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New construction spurs O'Fallon, Ill., economy

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O'FALLON, ILL. • This Metro East community has continued to grow despite the recession and sluggish recovery, and a wave of new retail construction could spur the local economy further.

As long as nearby Scott Air Force Base remains a key defense facility, the O'Fallon economy should slowly and steadily move in the right direction, said Collin Fischer, a commercial real estate broker with BarberMurphy Group in Shiloh.

“And the growth could become explosive if the economy fully recovers,” he said.

Fischer noted that both Belleville hospitals — Memorial and St. Elizabeth's — were building satellite branches at O'Fallon, bringing more jobs and growth to the city. Both hospital branches are expected to open within the next two years.

A key catalyst for the city, which lies about 16 miles east of the Gateway Arch, has been a \$23 million project to build one of the two new Menards hardware stores in the St. Louis region, which the home improvement chain had previously ignored.

Meanwhile, O'Fallon's convenient location for commuters along Interstate 64, coupled with a stable local political climate, have positioned the city for a rapid continuing growth, said Ted K. Shekell, the city's planning director.

“We have not had a lot of turnover in our local officials, and there's not been a lot of bickering and

strife," he said. "And that lends itself to growth. Developers know that the area is stable."

O'Fallon Mayor Gary Graham has served for 16 years, and many of the City Council members have been in office almost that long. Since taking office, Graham and council members have promoted growth both residentially and commercially.

Shekell noted that 101 new homes were built in O'Fallon last year and that the city has averaged construction of nearly 100 new homes annually since the recession started in 2008. In comparison, 552 new homes were built last year in the entire St. Louis County.

O'Fallon now has nearly 30,000 residents. Shekell said the land is available to double that number within the next couple of decades.

While the city's commercial construction slowed during the recession, it has taken off recently.

Shekell pointed to these developments:

- Menards, an Eau Claire, Wis.-based chain of large hardware and home supply stores, is completing its store at Central Park Plaza on Central Park Drive, near Green Mount Road in O'Fallon. The store will include 164,000 square feet of retail space under roof and 200,000 square feet of outdoor space. The store is scheduled to open in April and is expected to hire from 150 to 200 employees. The general contractor is Poettker Construction Co.
- CarMax was approved for a store on Central Park Drive adjacent to an existing Honda dealership. Construction is scheduled to start within the next year.
- Colonnade Senior Living and Memory Care Center on Weber Road is undergoing a major expansion and renovation at a cost of \$8.1 million.
- Panda Express completed a restaurant along Illinois Highway 50.
- AutoZone is building a store along Highway 50.
- A new Walker Retail Center of smaller stores is under construction on the I-64 frontage road. Halloran Construction is building the \$1.7 million center.
- A \$3.9 million St. Clare Catholic School addition is being built by Holland Construction Services.
- Ambassador Flooring has expanded and an Alpine Shop opened along Highway 50.

Citywide, all residential and commercial construction totaled nearly \$66.3 million last year, Shekell says.

BarberMurphy's Fischer said he believed Menards would serve as an anchor to spur more development along Central Park Drive and other streets nearby, both in O'Fallon and Shiloh.

The real estate broker said the Menards store would be larger than any other home décor and hardware store in St. Clair County. "They're going to make a huge footprint here," he said.

Jeff Abbott, a Menards spokesman, said the hardware chain was eager to open both the O'Fallon store and one also scheduled for completion this spring at St. Peters in St. Charles County.

"We're very excited that these two new stores are on schedule and ready to open this spring," Abbott

said. "Both stores will be 'supersized,' with several great departments, full-service lumber yards and beautiful garden centers."

Abbott said the O'Fallon, Ill., and St. Peters stores will also carry name brand appliances, pet products, lawn and garden supplies and a line of convenience groceries.

Menards operates 273 home improvement stores in 14 Midwestern states, including 57 Illinois stores and six in Missouri.



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