

South Montgomery
County Woodlands



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
PARTNERSHIP

News

New building debuts in area of waterway

By BETH KUHLES
Chronicle Correspondent

The Woodlands Town Center is moving on up.

The Woodlands Development Co. held a topping out ceremony for its newest offering in the downtown district Thursday, a 13-story building that will feature office space, retail stores and restaurants.

Three more buildings also are on the drawing boards for Town Center, ranging in size from six to nine stories. The Woodlands Development Co. plans to build two more office buildings near Woodloch Forest and Lake Robbins Drive, and U.S. Oncology announced plans for an eight-story corporate headquarters on Woodlands Parkway at Woodloch Forest Drive.

"It's downtown," said Alex Sutton, co-president of The Woodlands Development Co. "You associate high-rise buildings with downtown."

The new building in Town Center is 24 Waterway Avenue, which marks the first step for the prestigious Waterway Square area, an urban park that will feature a fountain and a pavilion.

"It offers a prestigious address and a wonderful environment," Sutton said. "People can look right down on Waterway Square."

New buildings

The 13-story, 320,000-square-foot, glass-enclosed building will border the new park and offer a specialty grocery store, retail shops and restaurants on the lower level. The upper floors will be multi-tenant office space, and the first two tenants to sign on are The Woodlands founder George Mitchell's investment firm and the corporate headquarters for a petroleum industry firm. Other firms are in the pipeline to rent space.

"We think George Mitchell will have an office there," Sutton said.

The new building will feature the first-of-its-kind specialty grocery store, which includes a bistro serving breakfast, lunch and dinner. Called Hubbell and Hudson, the market is the creation of Cary Attar, who has been affiliated with Dean & DeLuca, Central Market, Brinker International and Fox & Obel.

The theme of the market will be "Where Texas Meets Gourmet," and it will offer locally grown

produce, artisan bakery, rustic pastries, boutique wines and cheeses, premium and aged meats, and a European deli. The store will offer informal dining as well as a coffee bar and full-service bar.

Sutton said he is also pursuing additional retail stores and restaurants for the lower floors.

New tenants

The first tenants of the building include GPM, the asset management firm for Mitchell. The firm has been located in The Woodlands since 1984, and it will share space with the headquarters of the Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation and other affiliated companies.

Also leasing in the building will be HMT, a firm that specializes in the maintenance and repair of aboveground storage tanks for the petroleum industry. The company is moving its corporate headquarters from Tomball and will lease the entire fourth floor.

"It's all part of carrying the vision forward," said Nelda Luce Blair, chairwoman of the Town Center Improvement District, which oversees the new downtown area. "It's office, it's retail, it's restaurants. It's the mix we've always wanted in downtown."

Continued growth

This is the largest building constructed by The Woodlands Development Co. on speculation without predetermined tenants, and most of the space has been committed or leased, Sutton said.

"Leasing is very strong," Sutton said.

With office vacancy in Town Center approaching zero, The Woodlands Development Co. is planning to build more — and larger buildings — in the downtown area.

"We are doing really, really well," said Dan Leverett, vice president of commercial for The Woodlands Development Co. "We still are having about 100 percent occupancy."

Sutton said there are two buildings on the drawing boards for Woodloch Forest and Lake Robbins Drive that are six and nine stories respectively. In addition, U.S. Oncology will built its corporate headquarters on the so-called super block the area bordered by Woodlands Forest Drive, Timberloch, Woodlands Parkway and Waterway Square.

Sutton said he hopes to attract single-tenant buildings there, ranging from eight to 13 stories high. A high-rise condo tower is also being planned downtown in the future, Sutton said.

Sutton said the size and square footage of the buildings will be determined by the economy. Right now, he said things "look good" for The Woodlands, despite recent slowdowns in some sectors of the real estate market in the Greater Houston area.