buildings, just the quality we put into the buildings, that even in times of economic doldrums like we're going through right now, we have more than enough interest to fill the buildings," he said.

Eventually, Martinez said the 30-acre site will see two additional waves of development.

"But these are certainly times where you don't want to build ahead of your signed tenants, so we're just taking it very conservative," he said. "Just basically building what we can lease for now."

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