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## Landmark laid to rest

*Mall's fans say they will miss Buckingham, but its time had come*

By **Brandon Johansson**  
The Aurora Sentinel

**AURORA** | They worked, shopped and virtually lived at **Buckingham Square Mall**.



Heather A. Longway-Burke/The Aurora Sentinel Troy Mefferd and his fiance Tadessa Banks listen to city officials speak Jan. 8 during the demolition ceremony at the Buckingham Square Mall in Aurora.

And as crews tear down the Aurora landmark at South Havana Street and East Mississippi Avenue, the people who strolled through Buckingham's Center Court or flipped coins into the mall's fountains say they have mixed feelings about the mall's end.

"I know there is progress that needs to be made," said Nancy Canady, who worked at Buckingham's Joslin's department store for 16 years. "But it is sort of sad."

Crews are now demolishing the mall and construction officials say that by early March, Buckingham will be nothing more than a memory.

By then, construction will begin on The Gardens on Havana, a \$110 million redevelopment project. Officials say they hope the new retail space and residential properties will spark redevelopment along the city's Havana corridor.

Canady said that while she is excited about the possibilities redevelopment presents, she misses Buckingham.

"It played a great big part in the lives of people who lived around there," she said.

Canady retired from Joslin's in 1998 when Dillard's bought the store.

Some of her fondest memories were the Midnight Madness sales at the department stores. Everyone from the store manager on down came to work in their pajamas and worked through the wee hours of the morning.

Canady lived in the Village East Neighborhood when Buckingham opened in 1971 and said she remembers the excitement in the neighborhood when they heard Buckingham was coming.

"When we finally learned that we were going to have a mall like that, it was absolutely wonderful news. And it was a wonderful mall for many years," she said.

But like many indoor malls around the country, Buckingham eventually hit hard times.

By the late 1990s, many of the stores in the once-bustling mall were gone.

"It had gone downhill to the point that we all knew it had to come down," Canady said.

Gayle Jetchick, executive director of the Havana Business Improvement District, said that over time, businesses that were once vital to the mall - like Montgomery Ward, Round the Corner and Gart Bros. - left, and the mall was never the same.

"It was just kind of one thing after another," she said.

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The business improvement district is working to improve the business atmosphere up and down Havana, and Jetchick said she hopes the redevelopment of Buckingham will lead to a revitalized corridor.

"I think it's time," Jetchick said. "We're all ready for a change."

Troy Mefferd, who worked maintenance at Buckingham since 1996, said he, too, was ready to see the mall come down.

"It happens," Mefferd said Tuesday afternoon shortly before a demolition ceremony at Buckingham.

Mefferd met his fiancée, Tadessa Banks, while both were working at Buckingham.

Banks worked at FT Casuals and when the lights on the store's Christmas tree malfunctioned, she called Mefferd to help.

While the mall played an important part in Mefferd and Banks' lives, they both said they were ready to move on and ready to see Buckingham go.

"It's just time," Mefferd said. "It's time for me to change, too."

Buckingham won't be the first indoor mall in the area to be razed and replaced by outdoor retail shops and residential properties. Villa Italia Mall in Lakewood, Cinderella City Mall in Englewood, Northglenn Mall, Westland and Southglenn Mall in Centennial have all experienced similar fates.

Dale Flowers, who was the manager at Buckingham when the mall opened, said that while it is sad to see a community hub like Buckingham go, outdoor shopping districts such as Havana Gardens serve much the same purpose.

"They still are a hub," he said. "They are just today's hub rather than 30-years-ago's hub. It's just a question of keeping up with the times."

Flowers moved to Aurora to start up the new mall six weeks before it opened in 1971.

He lived in an apartment across the street from Buckingham and quickly learned that running a mall, particularly a brand new one, wasn't a 40-hour-a-week job.

"That first year was seven days a week, up with the birds and home when the moon was coming down," he said.

In addition to running the mall, Flowers spent a lot of time meeting with neighborhoods and community groups. His goal, he said, was to explain that the mall, despite the bright streetlights and increased traffic, was a good thing for the community.

"When we pour that much concrete and asphalt, we have a responsibility to the community, we have to give it an identity, a personality," he said.

Buckingham, with its British theme - including actual palace guards named "Buck" and "Ham" in 1972 - certainly had that.

And, Flowers said, in those early days of the mall, people really loved Buckingham.

The year-round, 72-degree temperatures and tropical plants made people just want to spend an afternoon strolling through Center Court and maybe grab an ice cream cone, he said.

Sometimes people would stop him out of the blue just to tell him thanks for opening the mall and how happy they were Aurora had a mall of its own.

"It was kind of like being a local hero, per se, to be the 'mall guy,'" he said.

Flowers left Buckingham in late 1972 to manage Northglenn Mall. He later managed other malls in the area.

For Flowers, Buckingham will always be special because it was the first mall he opened and ran all on his own.

He said that career-wise, getting the chance to open Buckingham was the best thing that ever happened to him.



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"My successes were my successes, and my failures were my failures," he said. "Fortunately, there were more successes than failures."

For the people who lived near the mall, Buckingham was always a hugely important part of the neighborhood.

Zarba Joseph moved into the neighborhood in 1968.

From the day the mall opened until he moved in the early 1990s, he said he spent many hours at Buckingham, sometimes just walking around.

"This was quite a place when it first opened," he said.

Joseph, who now lives in Parker, said he has high hopes for The Gardens on Havana.

He said he would like to see the redevelopment be the same thing Buckingham was: a nice place for the neighbors to go and meet their neighbors.

"It could possibly do that," he said with a smile. "Then I might even move back."

## Reader Comments

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Posted: Sunday, April 06, 2008

Article comment by: **Jenna Snoke**

I actually knew Troy and Tedessa from the article. I knew her when she worked at Furr's and I worked at Sam Goody in the mall. I loved that mall and I'm sad that I am in Oklahoma and missed my chance to see the mall one last time!

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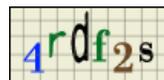
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