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Mixed-use mecca

North Hills continues massive expansion project

by Danielle Jackson

When Kane Realty Corp. purchased a 30-acre Brownfield on the site of the deteriorating North Hills Mall a decade ago, the company set out to fulfill its mission of offering a one-stop shopping, dining, working, living, and playing experience. But even John Kane and his team couldn't anticipate how successful that plan would be.

Since it opened, North Hills has become a destination for residents of the Triangle and beyond. Its healthy mix of upscale boutiques, health and wellness options, restaurants, and entertainment venues provides just the right amount of amenities in a walkable, aesthetic environment.

But while the blossoming region on the western side of Six Forks Road continues to thrive — with new tenants such as Ruth's Chris Steak House and the Renaissance Raleigh Hotel, among others — it's the eastern side's time to bloom.

With an additional 50 acres of mixed-use development under way, Kane is taking its vision to the next step. In all, the current expansion project will add more than 1.5 million square feet of office space, 450,000 square feet of retail space, 1,800 residential units, 800 hotel rooms and additional green space to this bustling corridor.

"This will bring new life to office, retail, hotel and residential options — including unparalleled retirement living — set within acres of open green space for community enjoyment," says Kane, chairman and CEO.

Building on success

Before digging into details of the \$1 billion development, Kane is quick to credit the success of the existing North Hills space.

"Personalized service and unique boutiques that aren't available elsewhere distinguish retail communities like North Hills, while special events such as the Midtown Music Concert Series and North Hills Farmers Market also are drawing interest," he says.

With more than 90 shops and boutiques and more than 20 restaurants to choose from, the company is expanding on a proven formula.

"The spaces throughout North Hills have been filling up, and the way stores continue to work together has been great," says Lisa Disbrow, who runs Scout & Molly's Boutique and Walk, a shoetique, near Harris Teeter.

Disbrow and other tenants credit the arrival of the Renaissance Raleigh Hotel — which opened in December and includes 229 rooms and more than 8,500 square feet of meeting space — with bringing even more foot traffic to the shopping center.

"The opening of the hotel and construction project across the street certainly bode well for our restaurant and all of North Hills," says David Sadeghi, chief operating officer for Big Steaks Management and Ruth's Chris Steak House.

"North Hills is such a vibrant complex, and we feel a great synergy with the tenant mix," he adds. "Every time something new opens, we see new customers coming," says Gena Fajgenbaum Combs, who launched the upscale clothing boutique with longtime friend Chandler Woodall in 2006.

"The restaurants are fabulous, the shopping is great and the concept is perfect because it's so easy

to get here."

To capitalize on this accessibility, Rodolfo Gonzales Interior Design chose a high-traffic corner near JCPenney for its newest location, which it opened in November 2007.

"We specialize in high-quality, custom home furnishings that are not available elsewhere in our market," says Rodolfo Gonzales, principal.

"This niche has resulted in our showroom and design studio becoming a destination spot for prospective clients from throughout the region."

A new place to play, work

The North Hills expansion project includes the state's first two-story, 50,000-square-foot Harris Teeter — which will relocate from its spot across the street later this year — as well as the 17-story Captrust Tower, which at 230 feet will be the tallest building along the Interstate 440 beltline. The nearby Hyatt Summerfield Suites will offer 140 spacious suites, while a large courtyard near new restaurants will add to the green space for concerts and other events.

Pre-leases for the Captrust Tower — scheduled to open in the fall — already are one-third complete, with tenants Captrust Financial Advisors, CB Richard Ellis, Ogletree Deakins Nash Smoak & Stewart, and The American Board of Anesthesiology on board. It will offer 300,000 square feet of Class A office space when completed and will feature deck parking inside the building, with direct access to all office levels. Builders are pursuing Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) silver certification for the building, which will make it the first speculative office building in such standing in the Triangle.

The Hyatt, scheduled to open in 2010, will total about 100,000 square feet, 9,000 of which will be ground-level retail space. The project is Kane's second joint venture with Raleigh-based Concord Hospitality Enterprises Co.; its first was on the new Renaissance Raleigh Hotel.

"We are developing North Hills in a way that provides connectivity and convenience for residents, tenants, and visitors while committing ourselves to sustainable growth that preserves open space," Kane says.

Living the good life

Adding to the mix of office, retail and hotel space is an ever-expanding offering of housing options for residents of all ages.

The North Hills Park and Market Apartments, scheduled to open this fall and located in the same building as Harris Teeter, will feature 409 units of studio and one- and two-bedroom apartments. In all, it will include 900,000 square feet of residential development above approximately 93,000 square feet of street-level retail and restaurants, with an interior parking deck and courtyard.

When it opens in late 2010, The Cardinal at North Hills, a continuing-care retirement community, will integrate senior housing with an urban, multi-generational and pedestrian-friendly community. The development will feature 202 independent living units, a 55,000-square-foot clubhouse, wellness center, and 45 assisted living and skilled nursing beds. The project is a joint venture between Kane and Drucker & Falk LLC of Raleigh, with health care provided by Duke University Health System.

"The continuum of care for senior adults is being redefined, and The Cardinal is part of new trends in active, urban and environmentally sustainable senior living," Kane notes.

Kane also is working on the first phase of the Ramblewood neighborhood of single-family homes, townhomes and stacked-flat condominiums, as well as The Lassiter, a seven-story condominium complex featuring 49 signature residences.

"John Kane and his team are investing a significant amount of money and focus to make North Hills a destination spot," Gonzales says.

"The live-work-play environment that has been created here is unique among shopping centers and is the future of mixed-use developments."

Danielle Jackson is editor of Wake Living, Fifteen501 and Triad Living magazines.