

THE TOWN CENTER AT

LEVIS COMMONS

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Front entrance to Levis Commons

Anything but Common



Levis Commons finds its niche

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PERRYSBURG — Five years ago J. Preston Levis Commons was just a vision, some might say a pipe dream.

Now it's a growing development combining business, entertainment and residential uses and strict architectural standards.

In short, it's unlike anything else in Northwest Ohio.

Today marks the one-year anniversary of the official grand opening of the \$55 million retail and office anchor of the project, dubbed "The Town Center at Levis Commons."

Situated where Ohio 25 meets Interstate 475, Levis Commons encompasses about 400 total acres and also is the future home of Fortune 500 company Owens-Illinois' world headquarters. The O-I project alone is a \$33 million venture currently underway. It includes both new construction as well as renovation of existing O-I facilities at Levis.

Lead developer for Levis Commons, Larry Dillin, predicts the overall development will represent a \$500 million investment when it's all said and done. He's also predicting it will generate up to 2,000 jobs for Perrysburg.



Townhouses filling up with residents

"We're moving at a faster pace than we originally anticipated," Dillin said during a recent phone interview, speaking from his boyhood hometown of Marengo, Iowa, where he was spending some time with family earlier this month.

"We're confident to use that \$500 million figure," Dillin said. "That's what we anticipate the value of the new buildings and property out there will be when it's complete."

The Town Center currently features 34 retailers and restaurants, most of which are new to the Toledo and Northwest Ohio market.

About 90-percent of the 319,000 square-feet of

A list of events scheduled to celebrate the one-year anniversary of J. Preston Levis Commons appear on page 5.

retail space at the Town Center is occupied, according to information provided by Hill Partners Inc., a North Carolina-based firm leading the retail portion of the Levis development.

Bob Spratt, president of Hill Partners, said the one-year anniversary "gives us a chance to look back on our first year of operation and reflect on the growth of the Town Center and the success that retailers have had.

"In our second year, we look forward to the tenant mix continuing to grow, not only in numbers but in diversity as well," Spratt said.

"We're now deep into planning the expansion of the Town Center," Dillin said.

Plans call for a new outdoor amphitheater that will accommodate about 300 people for live entertainment during the warmer months of the year. There also are plans for a five-story tall clock tower rising above the heart of the development.

"We'll start construction on that next spring,"

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Dillin said.

With O-I moving forward with its headquarters project, interest and activity at Levis is expected to continue growing.

A new upscale hotel and conference center could be on the horizon, and situated near the O-I headquarters.

Dillin said there may be an announcement on the hotel in the coming months.

"As we're planning the additional elements we're also sticking to our theme of creating a dense urban environment where we mix all the uses," Dillin said. "I think that adds to the overall vitality of the development — a walkable, pedestrian-oriented community."

The development has received significant help from the city of Perrysburg. Both former Mayor Jody Holbrook and current Mayor Tim McCarthy have supported zoning amendments and tax sharing agreements to help the project. City council initially allocated \$3.7 million for basic infrastructure work back in 2000.

The city in 2003 amended its zoning code to allow mixed use development via an "Urban Village Overlay" or UVO designation.

The city also granted Tax Increment Financing agreements or "TIFs," first in 2003 and then an expanded TIF approved last month. It allows a portion of property tax revenues to be diverted to help Dillin pay off loans for the expanding development.

Much of that work, including street improvements, city officials agreed to earlier this year as part of its deal to lure Owens-Illinois and its world headquarters project.

In terms of residential development, Preston Gardens at Levis Commons, an apartment complex, is opening.

And another new residential section, dubbed "The Brownstone Village at Levis Commons," will open in the spring. Construction on the first building, which will include about 40 two- to four-story tall condominiums, is continuing.

These condos are targeted at young professional couples and older "empty nesters." Prices vary from about \$250,000 up to \$450,000.

Just like brownstone condos found in big cities like New York or Chicago, some of the units at Levis will feature roof-top decks.



J.D. Pooley/Sentinel-Tribune

New O-I building under construction

More residential could follow, but Dillin said demand will dictate the pace of development.

"We actually have capacity within the total development

for even more units," he explained. "But again, that will be market-driven, so we're see where that goes."

Also on the horizon is incorporation of some residential

units over new retail businesses in two- or three-story designs. Again, this is a throwback to older big-city neighborhoods where going to the coffee shop, restaurant or

clothing store is just a short walk from home.

Office space has not moved as quickly as originally anticipated. The center contains over 60,000 square feet of class-A

office space, but only 40-percent has been filled since it opened a year ago.

The most recent office tenant is Progressive Insurance, which began leasing a 17,000 square-foot office this summer.

"It's true that when we envisioned the project originally, we thought we'd have more smaller tenants," Dillin said. "But we're actually attracting more larger tenants than we anticipated."

He blamed the slower-than-expected office occupancy on a glut of available office space in and around Toledo. "That makes it a very competitive market."

On the neighborhood retail end, work on another section dubbed "Preston Place" began this month. Dillin described it as "more neighborhood-oriented retail activity" located south of the Town Center and Brownstone Village.

Like all phases, it will be linked to the other sections with wide sidewalks and extensive landscaping.