

Whole Foods, the anchor of Towne Center, to open July 20th

By Jeff Smithpeters, Contributing Editor

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The next round of store openings in Towne Center is about to start. Those drivers unable to resist making the turn into the new complex of stores and restaurants being built on the intersection of Corporate and Jefferson will soon see the stores from the inside.

Whole Foods, the anchor of the shopping center is to open Wednesday July 20th. Around 9:00 p.m. Wednesday night a guard snuck me into the 46,000 square foot health food store in progress, and I could see that merchandise is already beginning to be set up in the aisles. The checkout stands, with all the flat-panel monitors already on, were finished. At my right as I entered, I glimpsed a nearly finished gourmet coffee shop. With two more weeks until opening day, Whole Foods is almost a Whole store.

Towne Center is to be what its developers at Creekstone Builders call a "lifestyle center." As Marketing Director Paula Biggs describes it, "lifestyle centers are open-air marketplaces where stores open onto sidewalks, and sidewalks meander past outdoor seating areas, fountains and nicely landscaped green areas." These centers are meant "to overcome some of the inconveniences of traditional shopping malls, where large parking lots and crowded interior concourses make shopping a hassle."

Sure, but will it make it easier for me to find my car?

Already, several restaurants have opened in Town Centre I, the shopping district of the project, including Fleming's Prime Steakhouse, Carrabba's Italian Grill and P.F. Chang's China Bistro. The stores will include Whole Foods, Taylor Loft, Talbot's, Coldwater Creek, White House Black Market, Massey's Professional Outfitters, and Chico's.

Creekstone Builders is putting \$80 million into the project, which will be completed in three phases. Biggs said the first two phases, which include the shopping center, are 90 percent complete and that stores are already reporting brisk sales: "We are elated at the number of shoppers we're seeing. They're coming in steady streams, really outpacing our projections."

Another part of the project will be a business park called Towne Center II, which will include regular and medical offices. Towne Centre I will include 310,000 square feet of "retail office and medical space," as a news release provided by Creekstone describes it. Towne Centre II will measure a slightly larger 320,000 square feet.

Apartments have already been completed and rented out at The Reserve at Cedar Lodge, another development by Creekstone. The complex, which is divided into 300 units, includes such amenities as "an indoor basketball court, a billiard and game room, a clubhouse and fitness center, a movie center with a 100-inch screen and a business center," according to a press release issued by the developer.

The Baton Rouge project is Creekstone's first development in Baton Rouge. The company has built \$300 million worth of commercial property in 15 states.