

Mansour legacy Town Center to be finished in 2008

By Mike Roberts
Staff writer

Tony Mansour has spent the last 27 years of his life, "which is most of my prime life in business," he said, trying to do the Town Center project. At long last, the end is in sight.

The target for completion of Town Center is Christmas, 2008.

Reflecting on the last 27 years, Mansour said, "We got in, we made a promise. It became a passion, a love."

Mansour's vision kept Town Center from becoming an enclosed mall or a Walmart. Instead, he and his son Louis Mansour have designed a European-influenced village with timeless buildings and a homey main street.

Mansour's leasing agent, Doug Wiele, hopes that 10 years from now "you won't be able to tell when this place was built."

The opening of the large white building across from Café

Campanile this fall marks the completion of all major Town Center buildings west of the lake. What remains is east of the lake, between White Rock Road and the Mercedes Dealer.

The diverse architecture and owner-operated small businesses of Town Center Boulevard will extend east into five more buildings leading up to the Theater Plaza. Work on those buildings will start in early 2007.

Leasing agent Doug Wiele plans

to continue to fill the main street with focused stores, "like Looks for woman's apparel and EDH Boards." Wiele likes retail stores that know who their customer is and appeal directly to them. "Those stores draw specific customers, and become little anchors," he said.

A more conventional anchor, Target, will likely be located on White Rock Road, west of Vine

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Street. That deal is still not finalized.

Meat loaf (the comfort food, not the rock star) will arrive in Town Center by the end of the year, when Bristro 33 opens in the new white building. Bristro 33's diverse menu shows off exotic California cuisine beside American favorites, all at reasonable prices.

You'll have to wait until the fall of 2007 for sushi in Town Center, when the hottest restaurant in Sacramento, Mikuni Sushi, opens in a cluster of three buildings across from the Mercedes Dealer.

Office buildings on the northeast and southeast corners of Town Center will share parking with the theater. Hungry office workers will have plenty of lunch options nearby.

Everything will be within walking distance from Town Center Boulevard, with its diverse European Village style and attention to detail.

"A lot of developers are going to the lifestyle open air shopping," said Tony Mansour. "We started this concept 10 years ago, way ahead of everybody."

Mansour's vision has provided EDH with something that many newer communities lack, a real downtown. But it didn't happen by accident.

"You have to think ahead of your days," he said. "Sometimes you hit, sometimes you miss."

There have been a few regrets along the way. Master developer Mansour sold the property which

became the Marketplace at Town Center, the stretch of stores between Longs Drug Store and the now-defunct Ralph's supermarket location, which includes the Starbucks strip across the parking lot.

"At the time we thought it was the right decision. If we had to do it over again, we'd keep that key piece of real estate under our control," Mansour said.

The Ralph's store has been vacant over three months, and the nearby businesses miss having a traffic-generating anchor as a neighbor. Betty Williams is co-owner of Wowza, the creative kids store adjacent to the empty Ralph's store. "Weekend foot-traffic is gone. We're very eager to get something in next door," she said.

There's been activity in the empty store of late, and rumors are flying about a potential grocery tenant. Craig Woolmington-Smith, who manages the Marketplace property, said that Ralph's parent company, Kroger, is selling the leases on all their Northern California grocery stores.

"Kroger is as eager as we are to see another grocery store in there; they want to sell all those grocery fixtures as part of the deal," he said.

Woolmington-Smith has been told by Kroger representatives that "the store is in escrow now, and that they hope to announce something in two to three weeks."

"We're hoping to see an upscale grocer in that location; that would



Village Life Photo by Mike Roberts

THE EUROPEAN VILLAGE style of town Center in El Dorado Hills is typified by the Tuscan bell tower that dominates the retail development.

be best for the merchants and for the community," said Woolmington-Smith. Leasing restrictions prohibit a discount grocer, but Woolmington-Smith said that Kroger could lease to a non-grocery retailer. "We have the right to approve the tenant," he said.

There is room for one more store in Marketplace. "We have a 22,000-square-foot anchor pad pre-approved for the spot between Debbie Wong's and Round Table," Woolmington-Smith said. "We're waiting to see what happens in the Ralph's location, and with the dis-

cussion of Target, we are getting more interest from retailers."

Woolmington-Smith sees Town Center Marketplace as "a neighborhood center, an everyday place with a grocery store, a drug store, a Starbucks - the basics for the everyday shopper," he said.

Back on Town Center Boulevard, there's a vacancy next to the Hang It Up gallery. "We are negotiating letters of intent with a couple potential retailers that want to be there," said Wiele.

With Town Center starting to look like the center of a town, and

the end of the project in sight, Mansour said "We are three generations now. Maybe my grandson will be working on this someday. When you talk about two or three generations working on one project, it's about more than just making money."

With or without someone named Mansour involved, town Center is a Mansour legacy, Louis Mansour put it this way, "This is the final piece of the El Dorado Hills project my dad envisioned. It started with him creating a world-class community. It's fitting that we finish it off