

[Return to Pulse of Conway Home Page](#)

Conway Booms, Setting Retail Records

Arkansas Business Daily Report

by Sarah Campbell

Posted 3/27/2017 12:00 am



Commercial development is thriving in Conway, evidenced by the nearly complete \$65 million Lewis Crossing shopping center and plans for a startup space the city hopes will attract new and existing companies.

Both are part of the city's continuing transformation into a commercial hub distinct from Little Rock, though they share a metropolitan statistical area.

“In spite of a difficult national retail climate, Conway has continued to show growth with record retail sales of \$1.45 billion for 2016,” Brad Lacy, CEO of the Conway Area Chamber of Commerce, said in an email to Arkansas Business. “With the opening of Sam’s Club in January, we anticipate that number to grow as we solidify our place as a regional shopping destination.”

Lacy also lauded Conway’s success in retail development. Sam’s Club, at 136,580 SF, is the main anchor of Lewis Crossing.

“This growth will only build the case for other retailers to invest in our market,” Lacy said. “With a great mix of locally owned, specialty stores and restaurants and well-known national brands, we consistently hear that our residents are not traveling out of town to shop and more visitors are choosing Conway.”

The 441,871-SF Lewis Crossing is at the southeast corner of Interstate 40 and Dave Ward Drive; just south of another top development, Lewis Ranch. Shoppes at Central Landing is north of both and on the other side of Interstate 40.

Lewis Ranch LLC moved dirt last week for a new road it is building to connect its 50-acre development to Lewis Crossing and Conway Commons, said Operations Analyst Audie Alumbaugh. Conway Commons is the 600,000-SF shopping center near I-40 off of Exit 127.

“Our goal is to have a defined retail corridor starting around Conway Farm & Home on Amity and going all the way through the Sam’s development, through Lewis Ranch and up through Conway Commons, where the Target, the Home Depot, all that is,” she said.

The property owner, Bill Lewis of Conway, is investing \$5 million in the road and other infrastructure features, Alumbaugh said. The new Amity Road will go north of Crain Buick GMC, then through Lewis Ranch to the second roundabout on Dave Ward Drive. Crain Buick GMC and Crain Kia of Conway have already bought property at Lewis Ranch.

Alumbaugh wouldn’t disclose the project’s total cost, saying several pieces will be built to the future tenants’ specifications, altering estimates.

Sage Partners Real Estate Solutions of Fayetteville is the leasing agent for the property. The Tyler Group of Conway is managing the project, and Centennial Bank is financing it.

Alumbaugh said the owner has been working on the development for two years and has letters of intent as well as written offers. She also mentioned talks with three big-box stores but declined to name them.

She expects Lewis Ranch construction to take two years, but the road is set to be finished by the end of this year.

Lewis Crossing

Much further along is its neighbor, Lewis Crossing.

All of its anchor stores are open, said Roger Cole with Elrod Real Estate of Little Rock, the local leasing agent.

Open now are Academy Sports, Bed Bath & Beyond, On the Border, Kay Jewelers, Books-A-Million, Dollar Tree, Michael's, Petco, Ross Dress for Less, Ulta, Aspen Dental, AT&T and Mattress Firm.

Hideaway Pizza and Red Robin near starting construction of their standalone buildings, while Success Vision, T-Mobile and Rita's Italian Ice are set for finish-out work. David's Burgers, another standalone building does not yet have a construction start date, he said.

Developer Ryan Mosser of Collett & Associates of Charlotte, North Carolina, said, "Everybody that we've talked to out there that's open says it's going really well with sales. A few of the tenants are above projections ... It's a great town and all retailers do really well."

C.R. Crawford of Fayetteville was the contractor; Garrett Excavating of Hot Springs did the site work, Construction started in August 2015.

Shoppes at Central Landing

Another big retail development in planning is the Shoppes at Central Landing, a 302,708-SF center featuring Dillard's, retail shops, restaurants, apartments, a hotel and outparcels, according to the website of developer Jim Wilson &

Associates of Montgomery, Alabama. The company's president, Will Wilson, did not return calls from Arkansas Business.

The center is being built at the 151-acre former municipal airport on Corporate Drive. A new overpass is also underway to connect Central Landing with Conway Commons.

Bryan Patrick, director of the city's Planning & Development Department, said the city is building the overpass and people will be using it by the end of the summer or early fall.

He said all of the city's infrastructure improvements connected to the Central Landing project, including the overpass, cost about \$28 million.

Projects With UCA Ties

The Conway Area Chamber announced earlier this month Conway Corp. will pay for a new space for startups called the Arnold Innovation Center. The utility has not pledged an exact amount yet because the center's downtown location has not been finalized, CEO Lacy said.

A site may be known by May.

The Conductor, a public-private partnership of the University of Central Arkansas and Startup Junkie Consulting of Fayetteville, will offer programming to Arnold Innovation Center, named for retiring Conway Corp. CEO Richie Arnold. UCA will pay Startup Junkie \$1.3 million to run the Conductor through September 2019.

The chamber is also studying the feasibility of renovating the historic chamber-owned Grand Theatre into a new arts venue.

UCA's other commercial development was the \$16.3 million, 67,500-SF Donaghey Hall. Students moved in in August and businesses followed.

The second, third and fourth floors are residential, but the first floor is home to Uncle T's Deli/Market, Marble Slab Creamery, Great American Cookies, Blue Sail Coffee and Mosaique Bistro & Grill.

Trek Bikes of Conway plans to join them in mid-April, a UCA spokeswoman said.

On five-year leases, tenants pay \$1,888 to \$4,652 in rent, \$15 per square foot. The building will also house a 1,000-SF “maker space” called The Cave that will give entrepreneurs access to advanced tools and technology. The university partnered with the Arkansas Regional Innovation Hub to operate the maker space, which will yield no rent.

Office Buildings

A smaller project, three multi-tenant office buildings at 605, 635 and 655 Dave Ward Drive, have been developed by George Covington Sr. of Covington Cos. in Conway for \$3.7 million. The buildings are complete, but tenants are being sought, Covington said.

Covington constructed the building at 635, while the others were remodeled. The three combined offer tenants 46,697 SF.