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DATE DISTRIBUTED 10/5/07 DATE OF ARTICLE 10/1-7/07 NEWSPAPER F.W. Business Press

Banking on the Mid-Cities

Worthington National Bank has converted its Colleyville loan production office into a full service banking center, the bank announced Sept. 27.

The bank's office at 5311 Colleyville Boulevard, opened seven months ago. Worthington, based in Arlington, has two Arlington locations and one location in downtown Fort Worth.

Also coming to the Mid-Cities is Plano-based ViewPoint Bank, which has signed a ground lease on a 51,519-square-foot pad site at The Shops at Vineyard Village, located at the southeast corner of Glade Road and State Highway 121 in Euless. Estimated opening is March 2008, according to Staubach Retail Services.

Reported by Robert Francis at 11:49 a.m. on Sept. 27

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EULESS

City expects dog park soon

By **JESSICA DeLEÓN**
 jdeleon@star-telegram.com

EULESS — The city is expected to have a dog park by year's end — and that could help Merilyn Brooks' dog, Gracie.

Gracie, almost 2, doesn't like other dogs.

"That's why she needs some socialization," Brooks said as she walked the Mi-Ki during a recent afternoon.

The pooches will be able to hang out and hang loose on 3 acres at the Village of Bear Creek Park on Bear Creek Parkway.

The space will be divided equally: one area for dogs weighing less than 40 pounds,

another area for dogs heavier than 40 pounds, said Ray McDonald, parks and community services director.

Bidding on construction, which will include a chain-link fence and wash station, could start in the next 30 days. The City Council budgeted \$150,000 for the project.

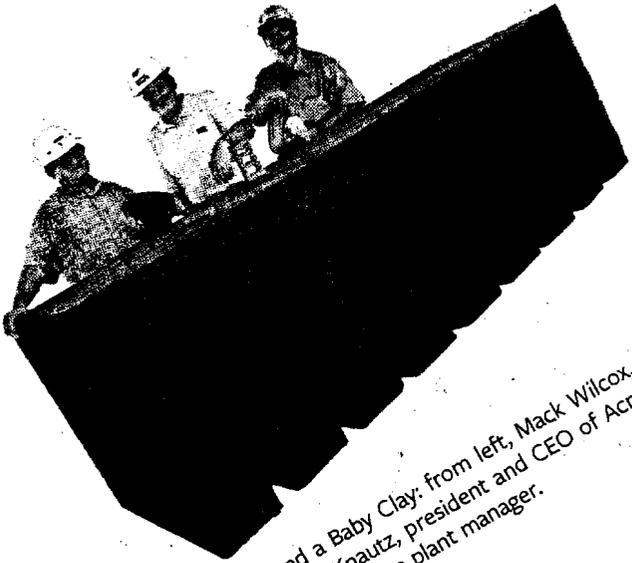
The city had received numerous requests for a dog park. North Richland Hills and Southlake have them.

Euleless officials chose the Village of Bear Creek Park because it's in a large apartment community.

"It's just a perfect fit," McDonald said.

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Three men and a Baby Clay: from left, Mack Wilcox, project supervisor; Dennis Knautz, president and CEO of Acme Brick; and Harland Dixon, Denton plant manager.

ACME BRICK

Acme of bricks

Acme Brick is proud to announce that Baby Clay was born at 6 a.m. July 4 in Denton. Clay weighed in at 6,000 pounds and is 9 feet, 8 inches long, 39 inches tall and 39 inches wide.

Yes, you read that right.

After four years — a gestation period longer than that of an elephant — Acme has delivered the world's largest brick, certified by Guinness World Records. It is 3,000 times the size of a standard brick, the company said.

"The creation of Clay demonstrates exceptional expertise among our brick making staff. This was a huge, unprecedented challenge for them," Dennis Knautz, president and chief executive, said in a statement.

And now, Clay is on tour.

On Friday, it began a 7,000-mile tour from Acme's Denton plant. This month and next, the brick will visit all 67 Acme offices and plants in Texas and seven adjacent states. Clay is made from materials from each of Acme's 23 brick plants around the Southwest.

The brick is being displayed today at noon at Acme's Euless sales office, 801 Airport Freeway, and at 4 p.m. at Acme's Fort Worth headquarters, 2821 W. Seventh St.

A complete schedule of Clay's appearances is on the Acme Web site, www.brick.com.

Acme was founded in 1891 near Fort Worth. It is now a part of Berkshire Hathaway, headed by famed investor Warren Buffett.

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BRIEFS

San Francisco Oven opens today in Eules

EULESS — San Francisco Oven, a bistro-cafe chain, opens a 135-seat location today in the Vineyard Village Shopping Center, 3010 Texas 121. The restaurant is owned by franchisee Badna Investments. The interior is floor-to-ceiling San Francisco flavor, featuring large-scale photographs of Bay Area landmarks. A replica of the Golden Gate Bridge separates the dining room from the service counter. The menu features Bay Area favorites such as pizza Napoletana and calzones, as well as sandwiches, soups and salads. This is the chain's fourth Metroplex location. — *Sandra Baker*

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UNITED WAY

Northeast transit program rides high

Word about the free, week-day service is spreading.

By **DAVE FERMAN**
 dferman@star-telegram.com

BEDFORD — Just about this time last year, Faye Beaulieu was worried: Designed to help low-income workers find reliable transportation, the HEB Transit project was getting off to a slow start, with only a handful of people taking 15 to 20 rides in the first month.

"We knew the need was there. There was no doubt in our minds, and we thought we'd be overwhelmed with riders," said Beaulieu, project director for United Way/Northeast. "We thought people would be coming out of the woodwork. But it was harder to find the niche client than we anticipated."

A year later, the clients have been found: The free Monday-Friday service gave 2,030 rides through the end of August; daily hours are now 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.; and starting in September, Dallas/Fort Worth Airport workers became eligible.

"We are close to vehicle capacity," Beaulieu said.

HEB Transit uses American Red Cross vans for what is



Rena Patterson of Euless received an HEB Transit ride from her apartment to offices in Bedford on Friday morning.

STAR-TELEGRAM/IAN McVEA

HEB Transit

HEB Transit is a partnership among the United Way of Tarrant County, the Workforce Development Board of Tarrant County and the North Central Texas Council of Governments. To determine eligibility or receive a transit pass, contact one of the following organizations:

- Catholic Charities, 817-534-0814
- Christian Connection, 817-283-8746
- Mission Central, 817-595-0011
- St. John the Apostle Catholic Church, 817-284-4811
- Travelers Aid (D/FW Airport), 972-574-4420
- Workforce Solutions Mid-Cities Center, 817-399-7500

To donate

The United Way of Tarrant County is trying to raise \$24 million to fund nonprofit social-service agencies. The organization began its annual fundraising campaign Sept. 7. To donate: United Way of Tarrant County, 210 E. Ninth St., Fort Worth, TX 76102, or www.unitedwaytarrant.org.

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much like a taxi service, said project manager James Powell, who is also a transportation planner with the North Central Texas Council of Governments. People book rides 48 hours in advance; in August, the service gave 259 rides, he said.

The rides must begin or end in Hurst, Euless or Bedford, Beaulieu said, although the service will also take people to CentrePort at D/FW Airport or the Texas Health & Human Services Commission office on John T. White Road in east Fort Worth.

Seven community groups, including Catholic Charities, Christian Connection and Travelers Aid Dallas/Fort Worth, distribute ride passes. The United Way contributed \$25,000 in seed money to start the program, which is now supported through contributions from local churches and Workforce Solutions, as well as federal money administered by the Council of Governments, Beaulieu said.

Many riders have no other reliable transportation, which prevents them from keeping a steady job, she said. By using the service, they can save for car repairs or a down payment.

The more riders there are, the more word spreads about the reliability of the service and the more people use it, Beaulieu said.

"You have to build trust," she said. "To tell a potential client that someone will take you to work and take you back for free, well, it sounds too good to be true. People don't necessarily trust something that's free until they use it and

see that it works and that it really is an attempt to get people on their feet. We've had to establish that trust."

Also, she said, volunteers went to churches, apartment complex managers and civic organizations to get the word out. The goal was to reach workers who might use the program, she said.

Adding Travelers Aid to organizations distributing passes will help a "substantial" number of airport workers, said Bruce Freeman, the organization's executive director.

"Their transportation challenges may hinder them from being as reliable as they could be, and there aren't that many affordable options," he said.

Powell said the association with the airport is a major step forward for the program, which anticipates providing 3,000 rides in its second year.

"There are still a lot of skeptical people, but I think if they try it once, they will see that it works. We have a lot of people who depend daily on it."

DAVE FERMAN, 817-685-3957

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Empty buildings leave area cities feeling unfulfilled

By JESSICA DeLEÓN

jdeleon@star-telegram.com

They're the old grocery stores and restaurants that once teemed with customers.

Now they sit empty, sometimes for years, despite their visible locations.

Except in booming Keller and Southlake, officials throughout Northeast Tarrant County face the challenge of filling large vacant buildings. Until they're reoccupied, cities lose out on potential revenue from sales, equipment and inventory taxes. And they lose out on foot traffic that might improve sales at neighboring businesses. Meanwhile, residents complain about what they perceive as blight.

"You've always got that building," said Bill Ridgway, Euless' economic development director.

Wal-Mart effect

City officials say they most want to see their former supermarkets occupied because of the potential tax revenue. But why are so many grocery stores empty?

"One word: Wal-Mart," said Scott Welmaker, Colleyville's economic development manager.

Colleyville has two empty grocery stores: Kroger and Albertsons, both privately owned and diagonally across the street from each other on Colleyville Boulevard.

Welmaker hopes that if one supermarket gets filled, the other will soon have a buyer.

He would like to see clothing or linen stores.

"Obviously, grocery stores didn't work there," he said.

Supermarkets present problems for reuse. The buildings usually have one floor, 18-foot-high ceilings and support structures that divide the building, said Terry Clower, associate director of the Center for Economic Development at the University of North Texas in Denton.

The design makes it more difficult to attract other businesses because of the limited uses, "which is why we see many old grocery stores turn into bingo halls," Clower said.

The vacancy can also become a self-fulfilling prophecy, he said: The longer the building sits empty, the more businesses don't want to locate there, and the space can turn into an eyesore.

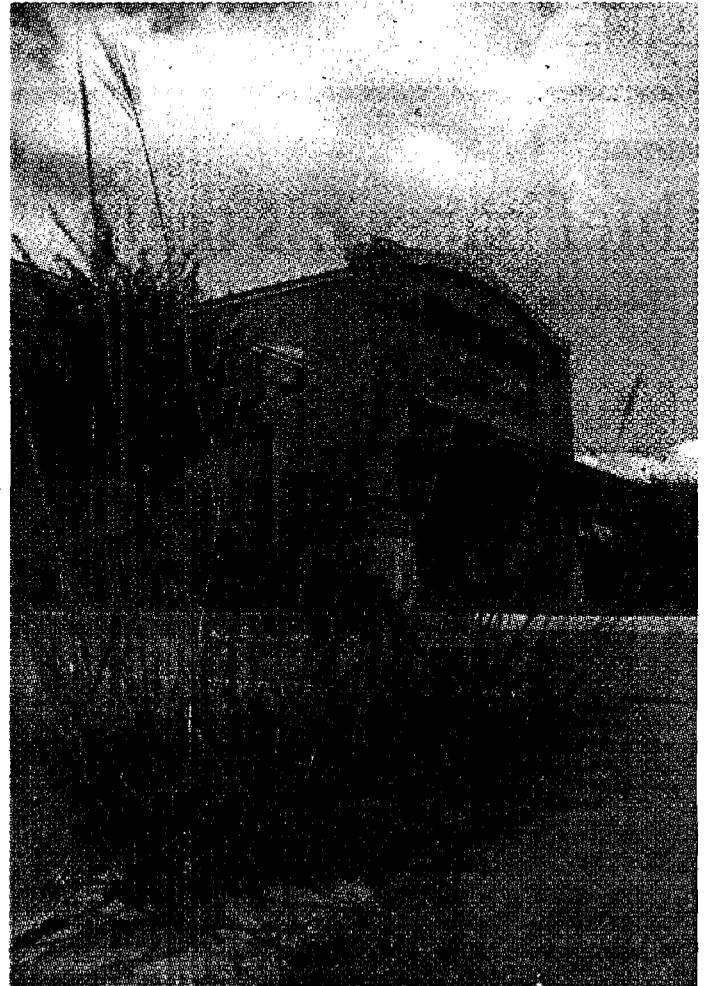
Or, in another scenario, the building has a secondary use, Clower said. For example, a grocery store may close, and a deep-discount retailer will take its place — generating far less sales tax revenue.

Taken over by the city

Some cities have converted the vacant buildings for their own use.

Hurst is transforming Cavender's, a former Western clothing store at 845 W. Pipeline Road, into a senior center. The building, which had been vacant for about three years, could be occupied by July 2009.

The senior center will be next to a city park and be part



STAR-TELEGRAM/IAN McVEA

Bedford

Harrigans Grill and Bar, 1501 Airport Freeway, 7,401 square feet

How long empty: Four years **Property value:** \$900,000

Officials' wish: Restaurant

Other information: Companies have told city officials that the property doesn't have enough parking, and motorists may find it hard to get to.

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of a development that will include a new fire station, homes and stores, city spokeswoman Ashleigh Whiteman said.

"It really just made sense," Whiteman said.

In North Richland Hills, officials plan to convert the former Food Lion store at 4131 Rufe Snow Drive, empty since 1997, to city offices. The state's planned expansion of Northeast Loop 820 will likely force the building that houses the city's library, recreation center and other offices near Rufe Snow to close.

The city is building a recreation center and library at Home Town NRH off Davis Boulevard, but other offices will need space. No timeline has been set for moving into the Food Lion store; the highway expansion project may be years away.

When local governments take over buildings, they're also giving up, Clower said. They're taking the building off the tax rolls and not getting the sales tax revenue that they used to.

"It becomes, 'We're kind of stuck with that building,'" he said.

Patience can pay off

Sometimes cities have found they have to be patient.

Eules waited for nearly a dozen years before a former Sutherlands building materials store, at 1010 N. Industrial Blvd., found a tenant.

Residents often asked about the building at town hall meetings.

"It had become a very bad joke," Ridgway said.

Professional Turf Products took over the space about a year ago. "The city cooperated with them in every way possible," Ridgway said, including giving the company sales tax incentives.

The old Kmart at 701 S. Industrial Blvd sat empty for at least five years until 2001, when the building become the DFW Technology Center. It's now the corporate headquarters for Reynolds Asphalt.

After four years of waiting, Bedford officials expect that a 60,000-square-foot call center will move into the Bank One building at 1900 L. Don Dodson Drive by the end of the year. Officials hope they can fill the rest of the 200,000-square-foot building.

And JPS Health Network is putting a clinic in a 20,000-square-foot section of the former Winn-Dixie on 6601 Watauga Road in Watauga.

Sometimes cities and businesses must be flexible. The old Winn-Dixie shopping center on 143 E. Harwood Road in Hurst, vacant for five years,

will have two businesses instead of one.

Bicycles Inc., now in Bedford, will take up half the 44,000-square-foot building, with the other business to be determined. A dialysis center will also move into the shopping center.

Dallas-based Realtor Croesus Capital Partners, which bought the center in December from a Florida real estate investor, plans to update the center with new landscaping and a new facade.

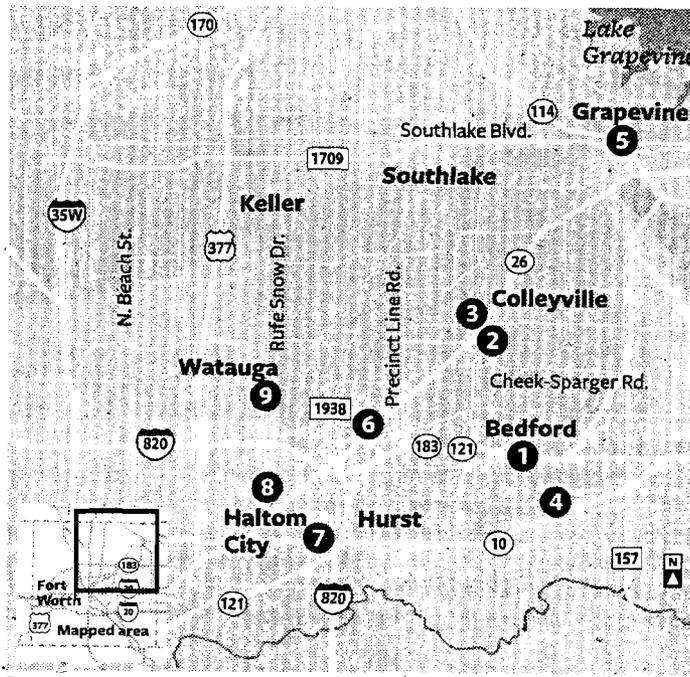
Trip Green of Croesus said that the company was attracted by the area's solid demographics and income levels and that it wasn't spooked by the building's long vacancy.

"What we saw is what it could be, not what it was or not what it had been," he said.

Staff writer John Kirsch contributed to this report, which includes material from the Star-Telegram archives.

JESSICA DeLEÓN, 817-685-3932

Vacant buildings in Northeast Tarrant County



Cities throughout Northeast Tarrant County are trying to find buyers or tenants for vacant buildings. Here are some of the area's larger, empty buildings:

1. Harrigan's Grill & Bar, Bedford
2. Albertsons, Colleyville
3. Kroger, Colleyville
4. Former Tarrant Printing building, Eules
5. Albertsons, Grapevine
6. Tom Thumb, Hurst
7. Sam's Club, Richland Hills
8. Food Lion, North Richland Hills
9. Albertsons, Watauga



STAR-TELEGRAM/STEWART F. HOUSE

Colleyville

Albertsons, 4801 Colleyville Blvd., 60,000 square feet

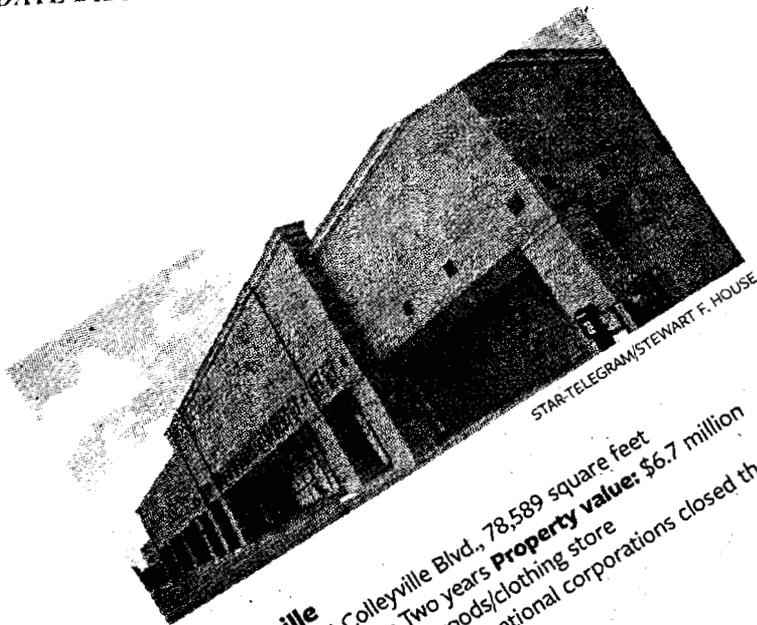
How long empty: Six months **Property value:** \$4.2 million

Officials' wish: Soft-goods/clothing store

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STAR-TELEGRAM/STEWART F. HOUSE

Colleyville
Kroger, 4904 Colleyville Blvd., 78,589 square feet
How long empty: Two years
Property value: \$6.7 million
Officials' wish: Soft-goods/clothing store
Other information: The national corporations closed the Albertsons and Kroger stores.



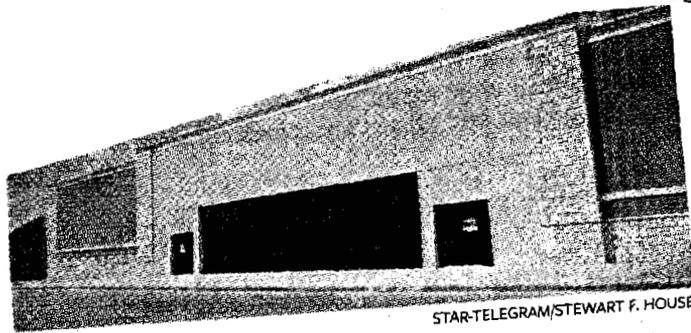
STAR-TELEGRAM/STEWART F. HOUSE

Eules
Former Tarrant Printing building, 3200 W. Eules Blvd., 74,942 square feet
How long empty: About three years
Property value: \$1.5 million
Officials' wish: Anything retail, especially a Costco, Target or Wal-Mart, or a grocery store.
Other information: The building is having asbestos removed, Economic Development Director Bill Ridgway said. The building also used to be a Tom Thumb.



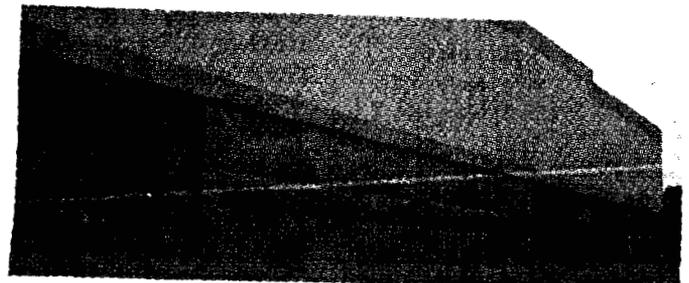
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Grapevine
Albertsons, 2100 W. Northwest Highway, 66,958 square feet
How long empty: Five months
Property value: \$3.8 million
Officials' wish: Grocery store/retail store
Other information: The building was one of the first Albertsons stores in the area, Grapevine Assistant City Manager Tommy Hardy said. Many Albertsons stores have been closing, and this store went with a round of closings this year, he said.



STAR-TELEGRAM/STEWART F. HOUSE

Hurst
Tom Thumb/Mayfair shopping center, 666 Grapevine Highway, 197,745 square feet
How long empty: Three years
Property value: \$14 million
Officials' wish: Retail store or restaurant
Other information: The Tom Thumb, which moved next door, is part of a shopping center that includes several restaurants and stores that are still operating.

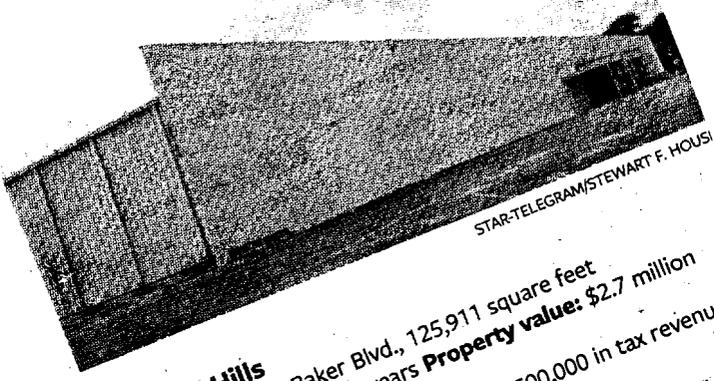


STAR-TELEGRAM/IAN McVE

North Richland Hills
Food Lion, 4131 Rufe Snow Drive, 37,025 square feet
How long empty: 10 years
Property value: \$1.9 million
Officials' wish: The city plans to use the building to relocate services displaced by the expansion of Northeast Loop 820.
Other information: North Richland Hills bought the building in December 2003 for \$650,000.

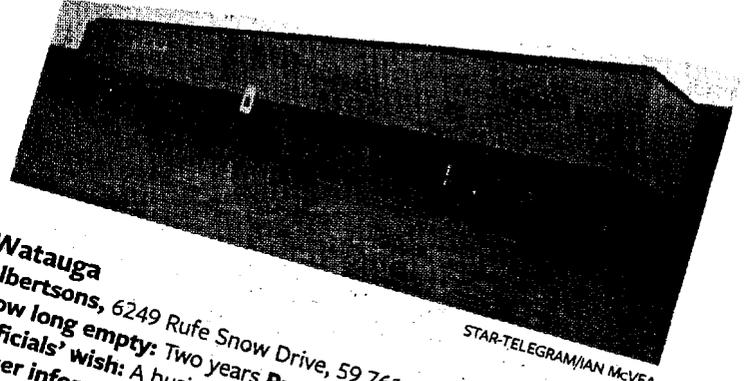
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Richland Hills
Sam's Club, 7500 Baker Blvd., 125,911 square feet
How long empty: Seven years **Property value:** \$2.7 million
Officials' wish: A store.
Other information: It had produced \$500,000 in tax revenue for the city annually.



STAR-TELEGRAM/IAN McVEA

Watauga
Albertsons, 6249 Rufe Snow Drive, 59,761 square feet
How long empty: Two years **Property value:** \$3.3 million
Officials' wish: A business
Other information: A Super Saver store occupied the building for a year after Albertsons vacated it. Albertsons left as part of an overall store reduction in the Metroplex.
— Jessica DeLeón, John Kirsch and Bill Teeter

Sources: Cities, Star-Telegram archives, Tarrant Appraisal District

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An adventurous mom and three energizer kids find the best places in Tarrant County to climb, swing and romp

By FELICIA PINKNEY Special to the Star-Telegram

Finding the right playground — especially if you have kids of all ages — is like shopping for a new car: You have to test-drive a few before you find the right one. Thankfully, Tarrant County is home to hundreds of public playgrounds. But which ones are best? We left that to the experts: kids and an eagle-eyed parent. Note: All playgrounds are covered in wood chips unless otherwise noted.

The mission: Search the area for some of the best playgrounds in Tarrant County

The requirements: Lots of room to romp, shade, restrooms, seating and a place for the baby to play safely

The playground posse: The monkey bar master, age 6; her swingin' sidekick, age 4; a blanket-bearing baby who's just along for the slide, age 20 months; and a picnic-packin' mama, age "never mind"

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Our top three:



1 J.W. Dunlop Sports Center

1500 N.W. Green Oaks Blvd., Arlington
The scene: Right down the street from River Legacy Parks sits the Sunrise Creative Playground, a perfect place for kids to have fun without the hot Texas sun bearing down on them.

Playground: This site has nearly everything we look for in a playground: It's large and shady, and little ones can play safely on the big-kid stuff; the screened-in play structure prevents falls from high up. Includes rocket-shaped playhouse, climbing wall, lots of monkey bars, slides and cool hiding places. Note: Watch out for cobwebs underneath the play structure.

Tot spot: Several baby swings, slides, monkey bars and a padded surface

Shade: Plenty

Restrooms: Portable toilets

Seating: Benches throughout the play area; some built into structure

Fave feature: The deep, roomy sandbox, which is in the Tot Lot. Sandcastle fun awaits; bring your own bucket.

Hours: 5 a.m.-10 p.m. daily

2 Trinity Park

2401 University Drive, Fort Worth

The scene: Just down the road from the Fort Worth Zoo, along the banks of the Trinity River, this lush park is one of the city's most popular places for kids to romp.

Playground: With so much to choose from, children won't know where to go first; slides, tunnels, swings, things to climb on and into. The play area is massive; it can get crowded, especially on weekends and holidays. Note: Check out the duck pond, which you'll find if you follow the winding road through the park.

Tot spot: Two play zones have smaller slides, not-so-scary tunnels and other amenities for younger kids; baby swings are near the ones for big kids.

Shade: Plenty

Restrooms: Portable toilets

Seating: Several benches in the play area

Fave feature: The miniature train that takes a 5-mile trip throughout the park. Tickets are \$3 for adults and \$2.50 for kids and seniors; cash only. Check www.fpmt.us for times.

Hours: 5 a.m.-11:30 p.m. daily

3 Glenview Baptist Church

4805 N.E. Loop 820, Fort Worth

The scene: Right near the border of Fort Worth and Haltom City is one of the best-kept secrets among indoor play areas — and there's no admission fee.

Playground: Three-story treehouse has five slides, one of which is the tallest spiral slide in Texas, says Glenview Senior Pastor Dennis Baw. Mazes throughout the treehouse lead to various levels of fun and adventure.

Tot spot: The "Romper Room," for crawlers and new walkers, has small slides and a tot-size treehouse. Nearby is a soft-play zone with tiny tunnels and more for little climbers.

Shade: No need to worry about Mr. Sun here, since it's all indoors.

Restrooms: Yes

Seating: Benches throughout the play area; or plop down on the floor with other parents

Fave feature: The entire playscape, which is big enough for moms and dads to climb into

Hours: Open to the public 10 a.m.-noon first, third and fifth Mondays for kindergartners and younger; 817-281-3361, www.glenviewchurch.org (click on "Ministries," then "Preschool & Children's Ministry")

Others worth a visit:

4 Candleridge Park

4301 French Lake Drive, Fort Worth

The scene: The CandleRidge neighborhood, tucked just off South Hulen in southwest Fort Worth, is home to this peaceful park, which is surrounded by bike/walking trails and features a large pond and spray fountain.

Playground: Old and new play structures; six slides, four swings, merry-go-round, climbing wall; ground covered with gravel. This playground is smaller than the others on our list, but that's a plus if you want to avoid the crowded ones.

Tot spot: One play structure, which includes a mini slide, tunnel and chain-link climber

Shade: Plenty

Restrooms: No

Seating: Benches surround the play zone
Fave feature: The duck pond. We brought all our discarded bread crusts and fed them to the ducks, turtles and other critters.

Note: Watch out for the jagged rocks leading down to the pond.

Hours: 5 a.m.-10 p.m. daily

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5 Johnson Road Park

640 Johnson Road, Keller

The scene: Across the parking lot from the Keller Library and senior center is this neighborhood playground, which is often referred to as "Castle Park."

Playground: The castlelike play structure has bridges and towers all around. There's also a sandbox, a climbing wall, several sets of swings and a ship-shaped playhouse; the play area is huge and offers many great spots to play hide-and-seek.

Tot spot: The "Tot Lot" has baby swings, slides and lower-to-the-ground monkey bars. The padded surface is perfect for those who are prone to tumble.

Shade: Not much, unless you sit in the pavilion

Restrooms: Yes

Seating: Benches built into the actual play structure; picnic tables in pavilion

Fave feature: Hand-operated bulldozers; kids can scoop and dump wood chips and channel their inner Bob the Builder

Hours: 6 a.m.-10 p.m. daily

8 Eastside YMCA

1500 Sandy Lane, Arlington

The scene: Rome wasn't built in a day, but this playground was. Along with national nonprofit organization Kaboom and the Build-A-Bear Workshop, volunteers built this colorful playground in August to give children in the community a place to play.

Playground: Climbing walls, colorful slides and swings will keep big kids busy for a while.

Tot spot: Little ones have their own slide, tunnels and other fun stuff in "Tot Town."

Shade: A little

Restrooms: No

Seating: In pavilion and gazebos near the play area

Fave feature: The tiny log cabin near the playground, which had an interesting bench made out of an old car seat

Hours: 6 a.m.-sundown daily; 817-451-8276

6 Chisholm Park

2200 Norwood Drive, Hurst

The scene: The largest park in Hurst, Chisholm Park offers something for nearly everyone: fishing, swimming, jogging trails and more.

Playground: Plenty of room to run and lots to do here, with a couple of play areas; six slides, several climbing walls and a handful of swings.

Tot spot: Smaller structures for little ones; parents may need to follow them on those that are not enclosed or are a little high off the ground.

Shade: Plenty over the park itself but none over the playground

Restrooms: Portable toilets, including a family-size one

Seating: Benches throughout the park

Fave feature: The fishing island by the duck pond, which is across from the playground

Hours: 6 a.m.-10 p.m. daily

7 Bob Eden Park

1099 Mid-Cities Blvd. W., Euless

The scene: Just off Texas 121 is a trifecta for busy little bees.

Playground: Besides swings, this cozy playground has all you need: plenty of room to roam, a couple of slides and lots of shade. Follow the walking trail south and it leads to Trailwood Park, where another playground awaits; go east and you hit pay dirt again at McCormick Park.

Tot spot: Little kids have to share the same structures with the big kids here.

Shade: Plenty

Restrooms: Portable toilets

Seating: Picnic benches nearby

Fave feature: The fact that we could walk the trail a bit and discover more places to play

Hours: 9 a.m.-11 p.m. daily

9 Town Park

500 N. Main St., Mansfield

The scene: Built last year, the park is on the outskirts of downtown Mansfield

Playground: Two play areas, which are partially padded, offer plenty of room to roam; five slides, swings, jungle gyms made of ropes, climbing wall, lily pads, paddlewheel; big-kid swings were being replaced on our visit.

Tot spot: Smaller play zone with slides, playhouse, music-maker toys, baby swings

Shade: None over the play area

Restrooms: Yes

Seating: Benches around playground and in pavilion

Fave feature: The spinning monkey bars were fun — for moms and dads, too.

Hours: 6 a.m.-11 p.m. daily.