



Menifee

Shopping center work begins

MENIFEE: Many residents welcome the stores and restaurants, but worry about impact on traffic.



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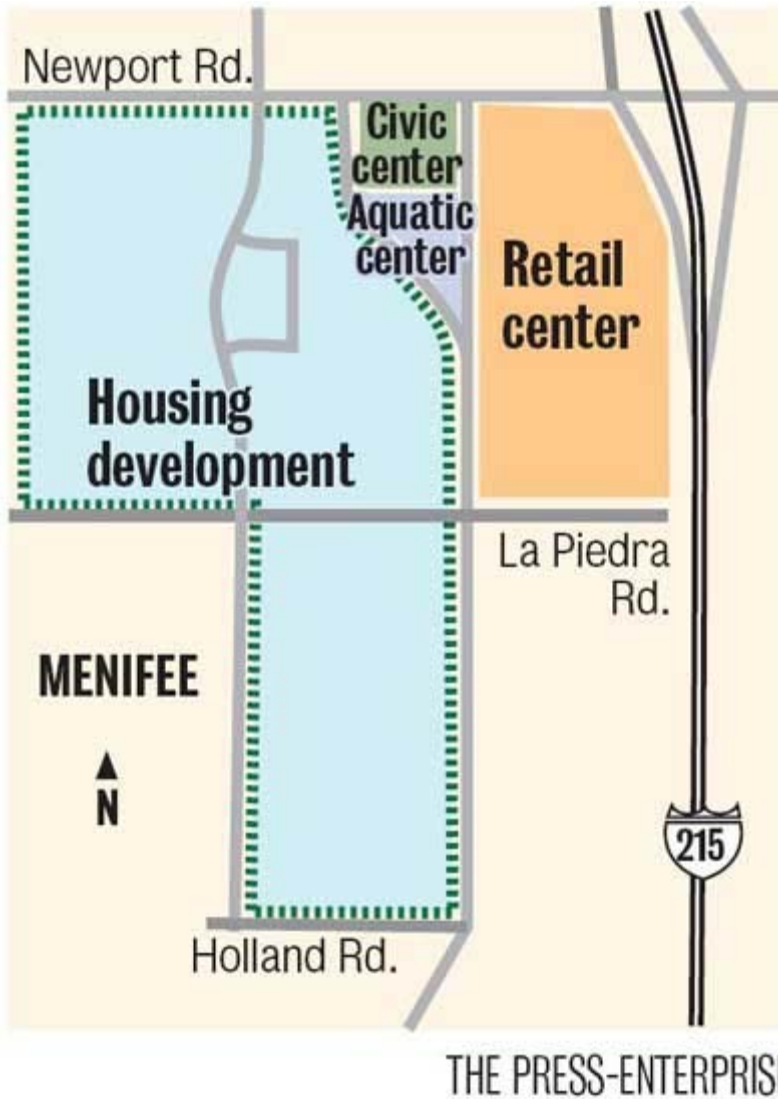
By SEAN NEALON
The Press-Enterprise

MENIFEE - The dirt field along Newport Road west of Interstate 215 is being transformed into a site for up to 1,500 homes, an aquatic center, a possible city hall and the first Lowe's, Starbucks and T.G.I. Friday's in Menifee.

Work recently started on the site of the 726,000-square-foot shopping center, which will have a total of 32 stores and restaurants and be known as Countryside Marketplace.

Stores are expected to open in October 2008 and the center is expected to be complete by March 2009, said Jeff Chambers, vice president of development for Donahue Schriber, the Costa Mesa-based developer of the project.

Story continues below



The aquatic center, which will have amenities for everyone from infants to seniors, is being designed and should be completed by the summer of 2008, said Riverside County Supervisor Jeff Stone, whose district includes Menifee. A civic center, which Stone expects would become city hall for the proposed city of Menifee Valley, will be built after the aquatic center.

Residents leading the cityhood effort welcome the city hall site and sales tax revenue that would be generated by the stores and restaurants at Countryside Marketplace and other planned shopping centers nearby, said John Denver, a leader of the effort to incorporate Menifee, Sun City and Quail Valley.

However, construction of homes is a concern because the cost to provide roads, police and fire protection to a home is more than a home generates in property tax, Denver said.

Menifee and Sun City residents also have mixed reactions to the development. They are pleased stores and restaurants are coming but are concerned about added traffic.

Tom and Pat Thurman, of Sun City, are happy they won't have to drive to Murrieta to shop at Lowe's, but they are concerned about what will happen to stores such as Sun City Hardware, where Tom Thurman works.

Menifee Valley is sandwiched between the cities of Murrieta, Hemet, Perris and Lake Elsinore and bisected by I-215.

Since 2000, the area's population has more than doubled to more than 60,000, as people seeking affordable housing move in. Two-story, red-tile rooftop homes have surrounded one-story seniors' homes in Sun City and replaced wheat fields in Menifee.

There are now enough home rooftops in Menifee Valley to attract stores and restaurants, similar to what happened in Lake Elsinore during the past couple years, Stone said.

The county has received preliminary plans for a seven-building shopping center in Menifee Valley to be anchored by Wal-Mart at I-215 and Scott Road and a Stater Bros.-anchored shopping center at Menifee Road and McCall Boulevard, said Joe Tronti, a Stone aide.

He also said Costco is interested in building a Menifee Valley store.

Commercial and industrial buildings are key to Menifee Valley's cityhood effort because of the sales tax they generate, Denver said.

An economic study completed by a consultant in 2005 said it was unlikely the proposed city of Menifee Valley could support itself. In January, cityhood leaders hired a different consultant to complete another economic study, which is expected to be released in September, Denver said.

In the meantime, work will continue on Countryside Marketplace.

A lawsuit filed by a group known as Menifee Citizens for Smart Growth was settled earlier this month, said Chambers, the vice president of development for Donahue Schriber. It sought to use environmental reasons to stop construction of the shopping center.

Target, Kohl's and Lowe's are confirmed for the shopping center, Chambers said.

The Target will replace the existing Target less than a mile away, at Newport and Antelope roads, Chambers said. He said the new Target would be "expanded," but declined to say whether it will be a Super Target, which would include a grocery store.

Possible Tenants

Chambers said Donahue Schriber is in final negotiations with Best Buy, Linens 'n Things, Sports Chalet, Old Navy, PETCO, Staples, Tilly's, In-N-Out, Starbucks, T.G.I. Friday's, BJ's Restaurant/Brewhouse, Red Robin and Chick-fil-A.

Gabrielle Cobb, of Menifee, is glad a PETCO is planned because she will no longer have to drive to Lake Elsinore to get food for her dog, Rosie, and her cat, Powder.

However, she is concerned the traffic will be worse.

Her neighbor, Lisa Frazier, fears Newport Road is soon going to look like the roads in Orange County she left behind when she moved to Menifee 12 years ago.

Frazier, president of the Menifee Valley PTA Council, also has a reason to be excited by the new stores and restaurants.

"I'll have new places to solicit for donations for PTA," she said, with a laugh.

Reach Sean Nealon at 951-375-3730 or snealon@PE.com