

Renovations give West Central Plaza new life

BY STEPHEN HAMWAY / JOURNAL STAFF WRITER
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After extensive remodeling, West Central Plaza is anchored by a Conn's HomePlus and a Burlington Coat Factory. The Southwest Albuquerque shopping center, which languished for years after the closure of its Kmart, is now nearly full, with more stores on the way. (Courtesy of Slapflish)

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — Four years ago, West Central Plaza at Central and Atrisco was in dire shape. After the closure of Kmart, the Southwest Albuquerque mall's anchor tenant, the mall was nearly 85 percent vacant, with a dilapidated parking lot and a shortage of nearby amenities.

Still, Casey McKeon, vice president for acquisitions at California-based Heslin Holdings, saw reasons for hope based on its location. With the right mix of stores and a retrofitted space, McKeon said the mall could succeed.

"We believe we can definitely backfill this Kmart with two or three tenants," he said.

RETAIL ROUNDUP



Stephen Hamway

Today, after extensive renovations, West Central Plaza is nearly full, with two national chains – Conn’s HomePlus and Burlington Coat Factory – occupying the space where Kmart once stood. New buildings have gone up, and new tenants have come onboard throughout the plaza.

“We saw the potential,” McKeon said.

McKeon said Heslin, which acquires and redevelops existing retail, office and medical plazas, was attracted to the parcel because of its location in southwest quadrant of the city. He said Southwest Albuquerque has less retail space per resident than the rest of the city, as well as the national average. That general shortage of stores, along with the success of the mall on the other side of Central Avenue, which is home to an El Super grocery store and a Family Dollar, were Heslin’s primary reasons for optimism.

“Being in the southwest portion of the market, there’s really not a lot of retail down there,” McKeon said.

The building that housed the Kmart went through an extensive renovation, as builders removed asbestos and installed a new HVAC system and roof. The developers subdivided the building, making it suitable for retailers looking to downsize. One building, now occupied by Harbor Freight Tools, was converted for use by a single tenant. When Dollar Tree committed to West Central Plaza in 2017, the developers built a 17,000-square-foot building for the company to move into. Finally, Dunkin Donuts is constructing a building in the shopping center along Central.

In a retail landscape that has been hard on many large stores, McKeon stressed the importance of working with “internet-resistant” companies: those that understand the disruptive role the internet can play on retail, and have taken steps to adapt to the new environment. He said he’s been encouraged to see how both Burlington and Conn’s have evolved as companies.

“That’s why we really like the tenant mix,” McKeon said.