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Mall entrance beckons

Also in the Basket, names of four Eddy Street Commons tenants



University Park Mall's new main entrance officially opened Friday in Mishawaka. The entrance, which is located north of the future Barnes & Noble bookstore, boasts lots of windows for natural light as well as a fireplace with seating and greenery. Tribune Photo/BARBARA ALLISON

By HEIDI PRESCOTT *Tribune columnist.*

The doors are somewhat hidden amid the construction surrounding it, and the fountains are muffled by drills and saws, but as mall shoppers walk inside they stop in their tracks.

The smell hits you first, the overpowering aroma of flooring and furniture and block. Your eyes catch up a breath or two later and the sun and clouds cast shadows on your skin through towering walls of windows. The gray textured flooring curves, leading shoppers into center court.

A combination of rocking chairs, wicker furniture and other more sequestered seating areas are located along the walls and beneath trees that you can imagine being covered in dazzling twinkle lights at Christmas on either side of a warm fireplace.

Warm. Comfortable. Inviting. These are some of the adjectives University Park Mall shoppers Friday used to describe the entrance that formally opened that morning. The event carried no fanfare, no mall managers unveiling this part of the redevelopment project in a press conference. Every now and then a construction worker in the future Barnes & Noble peeked through a window to see if people admired their work.

Shoppers were doing just that. Georgia Gildner of Mishawaka and her son, Hank Shafer, who was visiting from Tampa, sat on a bench outside admiring the architectural features.



Here's a peek inside the new University Park Mall entrance that is located on the site of the former Marshall Field's store in Mishawaka. Several new tenants have opened in the mall addition, and others are still under construction. Tribune Photo/BARBARA ALLISON

"They're trying to get rid of the old, and in with the new. We've been watching it, and I think they've done an amazing job in a short amount of time," says Shafer, his mom looking on. She smiled and softly confided, "I like the fireplace and chairs."

Ann and Bob Walters of Granger meandered into the vast new entrance, tilting their heads toward the ceiling and admiring the culmination of the work they have been watching while they walk the center almost daily.

"It's great, I like everything. It looks more Indianapolis. I think it's even prettier than what they're putting in the other new areas," Ann Walters says, referring to the retail developments just east of the mall. "It's more metropolitan."

Mindy Hall of South Bend held a white plastic J.C. Penney bag in one hand and took pictures on her cell phone with the other. "They're for my husband. He's an architect," Hall says.

While Hall doesn't think the new entrance alone will make a difference in the number of times she visits U.P. Mall, she believes the fireplace area might be a gathering place for shoppers in winter. Together we wondered whether an adjacent area close to Barnes & Noble might not be used for holiday displays like a huge tree at Christmas.