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**Havana Gardens blossom**

**Dick's Sporting Goods is third major anchor store to open at shopping center**

By BRANDON JOHANSSON

The Aurora Sentinel

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**AURORA** | The days of Center Court and guards named Buck and Ham are becoming a distant memory at the intersection of East Mississippi Avenue and South Havana Street.

As The Gardens on Havana shopping district continues to grow — taking another major step this week with the opening of Dick's Sporting Goods — the reminders of the famed Buckingham Square Mall that once stood on the site are becoming few and far between.

And as The Gardens grow, the business leaders in the area say the once-thriving business district will again be a hub for shoppers.

Jerry Copsinis, a spokesman for Dick's, said the Binghamton, New York-based retailer has high hopes for their new store and for the shopping center.

"It really does look like a great lifestyle mall," he said.

Dick's opened its doors last week with what retailers call a "soft opening."

The store's grand opening, complete with professional athletes and team mascots, is set for May 2 at the store on South Ironton Street and East Mississippi Avenue.

The sporting goods store is the third large "anchor store" to open at The Gardens and the second in less than two months, marking another important milestone in the \$110 million redevelopment project.

In March, an 88,000-square-foot Kohl's Department Store opened at the 50-acre shopping center.

In September, a Sprouts Farmers' Market is scheduled to become the fourth anchor store at The Gardens. The Target Greatland store, a holdover from before Buckingham's demolition, has remained open during the old mall's demolition and construction of other shops in the area.

Gayle Jetchick, executive director of the Havana Business Improvement District, said all the anchor stores, including Dick's, are important to the shopping district's

development.

"It's a big anchor, and it should attract other stores, too," she said. "Especially if we get the crowds in there that we're expecting."

For Dick's, the store at The Gardens is the company's second new Aurora store to open this year, joining 13 other stores around Colorado.

The company also has a store on East Briarwood Place in the Cornerstar shopping center near East Parker Road and Parker Road.

Copsinis said the company sees a lot of potential for retailers in the area right now.

"There are just some good opportunities there, some good retail development," he said.

At about 50,000 square feet, the Dick's store at The Gardens is fairly typical of the company's new stores around the country, Copsinis said. The company also has larger, two-story stores in a few of malls around the state.

Copsinis said the company doesn't publicize the number of employees at a given store, but he said when the store started accepting job applications a few months ago there was plenty of interest.

When the Kohl's store accepted applications, they were virtually overrun by job seekers.

That store hosted a job fair last year to attract employees to fill out its 140-person workforce and more than 1,000 applicants showed up. The numbers were so great that media reports said the store's computers crashed.



Dick's Sporting Goods employee Ramzy Blanch strings a tennis racket April 27 at Dick's Sporting Goods at The Gardens on Havana in Aurora. (Heather A. Longway/The Aurora Sentinel)



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The interest from job seekers is a sign that The Gardens is popular among the public and that people in the area are ready for businesses to return to a place that was once one of the busiest retail districts in the city, business leaders say.

Copsinis said the interest from job seekers wasn't enough to crash the company's computers, but "it was a very enthusiastic crowd."

Once development at The Gardens is complete, Copsinis said the company expects business to be brisk.

"There is pretty good traffic in that area in general," he said.

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