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City's uptown merchants unite

By Robin Mero

Tuesday, October 27, 2009

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FAYETTEVILLE — Merchants on the north end of Fayetteville are creating their own identity as "uptown" with formation of the Uptown Fayetteville Association, as announced Monday.

Uptown is new and trendy - with distinct features that distinguish it from other areas of the city, business owners said. They want to hear, "Let's go to dinner uptown" from residents.

"Fayetteville has the tradition of the University of Arkansas, the culture of downtown and the amenities of uptown. We feel the three of those combined make a very strong city," Jeff Bishop, senior property manager at the Northwest Arkansas Mall, said.

During an afternoon press conference at the mall, Mayor Lioneld Jordan and Chamber of Commerce President Steve Clark highlighted uptown Fayetteville's financial impact on the city.

"When you look at point of sale, at cash registers, this region is what makes Fayetteville ring," Clark said.

Jeff Cooperstein, research assistant at the University of Arkansas' Center for Business and Economic Research, said the uptown area seems to be the city's strongest economically at this time. He'll be following the association's efforts to carve an identity that complements, not alienates, economic efforts in other areas of the city.

The Uptown Fayetteville Association boundaries:

- ◇To the north, Johnson and Zion roads, Botanical Garden of the Ozarks.
- ◇To the south, Fiesta Square, Herman's Restaurant
- ◇To the east, Signature Square and Soul Restaurant, Crossover Road.
- ◇To the west, Sam's Club, Arkansas 112 and including Johnson businesses such as Inn at the Mill, The Blessings Golf Course and Marriott Towne Place.

Merchants gathered in April to discuss forming such an organization, said Jeff Bishop. They invited Jordan and Clark to a meeting to discuss issues of traffic flow and how to promote themselves as a destination.

Bishop said between 20 and 30 businesses were represented then, and many others have since expressed interest. Membership will be \$50 a year, and a 501(c)(3) is being formed.

Traffic concerns are foremost on the list of concerns, Bishop said, as roads are scattered and difficult to navigate, and some areas have poor access. The mall shopping area has expanded in phases since the mall was built in 1972. The Fulbright Expressway brings thousands of vehicles in each day from Interstate 540, but also blocks access.

Ten million dollars of projects to improve the dysfunction of traffic flow in uptown is planned during the next few years; much of those funds will come from the state.

"I feel the mayor has addressed those traffic concerns," Bishop said. "The next piece will be promotion and advertising - signage. Our intent is also to sponsor several events, such as the hot rod show that was so successful during Bikes, Blues & BBQ."

Clark was the first to use the term "uptown" to distinguish the area's culture as different from around the Fayetteville Square and Dickson Street.

The area now has a number of new restaurants, the East Meets West spa, many medical facilities, an expanded movie theater and a large entertainment venue at the Arkansas Music Pavilion. Parking is abundant and free. Arguably the busiest intersection in the region is located here, at Joyce Boulevard and College Avenue.

Interested merchants can contact Bishop at the mall for more information about the association. The first meeting will be held in November.

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