



Shoppers spurn enclosures for 'lifestyle centers'

By Matthew Daneman, USA TODAY

For 46 years, it has been a holiday tradition at Midtown Plaza mall in Rochester, N.Y., for children to ride on the monorail that circles the atrium, going past the tall, decorated tree and the area where they could later sit on Santa's lap.

If all goes according to plan, the mall, among the first built in the 1960s to lure shoppers back from the growing suburban retail areas, won't make it to a 47th holiday season. It is slated to be demolished this year to make way for a new headquarters for telecommunications firm PAETEC Holding Corp.

Finding a taker for downtown mall properties is an issue in many cities across the USA. In Dayton, Ohio, despite repeated proposals, the old Arcade mall has stood closed since 1991, according to the Ohio Preservation Alliance.

In Niagara Falls, N.Y., the Rainbow Centre Factory Outlet mall, blocks away from the waterfalls that are a destination for tourists worldwide, remains an unwanted eyesore since shutting its doors in 2000 after years of declining business, according to former mayor Vincenzo Anello.

While there are no national statistics on the number of closings, numerous shopping malls across the nation — especially, though not exclusively, those in downtown areas — are "on the way out," said Teresa Lynch of the National Main Street Center of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

"There's a pattern you see when you look across midsized cities across the nation," with downtown malls losing in the retail battle with growing suburban shopping centers and malls, said Heidi Zimmer-Meyer, president of the Rochester Downtown Development Corp.

Michael Braun, vice president of Wessman Development Co. in Palm Springs, Calif., says the latest trend for mall properties is the "lifestyle center" concept, which involves a mix of retail and residential development in an open-air plaza configuration.

The enclosed mall, he said, runs contrary to what people want, which is being outside, even in California's warm climate. Braun said his company plans to spend \$500 million to \$650 million replacing downtown Palm Springs' Desert Fashion Plaza, which has been largely closed for years, with such a center.

According to the International Council of Shopping Centers, major outdoor lifestyle centers are going up at a rate of 15 to 20 a year and are being built in both downtown and suburban locales from Houston to Harrisburg.

The Castleton Square lifestyle center in northeastern Indianapolis opened for the 2007 Christmas shopping season. A similar center, Rushmore Crossing, is under construction in Rapid City, S.D.

"What America is discovering is people hate driving their cars," Braun said. "Today, Manhattan is the most desirable place in the whole wide world. You can walk anywhere you want."

City Creek Center, a similar retail and residential development being financed in large part by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is going up in downtown Salt Lake City in the spot where Crossroads Plaza Mall and ZCMI Center Mall have stood.

Crossroads and ZCMI "each had their heyday and did well for a time period," said Mark Gibbons, president of City Creek Reserve, the church's downtown Salt Lake City redevelopment arm.

City Creek Center will have a mix of apartments and condominiums, a grocery store, Nordstrom and Macy's department stores as anchors and more than 100 shops. It will be open-air as well, but will have a retractable glass roof to keep out the worst winter and summer weather, Gibbons

said.

Anita Kramer, director of retail development for the Urban Land Institute, said that as the market around downtown malls changes, "the enclosed malls, those that can adapt, will survive or reinvent themselves, whether they open themselves up or have a street presence. Maybe they won't look like a mall anymore."

"The big fix, if you will, has never worked as a method of revitalizing downtown commercial districts," Lynch said. "A slow and more thoughtful approach is really the only thing that will work. It's a lot of little things that build on each other. Things don't happen right away, but by year three or five or 10 you start to see that incremental (improvement). It takes long-term commitment."

Daneman reports for the Rochester (N.Y.) Democrat and Chronicle. Contributing: Dennis Wagner, The Arizona Republic in Phoenix; Brian Passey, The Spectrum in St. George, Utah; and Stefanie Frith, The Desert Sun in Palm Springs, Calif.

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