

Deer Park Shopping Center Construction Begins Monday

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After five years of planning, bickering and studying, the first foundations for the \$4 million Deer Park Shopping Center in Rio Del Mar will be laid Monday, with a projected grand opening of May 1.

Bill Hammerstein, who with his partner Dick Little, has acted as consultant to developer Clifford Swenson, elaborated on the center's aims and designs that should be reality by spring.

With the first four building permits awarded Oct. 6, and the remainder expected within 30 days, construction on the 11-acre site, which will house 400 retail spaces, will begin in earnest. When the scope of Deer Park's plans is taken into consideration, the May deadline may seem premature.

The new shopping center will consist of nine buildings in addition to the already existing Deer Park Tavern and the old wooden barn. While the tavern will be retained by the Carl N. Swenson company, the other

retail spaces will be leased out, and the possibility exists that the center itself, or a portion of it, may be sold in the near future.

Stating "It's going to be a helluva place," Hammerstein outlined the diversity of shops and services to be available in the center, located just off Highway 1 on Rio Del Mar Boulevard. He emphasizes that the complex is not designed to mimic the Sutter Hill center, currently under construction on 41st Avenue. "We want to make it a neighborhood center, not just a regional or national outlet for chain stores," Hammerstein avers.

Among the stores slated for Deer Park are a new Deluxe Foods store, consisting of 20,000 square feet, with an adjoining liquor store. Another building may house a Bank of America office, although that agreement has not been firmed up. There will be a medical building, pharmacy, and possibly a health food store and restaurant.

The aged barn will be totally repovated and turned into an open-air, community building, which will provide free use to art shows, musicians, and other arts and entertainment gatherings. The use permit granted Deer Park precludes the barn from commercial endeavors.

The focal point of the center is expected to be the two-story shopping mall, with the grocery store on the ground level, and a variety of shops above. These might include purveyors of jewelry, photographs, flowers, tobacco, leather, pewter, clothes boutiques, books, records and candy. "There's been so much interest that we've held off on leasing," said Hammerstein, explaining he expects the remainder of the retail outlets to be filled shortly.

The highpoint of Deer Park will not be just the shops, but the design of the center, handled by local architect Jim Elmore and associates. There will be an abundance of stucco, rough-hewn wood and tiled roofs, what Hammerstein describes as a neo-Spanish "Monterey or Carmel" look.

What is now an unsightly mudhole will be turned into a landscaper's paradise, with trees, planter boxes, fountains, and even a real live waterfall, which will descend the side wall of the main shopping building.

Pedestrians will emerge from the main parking area, located in the center's foreground, and make their way to shops over open and enclosed bridges and walkways.

The Swenson company, which was active in the development of the San Lorenzo Park plaza in downtown Santa Cruz, plans to retain control of

the tavern itself, which has a long history as an Aptos family restaurant going back 50 years. In the late 1800s, sugar king Adolph Spreckels actually kept a herd of deer on the site. Chris Crusan, formerly manager of the Pogonip and Pasatiempo restaurants, is expected to duplicate that service here.

Bus service is expected to stop directly in front of the center, and a special elevator is being installed for handicapped persons to gain access to the walkways. While the mall part of the center will seem raised in relation to the other buildings, the site is being landscaped to fit some structures under the overhanging cliff, giving the illusion of depth and height.

Prospective tenants are being recruited from Santa Cruz and the Monterey peninsula, with many established stores either moving to Deer Park or opening an additional branch. Hammerstein foresees a local increase of upwards of 150 new jobs when the center gets under way, not to mention the construction work to be provided in the next six months.

While planning requirements were stringent for the property, and the Swenson Co. was forced to toe the line by such groups as the Rio Del Mar Improvement Assn. and the Aptos Chamber of Commerce, Hammerstein expressed the company's gratitude for the cooperation received to date. "The county has

been tough but fair in making us carry through with our plans and designs," he said. "We've tried to work with the land, rather than destroy it."

Much of the native landscaping was removed from the site prior to the current construction, but Hammerstein stressed that "we've spent about four times as much on the planned landscaping as most projects do." Traffic problems are not foreseen, as Rio Del Mar Boulevard was widened with a development like Deer Park in mind.

The center, which is expecting 95 per cent of its business to be from local residents, is not worrying about competing with Sutter Hill. "We do expect to have an effect on Rancho Del Mar shopping center," Hammerstein noted, describing that complex as "congested."

To discourage a vast influx of out-of-town visitors, the center will not be highly visible from the freeway, and Hammerstein expects "very subdued signing," for both the center and individual tenants.

Deer Park Shopping Center has gone through several false starts, intense review by both governmental and residential groups, and the usual pitfalls of large-scale development and construction. After five-plus years, Hammerstein issues a big sigh of relief when he says, "We've shown it is possible to do a large development if it's done right and done carefully."

REFERENCE

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