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Twelve Corners undergoing overhaul

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BRIGHTON — Twelve Corners Plaza looks a bit bleak with its empty storefronts and its snarled parking lot, but Kathryn Jensen knows what she has to look forward to.

The aroma of Panera Bread. More parking spaces. A larger Starbucks Coffee and better landscaping.

"Since we know that is what's coming, it helps," said Jensen, whose family makes its way to the almost-renovated plaza about once a day. "It's our town square."

By mid-December, the retail hot spot will have more of a town square feel. Common areas will be added. Back entrances will be spruced up.

And hopefully more shoppers will come, thanks to new stores and better traffic flow, said Jerry Cohen, manager of GDC Randolph Crossing LLC, which owns the plaza.

"It's going to be a much more vibrant shopping center," Cohen said from his office in Massachusetts. "People will find it a better experience."

In a desirable place like Twelve Corners, where close to 20,000 vehicles a day pass on Monroe Avenue, Cohen probably won't have a problem attracting tenants to the newly updated plaza. But Brighton and most of the other inner-ring suburbs won't be seeing the growth of places like Henrietta, which is bustling and still has plenty of land for new businesses.

Near The Marketplace mall in Henrietta, daily traffic counts come close to 35,000 on Jefferson Road between West Henrietta Road and Hylan Drive. A new shopping plaza called Market



Construction on the new Panera Bread continues at Twelve Corners Plaza. Renovations to the Brighton plaza, which include added parking spots and spruced-up back entrances, should be finished by mid-December.



Angela Dupuis of Irondequoit tries on a jacket at B. Younique in Twelve Corners Plaza. B. Younique owner Sandy Furia welcomes the plaza's renovations.

Square just added four stores and a restaurant, and a handful of other restaurants have opened in just the last month.

Brighton is 80 percent to 85 percent developed, said town Supervisor Sandra Frankel. And what isn't developed is already accounted for in the town's comprehensive plan, so businesses basically have to choose from what's already zoned commercial. On Monroe Avenue that can mean older homes that have been converted into places of business or smaller outdoor malls, such as Twelve Corners Plaza.

Still, the stretch of Monroe Avenue that passes through portions of the city, Brighton and Pittsford offers more square footage of shopping space than at any of the large indoor malls, Frankel said, and business is good and hopefully getting better.

Obviously, the renovations at the plaza will help, she said, but the town has also invested in that area by adding old-fashioned street lighting and more landscaping at Twelve Corners Memorial Park, plus benches, a pergola and a chess table. Nearby schools also have made improvements in the last few years, "and it has all spurred resurgence in our town center."

The Twelve Corners area, where South Winton Road and Elmwood and Monroe avenues intersect, has been the heart of Brighton since the city annexed the village of Brighton in 1905, Frankel said. Even one of historic Brighton's best-known industries — brick making — was once located there.

Today's businesses still find the neighborhood attractive. Already, Starbucks has agreed to move to a larger location in the plaza in late January. Panera Bread will open in December, and a mutual fund store and a FedEx Kinko's have signed on — leaving one spot empty. Cohen hopes to get that filled by February.

"It's definitely where retailers want to be," said John Antetomaso, the newly elected president of the Greater Rochester Association of Realtors. "It's very difficult to get commercial space that is that visible."

There are drawbacks, or at least factors that business owners stop and consider, he said. For example, the layout and traffic patterns don't really lend themselves to many drive-throughs, and square footage is limited.

The improvements at the plaza included taking out some store square footage to make room for outdoor improvements, prompting Music Lovers to move from the plaza to a larger spot at 2229 Monroe Ave. The store lost a bit of the traffic, but in exchange it was able to stay the size it was used to and offer better parking, said manager Mark Reynolds. "A lot of people comment on how much nicer it is here," he said. "It's easier to get out of the parking lot and people (at the Twelve Corners site) always complained about the parking."

Cohen said he is hopeful many of those complaints will go away when renovations are completed. Nine parking spots will be added, along with traffic flow improvements.

Sometimes Jensen walks or rides her bike to the Twelve Corners Plaza, but even when she drives it isn't that bad, she said, especially once a person gets used to the easiest ways to get in and out. "People get intimidated about driving downtown (in Rochester), watching for one-way

streets," she said, adding that downtown is easy to navigate once a person is used to it. It's the same with the Twelve Corners. "Don't be intimidated."

Business owner Sandy Furia welcomes the traffic near her shop, B. Younique. "I'm excited that they are finally filling in spots that have been empty for a couple of years," said Furia, who has had her upscale boutique at the plaza for six years. "Anything new generates excitement, and that generates people."

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