

CHAPTER 10

AFTERSHOCKS

The shock of regional shopping centers opening in nearby suburbs between 1956 and 1989 was sufficient to bring downtown Evanston to its knees as a retail center. But, most earthquakes are followed by “aftershocks” which take advantage of an already weakened condition. Therefore, even as Evanston was striving to revitalize its downtown, competing retail development continued to expand on the North Shore. Fortunately, at least some of it was located elsewhere in Evanston where the city and the school districts could benefit from its tax revenues.

Evanston once was home to a substantial industrial base, including several companies which were headquartered here, e.g. Rust-Oleum Corporation, Shure, Inc., Bell & Howell, and Mark Controls. All of these manufacturers have relocated to other sites outside Evanston. However, with investors’ renewed confidence in Evanston and its larger market area, aggressive action, and in some cases tax increment financing assistance from the city, virtually all of these vacated sites have been redeveloped.

In 1978, Main Street Commons on Main Street opened with K-Mart and Service Merchandise as its major anchors, subsequently replaced by Builders Square, Sam’s Club and Marshall’s. In the 1990s Builders Square and several smaller stores closed. A new owner plans the revitalization of this shopping center in 2004-2005.

In 1990, Evanston Plaza replaced Mark Controls and opened at Dempster and Dodge, with Franks Nursery & Crafts, Kids R Us, and numerous other smaller retailers. Today Evanston Plaza includes a Dominicks Supermarket, Blockbuster, Payless Shoes, A.J. Wright, and China Buffet.

In 1993, Evanston Center replaced Bell & Howell and Devry University. It opened on Howard Street with Target Greatland as its anchor, complemented by Office Max, Best Buy, Jewel-Osco, and a bank.

In 1996 Home Depot opened its super store on what was once the Rust-Oleum site on Oakton Street. All together, these shopping centers total over 1.0 million square feet of retail floor space - all developed after many respected economists had declared that major retailing was “dead” in Evanston and would never return.

But, that is not the entire story, for the future of Evanston’s many neighborhood shopping districts was also at stake. Again, Evanston’s strength as a proven market place and the resiliency of its business and civic leadership responded. As a result, revitalization has also occurred at the Central and Green Bay, Chicago and Dempster, and Chicago and Main business districts.

While Evanston was enjoying these successes, however, the owners of Old Orchard Shopping Center (now Westfield Shoppingtown Old Orchard) were not asleep. In fact, Old Orchard expanded its size from 1.3 million to approximately 1.8 million square feet, and over 120 retail stores, adding Nordstrom, Bloomingdale’s, Saks Fifth Avenue, and Lord & Taylor department stores and two movie theater complexes, totaling 17 screens and parking structures. Across Skokie Highway to the east the Shops at Orchard Place opened in 2001 with over 164,000 square feet of retailing, capturing several stores that were also considering downtown Evanston’s proposed Church Street Plaza.

As if this was not enough, the Westfield Group announced in June, 2005 that Shoppingtown Old Orchard would be expanded again. Westfield intends to demolish the former Saks Fifth Avenue and the Lord & Taylor stores to provide a Main Street style shopping promenade. It would have 53 new specialty stores and restaurants totaling 650,00 square feet of floor space, plus a new parking garage. The expansion would bring Old Orchard to 2.3 million square feet, almost twice its original size.

Clearly, the challenge to downtown Evanston became greater than ever and caused downtown proponents to work even harder to define its niche with even clearer focus. Fortunately, a cultural evolution was occurring throughout America that supported the concept of a mixed-use central place and living in the midst of an active environment. Add to that the qualities of a university town and downtown Evanston has found that it can be competitive once again.

EVANSTON SHOPPING CENTERS

Former Site Occupants	Mark Controls	Hires Root Beer Orange Crush Material Service	Rust-Oleum	Bell & Howell
Original Name of S.C.	Evanston Plaza	Main Street Commons	Home Depot	Evanston Center
Developer	Bandbury	Jack Jacobs & Co.	Home Depot	Tanguay Burke Stratton
Year Opened	1990	1978	1996	1993
Gross Leasable Area	222,000	245,000	187,000	250,000
Anchor Tenants	Frank's Nursery & Crafts Kids R Us	K-Mart Service Merchandise	Home Depot Petsmart Steak & Shake	Target Greatland Office Max Best Buy Jewel-Osco
TIF District	Freed Local Sales Tax Sharing Only	No. 2	Local Sales Tax Sharing Only	No. 3
Year TIF Created	N.A.	1990	N.A.	1992
2003 Name of S.C.	Evanston Plaza	Main Street Marketplace	Home Depot	Evanston
2003 Owner	Joseph Freed	Kap Sum Properties	Home Depot Petsmart Steak & Shake	Each pad owned by anchor tenants
2003 Anchor Tenants	Frank's Nursery & Crafts Dominick's Radio Shack	Sam's Club Marshall's Food 4 Less	Home Depot Petsmart Steak & Shake	Target Greatland Office Max Best Buy Jewel-Osco

Sources: Robert B. Teska
Chamber of Commerce
City of Evanston