

It will be an all-new Capitola Mall

By KEITH MURAOKA
Sentinel staff writer

CAPITOLA — Not all the work at Capitola Mall is being done on the \$35-million expansion. Just ask shoppers and store-owners.

The long-anticipated expansion will nearly double the size of the only covered shopping mall in Santa Cruz County by adding two new anchor stores in J.C. Penney and Leask's, as well as numerous other smaller shops. Grand opening is set for Nov. 2.

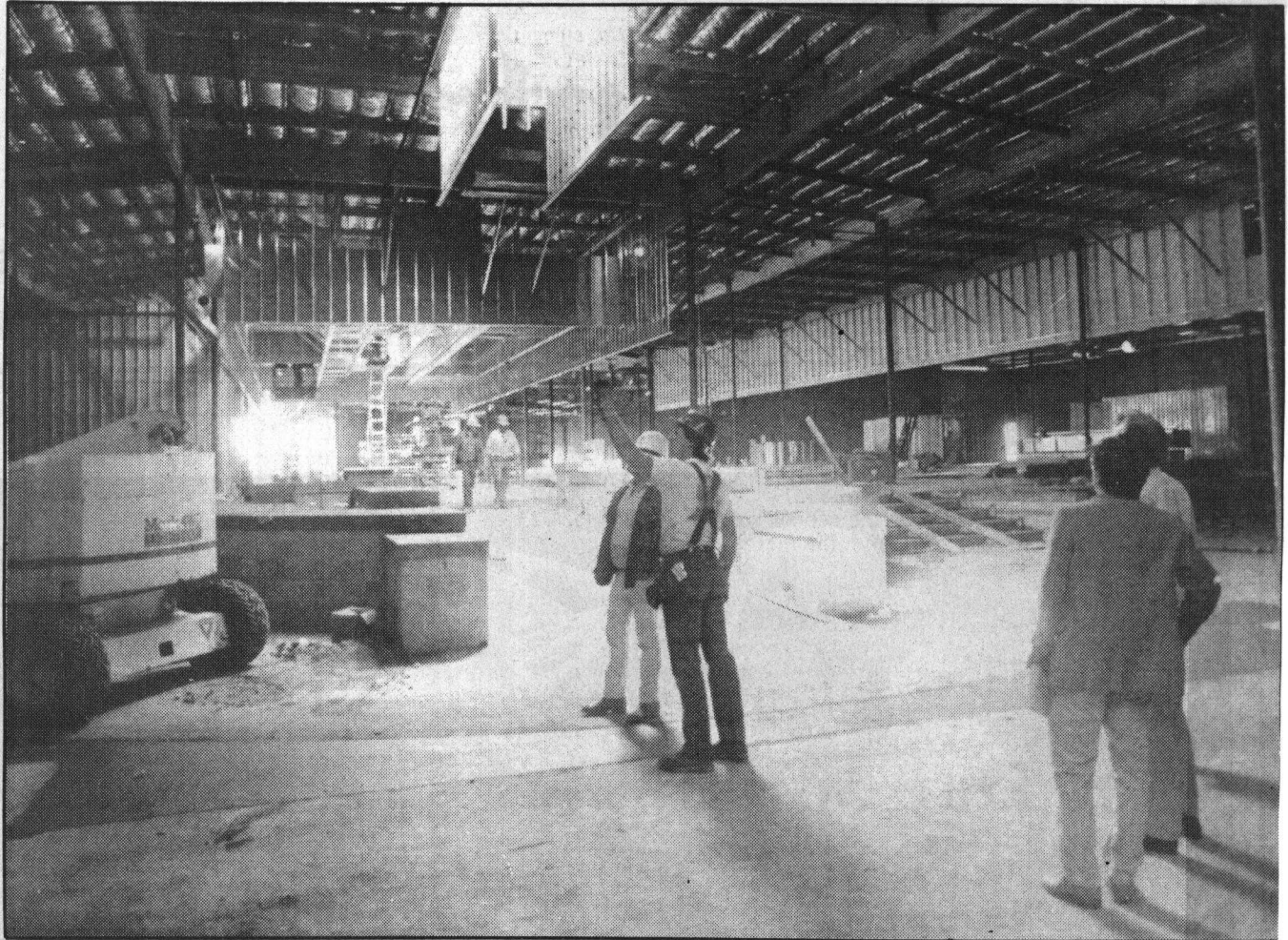
Yet, even as the new buildings are going up behind the mall, renovation work is on-going in the existing mall in order to match it with the expanded portion.

"We're trying to create an all-new mall," said John Gatto, vice president of Cypress Properties, developer of the mall. "A lot has changed since the mall opened in April, 1977."

To emphasize his point, Gatto led a tour of the on-going work — much of which is taking place inside the existing mall. Pointing to the gaping holes in the mall's roof and dodging construction workers and heavy equipment at the same time, Gatto says the old mall will really become a new mall by August.

The facelift of the old mall will cost around \$5 million, including on-site exterior work, such as landscaping and parking-lot lighting, he said. For instance, 1,000 boxed trees will be added to the landscaping.

Indoors, renovation will include the installation of a dozen skylights, the removal of redwood-facing, an all-new brighter interior color scheme and the addition of free-standing plants, flowers and wooden benches.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

The \$35-million expanded Capitola Mall is expected to open in November.

"Basically, we're adding a skylight in each 'room' or small section of the mall," said Gatto. "There won't be any area in the mall without a skylight."

"Everything is being done to improve the lighting," he added. "One of the biggest criticisms of the old mall was it appeared dark. In some areas it was like walking through a tunnel."

A circular theme will be added to the point of changing the now-square tile pillars that surround the fountain area. Those pillars will be rounded by being covered with sheet rock and painted white. That circular theme will even be carried outdoors where exterior pillars will be rounded and the entrances to the mall enlarged with half-circle side-walks.

The fountain area will remain. However, Gatto says it will be modified somewhat. Complaints about the noise the water makes will be dealt with in some fashion.

"We'll continue the water element, said Gatto. "We just don't know if it's going to be that particular water element yet."

Several mall stores have already had their storefronts facelifted. Before, all the shops had a straight line, linear face-front quality, said Gatto. So-called "pop-out facefronts" have been added at

Gergen's, Petries, Howard's, Regi's, Foot Locker and Petries Plus.

Mall Manager Julie Walker said those store owners "have already noticed the difference with sales being up" due to the attractive quality of the storefronts.

Gatto said 75 percent of the existing stores will be remodeled within the next 18 months. Those that have already done so were tied to new lease agreements.

Contrary to reports late last year about mall merchants being forced out due to rent increases and remodeling costs, Gatto said only seven of the 50 or so stores were vacated.

Existing stores that will be remodeled this summer include: Kay Bee Toys, Put-Ons, Pet Emporium, B. Dalton, Cookie Cupboard, Body and Sole, Radio Shack, York Gallery, Musicland and Kinney's.

New tenants already lined up to come into the existing mall include: Crescent Jewelers, Ali Clares, Things Remembered, Connie Shoes, J.W. (clothing), Leed's, Wild Pair and Wet Seal (clothing).

"At one point we even thought about changing the name of the mall because it will be so different," added Gatto. "After a four-day discussion, we decided to keep it."

Mall tries to prevent 'leakage'

CAPITOLA — The "all new" expanded Capitola Mall, scheduled to open Nov. 2, will help keep some local shoppers from going "over the hill" for their needs. However, mall developers aren't banking on the mall preventing all the shopping "leakage" out of the county.

"We still don't have a Nordstrom's, Macy's or Emporium," said John Gatto, vice president of Cypress Properties, developer of the mall. "We know people will continue to go out of the county for some of their shopping."

According to Gatto, Santa Cruz County has been "under-stored" — not having enough department stores — "for at least 10 years.

"People have done their shopping in San Jose forever," he added.

Yet, Gatto hopes that with the addition of J.C. Penney and Leask's to the mall — plus other stores that will nearly double the size — locals will do their department-store shopping in Capitola at least three out of every four times.

"Before, we just covered the basic (shopping) needs," conceded Gatto. "We can now be more to more people. Our demographics have changed, allowing for more upgraded

(store) chains."

The county offered a so-called "mid-market mall" locale 10 years ago whereupon the two existing mall anchors — Mervyn's and Sears — generally dictated what type of other stores would fill the mall, said Gatto.

"The two new anchors will target more of the upper-end shopper," he said. "That will set the tone for the new mall tenants."

While those new tenants have not all signed leases yet, Gatto said Cypress has "a number of tenants wanting to come in."

Getting new tenants is no problem, he said. Instead, Cypress is concerned with "getting the right tenant mix.

"We're not just doubling the number of stores in the mall," he added. "But we want to provide a better choice of stores, too."

As for someday encouraging a Nordstrom's, Macy's or Emporium to the mall, it doesn't appear likely, said Gatto.

"Macy's is not about to come here by themselves," he said. "And we don't have any more room. Both we and the city foresee this expansion as being the last."