

INDUSTRY WRAPUPS

From the October 1, 2004 print edition

Real Estate Roundup

Former Kmart site getting new life as Ford dealership

Tricia Lynn Silva

Business is going well for Northside Ford since the auto dealer took over a former Kmart space in North Central San Antonio about a month ago.

"We are very pleased with it," says Northside Ford owner Gary Woods. "The public has accepted it well."

Northside took what had been a Super Kmart store site at 12300 San Pedro Ave. and redeveloped it into an auto dealership. The redone site currently includes a 55-bay car repair shop, a body shop, sales offices and customer waiting areas -- including a play area for children.

It is quite a change for Northside, which had been located off of San Pedro Avenue since the early 1970s.

Northside acquired the site last August, says Woods, who is also president of locally based McCombs Enterprises.

Northside purchased the property from San Antonio 281 Realty Ltd., according to Nick Altomare, who represented the seller in the transaction. Altomare is a senior vice president and principal with United Commercial Realty (UCR) of San Antonio.

Getting the dealership up and running, however, required that Koontz McCombs Construction adhere to a frenetic schedule, recalls Henry Serry, who is the vice president of McCombs Construction.

Demolition work on the former Kmart site began last October. Originally, the retail box site was about 180,000 square feet. Koontz McCombs Construction, however, demolished about 40,000 square feet off of the building to make room for more parking and inventory. By the first part of 2004, McCombs had begun interior demolition.

The new dealership officially opened in late August. Costs for the redevelopment project were not disclosed.

Adds Serry: "It was a pretty accelerated pace."

The behemoth structure that was once a Kmart has allowed Northside Ford to put all of its services under one roof. That might be good for business, but it did create a bit of a contracting challenge for McCombs Construction.

"All of these (service/sales) areas had different code requirements," explains Serry -- not to mention the fact that the firm had to work around an existing structure.

But the effort was worth it, says Serry, who adds that his firm was able to convert what had been an eyesore for the past several years into an attractive, functional property in a high-traffic area.

Adds Woods: "The natural traffic passing by our dealership has tripled, quadrupled from the San Pedro location."

The new Northside Ford location also includes a quick-service area for simple repairs -- jobs that will take about 30 minutes or less. Those waiting for their cars can even take their laptops and plug in at one of several booths with Internet access.

"We want to make the customers comfortable," says Woods, who adds that Northside Ford expects to hold an official grand opening of the new facility later this month.

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