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Upscale retail center in planning stage

Published: 05/21/2008

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Ready to shop 'til you drop?

High-end outlet shopping is coming to Cherokee County.

Prime Retail, one of the largest owners of retail centers in the country, plans to build a 450,000-square-foot shopping center in Holly Springs.

The center is expected to open in 2010 on the southwestern corner of the intersection of Interstate 575 and Sixes Road at exit 11.

The \$120 million center will house about 120 stores and, while no tenants have been confirmed, the company's other outlets include such stores as Saks Off 5th, Neiman Marcus Last Call and Polo Ralph Lauren Factory Store.

The project is expected to bring about 2,000 jobs to the county.

It also is predicted to draw shoppers from around the metro area, for who Holly Springs is closer than the five current outlet shopping centers in Calhoun, Commerce, Dawsonville, Lawrenceville and Locust Grove.

Giancarlo Filartiga, senior vice president of development for Prime Retail, said Cherokee is an ideal location for one of the company's centers.

"If you look at this on paper, this is right down our alley," he said. "The Atlanta metro area is a terrific market and one of the fastest-growing areas in the country. The Cherokee/north Atlanta area has very good demographics in terms of household income."

The project still is in its "very early stages," he said, noting the projects usually take about one year to complete.

Misti Martin, executive director for the Development Authority of Cherokee County, said the outlet center could be a "great draw" for more growth.

"Any time you have high-end retail, it is a draw for more restaurants, offices and hotels," she said. "It would certainly boost sales tax money for education and SPLOST (Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax) projects."

Holly Springs Mayor Tim Downing said he sees the center as a positive for the whole community.

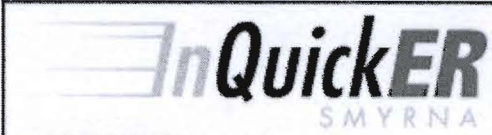
"The county as a whole needs more commercial business," he said. "This is a good thing."

Prime Retail is headquartered in Baltimore, Md. and is the parent company of Prime Outlets. It owns more than eight million square-feet throughout the country and Puerto Rico. It has 21 outlets in cities including Orlando, Fla.; San Marcos, Texas; Williamsburg, Va.; and Grove City, Pa.

The center site in Holly Springs is across from the planned location of a new Northside Hospital-Cherokee medical office building on the northeastern corner of the intersection.

Brantley Day, city planner for Holly Springs, said the center's location adjacent to the interstate and the county government's planned four-laning of the rest of Sixes Road and the bridge should "minimize the impact" on local traffic.

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