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Hungry for more



Michael Albrecht/Staff Photographer

Regardless of who or what occupies 2500 McKinney, a creative solution for parking will be necessary.

Uptown residents eager for markets to move to neighborhood

By MARIA HALKIAS
Staff Writer
mhalikias@dallasnews.com

Uptown's residents are hoping that history is about to repeat itself.

In the early 1990s, the neighborhood north of Woodall Rogers Freeway wasn't on any supermarket chain's radar. Urban pioneers approached Albertson's, which was aggressively expanding in North Texas at the time.

"They were very reluctant to come here," said Kyle Crews, who worked for

one of the first apartment developers in Uptown back then and is now director of sales and marketing at the Tower Residences at the Ritz-Carlton.

In 1994, Albertson's opened at the corner of McKinney and Lemmon avenues. It quickly became one of the company's highest-grossing stores.

Almost two decades later, grocers are trying to find places to grow in Dallas-Fort Worth's existing urban neighborhoods.

Trader Joe's finally confirmed that it's

expanding in Texas, and Whole Foods, Sprouts, Central Market and others are looking for fill-in opportunities. Central Market just snapped up the former Borders space in Preston Hollow for a smaller 30,000-square-foot concept store. In East Dallas, three grocers are eyeing the Lower Greenville block that formerly housed a Blockbuster and Whole Foods.

With downtown and Uptown's growth surging in the last decade, partly from

Grocers keep eye on Uptown

A specialty grocer could make its home at the former 22,000-square-foot Borders in West Village.



File 2008/24/11 Photo

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Uptown's new high-rise luxury condos, the area is ripe for more grocers to move in.

"There will be another grocer in Uptown within the next year. You don't need a crystal ball to know that," said Jack Gosnell, a partner in retail real estate firm UCR Urban.

The Albertson's store is still one of the chain's best, but the almost-monopoly status it enjoyed has been eroded in recent years. In 2005, Wal-Mart opened a Neighborhood Market at Central Expressway near Hall Street. Then, in late 2009, Target selected its Cityplace store to test expanded grocery aisles, a concept that it has since rolled out nationally.

Later this month, Kroger, which searched for years for a site near downtown, will break ground on Haskell Avenue across from Cityplace Target. That store, an existing Kroger store in Oak Lawn and one planned on Maple Avenue in the former Elliott's Hardware space creates a "nice imaginary line," Gosnell said. "It's a strategic, very strong chess move. Kroger has cut right across the city through the fat of the demographic."

Who is next?

The next chain to move into Uptown may be Whole Foods. It's rumored to be eyeing a prime Uptown block on McKinney at Fairmount Street.

A Dallas partnership headed by investor and developer Paul Cheng acquired the block last year. The buildings were leveled, and the site is ready for redevelopment.

"We currently are reviewing various options for the de-

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velopment of our property and have not made our mind up which way to go," Cheng said.

He's had a number of inquiries from potential tenants but said he can't confirm whether Whole Foods is one of the interested parties.

A Whole Foods spokesman declined to comment.

The just vacated 22,000-square-foot Borders in West Village could also land a specialty grocer.

In the last decade, Uptown's population increased 80 percent to more than 13,000, and it's still expanding.

The neighborhood's daytime office worker population is 18,000, according to Uptown Dallas Inc., a nonprofit

group that oversees the Uptown Public Improvement District.

Several daytime shoppers interviewed at Albertson's last week said they were there to stock up workplace pantries. Lorie Hahnl said she shops at Albertson's, the Whole Foods in Highland Park and sometimes Walmart Neighborhood Market.

"I'm here about twice a month and find what I need, but it would be nice to have a Whole Foods closer," said Hahnl, who works at the American Institute of Architects office on Woodall Rodgers Freeway.

Still growing

Uptown may look like it's developed out with only a couple of pieces of vacant land, but there are older buildings that can come down and be replaced with more density, Gos-

nell said.

And grocers are developing smaller stores. Trader Joe's stores are about 10,000 to 15,000 square feet. Brokers say the California-based grocer known for its private label specialty foods and cheap wine is still scouting for sites.

"A small boutique grocery is on everyone's wish list," said Jim Reagan, president and CEO of Uptown Dallas.

The recently cleared property on McKinney and the vacant Borders are the two sites getting the most buzz, Reagan said. The property at 2600 McKinney might need some creative parking solutions such as an underground garage, he said.

West Village has received lots of inquiries about the Borders, some from "top-name" grocers, said shopping center spokeswoman Katie Beal. There's a parking garage behind the store, but it doesn't connect into the space, so a bridge may be built directly into the space, Beal said.

"I think there's room for one, two or three more stores," Crews said. "Whenever I'm at the Whole Foods on Lomo Alto, I see our residents and people from the other luxury high-rises." Crews rattled off a few of those residential buildings in the area: LaTour, 1999 McKinney, The Ashton, 1900 McKinney, 2011 Cedar Springs and the property he markets, Tower Residences at the Ritz-Carlton.

"Our standard kitchen has double subzero refrigerator freezers and Wolf commercial gas ranges with six burners. It's a chef's dream," Crews said.

"I'm confident just like the Albertson's has flourished, so will other savvy grocers."

