

Riverview making gradual process

JJ Hensley

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While the buzz has been building around the newly inaugurated Tempe Marketplace, there's a different sound emanating from Mesa Riverview at the corner of Dobson Road and Loop 202: saws, hammers and heavy equipment.

Tempe Marketplace broke ground in February 2006, about 10 months after construction began at Riverview, and Tempe's long-awaited power center held its grand opening with much fanfare earlier this month.

Meanwhile, much of Mesa Riverview is still under construction. But developers insist that's by design. The project, which includes an office park and auto mall in addition to 1.3 million square feet of retail space, was scheduled with a 10-year build out but that time frame has been cut in half, said Marty DeRito, whose company developed the center along with Kimco Developers.

That means all 250 acres of Riverview should be complete or under construction by May 2010, he said.

"What people seem to miss is the sheer size of it," DeRito said. "We're 250 acres. We're twice the size of Tempe Marketplace."

The Home Depot that opened last spring on a 10-acre lot makes up less than 5 percent of the entire project, DeRito said, making it the functional equivalent of a Subway sandwich shop in a Fry's shopping center.

About 10 to 15 percent of the 1.3 million square feet set aside for shopping has not been leased, he said. Tempe Marketplace developers say 95 percent of the center's 120 stores are leased.

A walk down Riverview's Theater District, the stretch of shops between Bass Pro Shops Outdoor World and Cinemark Theatre, shows there's still plenty of work to be done.

A handful of restaurants and shops have started to appear in the development's signature area but large swaths of shops remain empty, with plywood holding the space for future tenants.

Developers have announced a few new shops in that area, including a Hubbard Family Swim School, a video-game store and a few restaurants, but DeRito said the Theater District, which comprises about 10 percent of the project's retail space, would have been the final piece of the Riverview puzzle if he had his way.

The development agreement dictated that those shops were built first.

"We kind of got the cart before the horse here with that part of it," DeRito said. "We would have really focused that on starting construction when Bass Pro opened. We had a lot of people pulling us to get that part open sooner."

Bob Guertin's grateful that they did.

Guertin opened Big Sticks Fine Cigars in May, making him the first tenant in the Theater District, and that was by design. Guertin said he wanted to get his tobacco shop in first so neighbors would know the type of business they were building next to. A barbershop is under construction next door, which Guertin sees as a nice fit for his business.

Riverview, with its emphasis on family entertainment and shopping, was a good fit, too, Guertin said, since his shop caters to fathers who might be looking for a little respite as their wives and children shop and play in the area.

"The reason I didn't want to go to Tempe Marketplace is that it's too frou-frou. It's more of a mall. This is more of a specialty area," said Guertin, who noted that developers helped him with publicity and other incidental issues that came up as other business have moved in.

"Marty's been very good to me," he said. "I have no complaints."