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## **New shopping center springing up on MLK** **BRIAN FONTENOT**

### **Staff Writer**

HOUMA -- Three new shopping centers are planned for the northern stretch of Martin Luther King Boulevard, one of Houma's fastest-developing corridors.

Plantation Commons, Houma Marketplace and an addition to the already-existing Houma Crossing, home of the arts-and-crafts store Hobby Lobby, are all in the works.

Plantation Commons, south of LaQuinta Inn and on the same side of the road, will break ground in about two weeks. It's expected to open in the spring.

It's one of five plots of Martin Luther King Boulevard land owned by Henry Richard, owner of Richard Development and the former president of the Terrebonne Economic Development Authority.

Plantation Commons, which will cost an estimated \$3 million to build, will have space for up to 10 stores, ranging in size from 1,300-square feet to 4,000-square feet.

Richard wouldn't say what types of businesses would occupy the center.

Across the street, another developer plans to build Houma Marketplace, a center that is designed to house 30 to 40 tenants. The three parcels, next to the Landing apartments and Microtel Inn and Suites, is being developed by Houston-based Weiner Development.

The company, which has developed multiple shopping centers in Texas, is developing the local property, but Houma-based LaRussa Real Estate is leasing the soon-to-be-built spaces, broker Mike LaRussa said.

"We're in negotiations with different tenants right now," he said. "We're actively dealing with several clients."

LaRussa wouldn't divulge the names of those businesses or even characterize them, citing the ongoing negotiations as the reason.

He also wouldn't comment on the cost to build the shopping center, which is still in the planning phase, but he did say it would have a French Quarter-inspired look.

An artist rendering, he said, should be available in December.

There's also no firm date on when construction will begin or end.

Also on tap is another phase to the Houma Crossing, the site of Hobby Lobby. That shopping center, which is being developed by the Texas-based Woodmont Co., has a slew of new stores and restaurants under construction.

In addition to the chicken-and-beer establishment Buffalo Wild Wings, which is being built in front of Hobby Lobby next to the under-construction Arby's Roast Beef, the new addition will include Zen Japanese Grill and Sushi Bar and Cappy's Coffee. There's also a Sports Clips, a franchise that offers men's hair cuts in a sports-theme environment, and an Ace Cash Express.

A Woodmont Co. representative said that, contrary to information included on a Web site detailing planned additions to the shopping center, no lease has been signed with Conn's Appliances. Told that the store is listed on the Web site, the spokeswoman said it needs to be updated.

Two-thirds of the Houma Crossing expansion is leased, she said, all of which should be open by the summer.

Other businesses are scheduled to spring up in the near future on the bustling corridor.

Richard owns three tracts on Martin Luther King Boulevard across from Synergy Bank and LaQuinta Inn. One will be the site of a Smoothie King, the other two are for sale.

He already sold another lot, this one totaling 1.25 acres and situated just north of the planned Plantation Commons Shopping Center. It will house a new office for the Houma-based Houma-based Seeca Eye Care. Construction is scheduled to start within the next year.

A new paved road, called Citiplace Street, will be built north of the Seeca lot and deadend at the rear of another piece of Richard property, a 15-acre strip of raw, cleared land. The property connects to Main Street, and Richard suggests it could be used for office parks, hotels, a retirement community or apartments.

LaRussa still owns three land parcels in the front of the planned Houma Marketplace. Two of the parcels, each a 1.88 corner lot, are listed for \$1.3 million each.

A Community Bank is also planned for the Houma Marketplace site, though no construction timeline has been developed.

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