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YOUNG McDONALD COLLINS C. BARKER GETCHELL LIBRARY ADMIN LIBRARY REF ANIMAL CNTRDATE DISTRIBUTED 11/21/08 DATE OF ARTICLE 11/10-16/08 NEWSPAPER F. W. Business Press

Fort Worth Business Press

Cities scramble to attract retail in tough economy

Economic developers get more hands-on

BY **ALESHIA HOWE**
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In cities such as Fort Worth, Euless and Grapevine, members of the economic development offices are well aware of the growing number of national and regional retailers cutting back expansion plans into 2010 and they are doing what they can to combat higher retail development vacancies by getting more hands-on.

"I'm not above cold-calling retailers nowadays," said Dan Truex, economic development manager for Grapevine. "There's no question we've gotten more aggressive. You have to because the same number of cities are competing for a much smaller number of retailers looking to open new stores. A fewer number of new stores is a game-changer because we want our retail full."

Retailers announcing plans to cut back growth patterns over the next few years began in the first quarter of 2008 and the list has continued to grow from Circuit City to Ann Taylor Loft and Linens 'n Things, retailers are scaling back projected new stores and closing existing stores throughout the nation.

While there will always be some retail building turnover due to renovations or replacement locations, the rate of new retail space generated in 2008 to open in 2009 is down sharply from previous years according to the latest data from McGraw-Hill Construction through July.

From January to July of this year, all retail subclasses tracked by McGraw-Hill Construction slowed by more than a third (down 37.4 percent from last year) compared with similar periods during prior years. The only retail property category that is still seeing impressive growth is freestanding drug stores, which showed an 18.5 percent faster rate of expansion in 2008 than in 2007. Supermarkets saw a slight increase of .9 percent increase in new square footage in 2008. McGraw-Hill reported the drugstore and grocery categories both represent consumer spending staples. Retail in mixed-use properties is down more than 40 percent in 2008.

The 2009 outlook for national retail expansion doesn't look to improve - at least according to the Urban Land Institute's and PricewaterhouseCoopers' annual Emerging Trends in Real Estate report.

In the report, more than 700 commercial real estate experts were surveyed for their opinion of the prospects of property types in 2009. Respondents ranked retail property types only above for-sale housing. On a scale of one to nine, with nine being excellent and one being abysmal, retail was scored at 4.26 as an investment option and a 3.95 rating as a development option.

Across the board, the report found that experts expect the commercial real estate industry to experience a rough - and lengthy - correction.

While some cities are in an economic development malaise, cities such as Mesquite see this as a chance to push harder.

The city of Mesquite hired a marketing manager this year, but the city's Manager of Economic Development Thomas Palmer said his department does not have money for direct marketing programs. The city's only option is to "roll up our sleeves and start helping," he said.

"The best marketing we're doing now is making sure that developers know us, know me, and can call me anytime to get information about land in the city, permit process or anything else," he said. "I tell any retailer that calls that I can go directly to the developer for them. If they're working on getting something up and going in Mesquite, I tell them 'I'll be your adjunct staff. Tell me when and where and I'll be there.'"

Amy Wetzel is senior vice president of Fort Worth-based Buxton Co.'s CommunityID Division, which specializes

in helping municipalities to identify potential growth patterns by providing customer analytics. Wetzel said her division has seen a recent uptick in cities interested in improving their marketing messages to retailers.

"A lot of communities may be thinking 'duck and cover,' 'hope and pray,' 'batten down the hatches,' but the smart ones are taking a good, long look at themselves and their inner workings and trying to improve, trying to play on their strengths," Wetzel said. "Retailers have to grow to survive and what matters to them is the same thing that's always mattered: location, opportunity, cost and demographics."

Wetzel said retailers have to grow to survive and they will be looking for expansion opportunities that are more inline with a newer, tighter growth plan.

"They're going to be looking for that perfect location, possibly consolidating, and that's happening with several retailers, like Old Navy, owned by Gap, which is moving to a retail square footage of 2,000 or 3,000," Wetzel said. "And if you can show them that your city is that perfect place, then there are plenty of retailers still looking to open stores in the next couple of years."

Truex said he works hard to grow retail in new developments, but he works equally as hard to keep current retail full.

"It's not easy in today's market," he said. "We are definitely more cognizant of our retail centers and keeping our retail full. It's slower for all of us, but that means we as an economic development office need to work harder to find leads and filter those to property owners and developers because retail is crucial in Grapevine ... Cities are starting to not take retail growth

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Dan Truex
Grapevine economic development manager

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for granted."

Bill Ridgway, director of economic development for Euless, said his city's approach to attracting retail has not seen a change because of recent economic woes.

"We have always gone after retail hard and we'll continue to do so," he said. "We haven't changed our philosophy, but maybe a few other cities are seeing the light."

David Southern, mayor of Granbury, recently traveled with city staff as well as a Hood County commissioner and judge to a retail real estate convention to market both his city as well as his county.

"We have new retail opening in Granbury, but we want to make sure that continues," he said. "We were listed as one of the top U.S. micromarkets by CoStar Group and we're here to shout it. At the

end of the day, we have to sell ourselves."

Wetzel said cities can begin the process of aggressively marketing to retailers by cleaning up their permitting process, which makes building new stores easier for retailers and developers alike, as well as creating an up-to-date inventory of all retail sites in the city and creating incentive plans, which don't have to include tax cuts, to attract retailers to the city.

"All of these things let retailers know that you're going to work with them better than the city next door and that's the kind of thing that can make a decision for a retailer," she said. "An incentive for them could be you helping them with an expedient permitting and code process. If you're invested in streamlining your process, they'll want to do business with you." ■

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POLITEX

SHIFTING GEARS ON SCHOOL BUS LAW

By MARIA RECIO, ANNA M. TINSLEY,
 DAVE MONTGOMERY and AMAN BATHEJA
 Star-Telegram staff writers

Texas lawmakers intended to send a get-tough message when they approved legislation imposing a \$1,000 fine on motorists who pass a stopped school bus.

Now Rep. Todd Smith, R-Eules, wants to change the law and reduce the penalty, but not because he's soft on violators. Police in his district say the statute isn't being enforced because the Class B misdemeanor requires officers to take the offending motorist to jail or issue a warrant for a court appearance, instead of simply writing a citation. Critics say that's a bit harsh.

"I guess the thought was noble, but what it did was just the opposite effect," said Lt. John Williams of the Eules Police Department, who consulted with Smith on his bill. "What would it look like if you put a soccer mom in jail for passing a school bus?"

Smith's bill would reduce the offense to a Class C misdemeanor with a maximum \$500 fine, presumably leaving officers unhesitant to chase down and ticket — but not jail — motorists zipping past a school bus.

And that includes heavy-footed soccer moms.

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SAFETY

Fire ratings rise two notches in Euless, Haltom

By ADRIENNE NETTLES
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Not only is Euless among the best places to raise children, according to *BusinessWeek* magazine, the city is one of a few in Texas with an excellent fire rating.

The Class 1 rating gives residents and businesses something to look forward to when they renew their insurance policies in 2009, city officials said.

The Insurance Services Office ranks municipal fire departments based on performance, facilities, staffing and water quality.

Representatives from the office recently visited with city leaders, and the new rating was announced at Tuesday's City Council meeting.

The new rating — up from a Class 3 — takes effect in February. Residents and businesses that renew their property insurance at that time will see reduced rates, said Betsy Deck, city spokeswoman.

Deck said only nine other cities in Texas have a Class 1 rating, the highest awarded.

They are Coppell, Plano, Frisco, Wylie, Tomball, Houston, El Paso, Stafford and Mesquite, according to city officials.

To achieve the new rating, Euless invested in updated in-

frastructure, including a new fire station and increased dispatch staffing to improve response times to emergencies, Fire Chief Robert Isbell said.

"The day we were notified of the Class 1 rating we began working on a 10-year plan for the department to make sure the rating stays," he said.

"It's too hard to get."

Haltom City at Class 2

Haltom City residents also have lower insurance rates to look forward to as their Fire Department was upgraded from Class 4 to Class 2, Fire Chief Wes Rhodes told the City Council recently.

Haltom City is one of 538 fire departments in the nation with a Class 2 rating, Rhodes said.

Rhodes said his Fire Department was just 2.8 points from Class 1.

"A Class 1 rating would be nothing more than an ego boost for a fire chief," Rhodes told the council. "But we'd have to spend a lot of money to get to a 1, and the cost benefit would probably be questionable."

Staff writer Kevin Lyons contributed to this report.

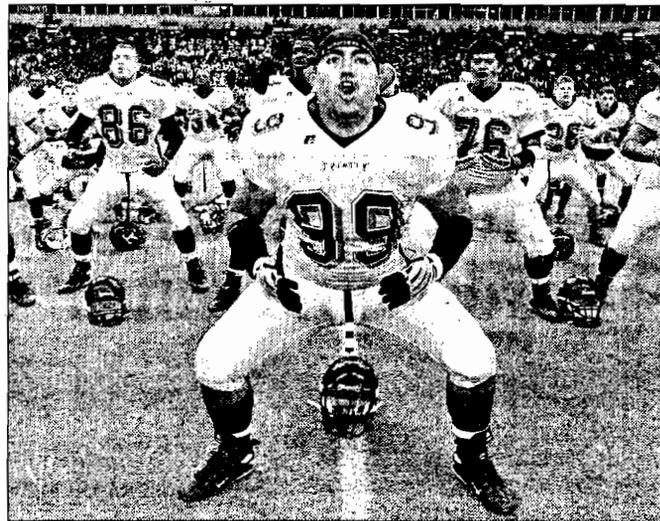
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High schools

Tongan players a key part of Texas powerhouse



By John F. Rhodes, The Dallas Morning News

Team tradition: L.T. Tuipulotu, one of several Trinity football players of Tongan descent, leads the team in the ceremonial haka dance.

By Jeff Zillgitt
USA TODAY

When Fotu Katoa became the first Tongan to play football for Trinity (Eules, Texas) in 1982, he had no idea he was the start of something big at the school.

Twenty-six years later, almost 4,000 Tongans live in Eules, a Dallas-Forth Worth suburb, and a part of Trinity's success is attributed to Tongan players.

On this year's 11-0 team, almost 20% of the 88 players are Tongan. The Trojans are No. 1 in USA TODAY's Super 25 and are the No. 1 Class 5A team in Texas.

Trinity, the defending 5A Division I champion, plays Plano in a second-round playoff game Saturday at Texas Stadium. Electricity is surging in anticipation of the

matchup. Plano is ranked in the top 10, and the teams met in last year's semifinals, won by Trinity 30-27 in double overtime.

"They have a lot of key guys back from last year," Trinity coach Steve Lineweaver says. "They score a ton of points and are very clever on offense."

Today, Katoa is Utah's director of Pacific Islander Affairs and still proud of his Trinity roots. "Once a Trojan, always a Trojan," he says.

Katoa moved to Eules from Utah in 1982.

"I walked into the school and was looking at the trophy case," Katoa says. "Someone asked if I needed help, and I said, 'I want to play football.'"

Lineweaver, then an assistant, said, "Where are you from, young man?"

"Tonga."

"Where's that?"

Katoa explained Tonga is nation of small islands in the South Pacific, about 1,700 air miles east of Sydney. Tongans moved to Eules because of its proximity to Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, and many work or have worked for American Airlines, where they receive discounted airfare for trips home. Others found outdoor work such as landscaping, which is why Katoa's dad moved to Eules.

"The Pacific Islanders have assimilated into the community very well," says Katoa, whose younger brother Sam was an all-state player at Trinity. "They ... contribute to the community."

Although Trinity receives attention because of the Tongan

community, Katoa is quick to point out, "We know it takes a whole team. We give our heart and soul because the community has accepted us."

Before games, Trinity performs the haka dance, a traditional Maori dance popularized by New Zealand's national rugby team.

"Our student body loves it," Trinity athletics director Sue Cannon says. "Everybody gets involved. But they don't perform it as entertainment. That dance is their way of getting themselves ready for competition."

Trinity is usually ready. Since 1998, the Trojans are 120-19. They are 51-3 in the last four seasons and won a state title in 2005.

"The main thing has been dealing with high expectations," Lineweaver says.