

Grandview Yard expected to complement suburb's existing retail district

BY CRAIG LOVELACE | BUSINESS FIRST

A new romance brings with it optimism, enthusiasm, speculation and questions about whether the relationship will blossom over time. The same might be said for Grandview Yard in Grandview Heights, whose first phase has been opening over the past four months.

In the making for the past five years, the Yard has business owners talking and wondering how much impact its development will have on the suburb and the already established retail corridor along Grandview Avenue.

"There's been a lot of communication among businesses with everyone talking about wanting to start meeting at Grandview Yard," said Marcie Gabor, a principal at the branding and marketing firm Conrad Phillips Vutech, whose office is near the development on Goodale Boulevard.

If the Yard becomes a destination, that's the stuff developers love to hear. Her firm moved to the area from the Short North just as rumblings started to emerge of a large project on the site of a former Big Bear Stores distribution center.

"We saw the potential in it becoming a more active area," Gabor said. "People love the idea that the Grandview-Goodale corridor is getting a face-lift."

And a face-lift it is.

The \$500 million mixed-use development will incorporate as much as 2 million square feet of retail, office space and housing components on the 90-acre site it encompasses off West Third Avenue in Grandview and the border it shares with Columbus to the east.

There are expectations the project will

create thousands of jobs. Tenants in the first phase include Urban Active Fitness, Jason's Deli, Hyatt Place, Buckeye Hall of Fame Grille, a dentist's office and M+A Architects.

It's hard to fathom what the site will look like after the 90 acres are developed by Nationwide Realty Investors Ltd. Whatever the outcome, there is no doubt that Grandview Yard will affect how others consider the suburb, said Patrik Bowman, Grandview's director of administration.

"It is certainly going to be busier down there," Bowman said, noting the development is preferred over the large office and medical buildings at Gowdy Field on Olentangy River Road, developed for Ohio State University and Time Warner Cable. He said he thinks the diverse makeup of Nationwide Realty's plan is consistent with Grandview's own planning.

Bowman anticipates the Yard will enhance rather than detract from the city's other prominent retail areas along West Fifth and Grandview avenues.

"It would likely change (shopping trends)," he said. "On the other hand, there are going to be thousands of new employees who aren't going to eat lunch there."

Ron Cameron is a member of the Grandview Heights Chamber of Commerce and was a school board member at the time of the Big Bear closings in the mid-2000s.

"When (Big Bear parent) Penn Traffic pulled out of there, it was pretty morose," said the lifelong resident of Grandview who runs Safeguard Business Printing.

The closing led city officials to cut services to help offset the loss of \$400,000 annually that the distribution center and a store on

West Fifth Avenue had brought it.

Bowman said several parties expressed interest in developing the site, which was originally 60 acres, in a piecemeal fashion, but the city did not want that. What was wanted was something that could "almost be a neighborhood of Grandview."

Nationwide Realty became the lead investor in 2006, and expanded the site by 30 acres with other purchases.

Retail strategist Chris Boring of Boulevard Strategies believes the Yard can plug a hole.

"From a retail standpoint, Grandview Yard is filling a terrible void created when City Center closed," he said.

Its location might be more beneficial because it can pull traffic from the downtown work force, the Short North, Grandview Heights, Upper Arlington and Ohio State University. And, Boring said he can envision a mix of big-box and other retail ventures locating there, such as a Best Buy or Dick's Sporting Goods store.

Worries over the Yard detracting from the rest of the Grandview's businesses should not be an issue. Boring said when the Lennox plaza was being built in the early 1990s, merchants along Grandview Avenue expressed concerns about lost business, but the fears didn't materialize.

Cameron applauds the extended view city officials and Nationwide Realty are taking.

"This is absolutely huge in the long term. It's a 10- to 12-year time line we are looking at before it's fully developed... Hopefully it will bring people to the area that normally wouldn't come here."