

# Retail ready to explode in Mt. Pleasant area

By MICHELLE GRAVES  
Sun Special Writer

Mt. Pleasant residents will have many new shopping options in the next few years to come.

The largest, the huge Union Commons retail development, will be located east of the Indian Hills Plaza on Bluegrass Road.

Currently, Encore Development Group's plans for Union Commons include up to 1 million square feet of retail with room to grow, said Jay Barnes, one of the principals of the company.

"Our project will be the re-

tail epicenter of Mt. Pleasant, Barnes said.

The development already includes plans for a 160,000 square foot Menards, one of the largest retailers in the development.

Construction is set to begin in the spring of 2006 with the store opening in the fall.

Menards will be the second-largest home improvement

## Growth in mid-Michigan

About this series of reports: Members of Central Michigan University journalism faculty member Mark Renzenberger's Public Affairs Reporting class examined issues spurring growth - and holding back growth - in mid-Michigan.

■ Monday: The land for new manufacturing

■ Today: Retail explosion

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store in Mt. Pleasant. Home Depot, 5650 E. Pickard Ave., will remain the largest home improvement store in town.

"We looked at demographics for the trade area around Mt. Pleasant," said Tom O'Neil, real estate acquisition manager for Menards Inc. "The trade

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## Mid-Michigan catches the eye of big retailers

By COLIN MERRY  
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in the spring?

George Dunn, president of Middle Michigan Development Corp., said Mount Pleasant has the kind of demographics large retailers want in a community when looking for new store

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The Mt. Pleasant area has definitely caught the eye of large retailers, but what is it about the local community that has mega-stores like Super Wal-Mart, Kohl's, and Sam's Club planning to build

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area is more than enough for us and Home Depot."

O'Neil said Menards will take some business away from Home Depot, but he is confident that there is enough of a market in Mt. Pleasant for Menards to be alive and thrive.

"From our standpoint, we don't let other stores affect our decisions. If we didn't go into markets with other stores, we wouldn't have expansions," O'Neil said.

Menards is based in Eau Claire, Wis., which is similar to Mt. Pleasant, he said. The Mt. Pleasant area is large enough to constitute a regional area that people from 20 to 30 miles away will drive to in order to shop.

"This is an opportunity to be part of a larger development," O'Neil said. "Wal-Mart and Sam's Club have a large drawing power."

"We have been talking with Kohl's, Michaels and dozens of smaller nationally recognized retailers," Barnes said. The company has also been talking with restaurants such as Roadhouse Grill Inc., Starbucks Coffee Co. and Panera Bread.

Barnes said Encore also has commitments from Wal-Mart Corp.

Roderick Scott, community affairs manager for the Midwest, said there the new Wal-Mart Supercenter and the planned Sam's Club discount warehouse would take advantage of a customer base that already exists.

"It will be good for the community," Scott said. Mt. Pleasant has an attractive market because it has a loyal customer base. Wal-Mart is a modern day general store; it will give customers an opportunity to get groceries as well, he said.

Scott said many factors go into choosing a location for a new store.

"We evaluate where our customers are, we look at the growth of the community and we look for available land," he said. "When we see that people are shopping at our stores and travel long distances to get there, we want to better serve them."

Scott said the Wal-Mart Supercenters include groceries, in addition to general merchandise. He said supercenters are well liked in communities.

"I think the project will benefit the area a lot," Barnes said. "We're bringing new retail to the marketplace."

In addition to the Union Commons development, a restaurant and retail strip mall is to be built on the 5.63 acres of land near the intersection of Bluegrass Road and Collegiate Way.

"The building will be shaped like a dumbbell with two large boxes on each end and a small strip in the middle," said Tim Bebee, owner of Central Michigan Survey and Development.

There will be 12,000 square feet of retail, said Union Township Zoning Administrator Woody Woodruff. Customers will be able to enter from either Bluegrass or Collegiate.

Yet another retail center has already started demolition for its building in mid-fall. One building will be on Palmer and will hold one or two tenants and the other, a small strip mall, will be on Mission Street.

The foundation and a layer of asphalt have already been finished on the Mission Street site. Aaron's Sales & Lease Ownership will be the biggest building in the strip mall, located on the far left side of the building.

A Check Into Cash will be the second largest store at the far right side of the building. Both stores are set to open Feb. 1.