

Crocker Park Redefines The Anchor

R.L. Stark Enterprises' Crocker Park is an example of how a critical mass of retailers, multifamily housing and a sense of place can now serve as anchor.

Barbara Payne

Everybody knows what an anchor really is: that without which a shopping center will not succeed. And, until recently, we all thought we knew what one looked like — a major department store or a national grocery chain. But the times, they are a-changing. And the anchor isn't what it used to be.

A NEW ANCHOR IN TOWN

While big-name retailers are always part of the draw, especially when they're carefully matched with the demographics of the surrounding area, retailers alone don't drive a shopping center's success, says Christopher Noble, vice president of development at R. L. Stark Enterprises, developers of 26 commercial and residential developments in Northeast Ohio.



Mixing residential space with retail and office creates a live-work-play environment at Crocker Park in Westlake, Ohio.



Walkability is a key component to Crocker Park's success.

"We're relying on the captivating charm and bustling energy of Crocker Park to keep people coming back," he says.

Crocker Park, set in Westlake, Ohio, and now 60 percent built out, comprises 52 percent residential space, 35 percent shopping space and 13 percent office space — a true mixed-use development that integrates residential, retail, dining and first-class office space along the time-tested principles of sound urban planning.

"Initially, we reserved a big pink square on our development plan for a department store," says Noble. "But as we negotiated with tenants, we realized that a department store as anchor is from the old paradigm for a



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shopping center. That's not what we're creating at Crocker Park."

From about the 1950s until recently, the trend was for people to abandon urban centers and move out to suburbs, where separated land use resulted in what's now characterized as sprawl. Huge freestanding malls anchored by department stores were part of this sprawl. But as lifestyles change — job security becomes a distant memory, baby boomers age, and wireless and other electronic marvels enable people to work anywhere — people are looking for something different and, some say, better.

MADE FOR WALKING

A Brookings Institute report says that up to 50 percent of households in America prefer urban walkability to heavy reliance on cars (see *Turning around Downtown: Twelve Steps to Revitalization*, by Christopher B. Leinberger).

People are once again seeking the feel of a city. They want to intermingle and experience the excitement a city provides: the ability to shop, eat, party and work in the same environment they call home. Thus, the experience itself becomes the powerful drawing card — and the anchor of today's successful shopping center.

The commercial real estate term for this change is New Urbanism — the philosophy of community design that lays out multi-use buildings and housing in a downtown-like environment. Crocker Park is a unique example that offers the surrounding community's nearly 32,000 residents a shopping center that's also a town center — visitors from all over the region join residents and workers at all times of the day, 24/7, to experience urban life.

Phase I of the 76-acre, 12-city-block development opened on October 29, 2004, to higher-than-projected sales for retailers, restaurants and entertainment venues alike.

"What we've done to date is clearly resonating with people," says Bob Stark, president of Stark Enterprises. "Tenants have been extremely pleased

as residents quickly adopted Crocker Park as their neighborhood. Visitors engage in activities that they really enjoy so they linger — and shop."

TENANT TALK

Retail space in Phase I of Crocker Park is fully leased. To date, 54 retail and office tenants are operating out of Crocker Park. Forty-two more tenants are on their way. When the project is complete — with an expected cost of \$480 million — it will be home to more than 50 retailers with a mix of locally owned stores and prominent national and international stores like Ann Taylor, H&M, Coach and Hollister.

"Cleveland, one of the country's top 50 MSAs, was already a target for our Midwest expansion," said Michael Oliverio, real estate director at H&M. "But it doesn't have a strong retail corridor downtown where we normally locate. Crocker Park — essentially a 'manufactured downtown' outside city limits — fit the need for us."

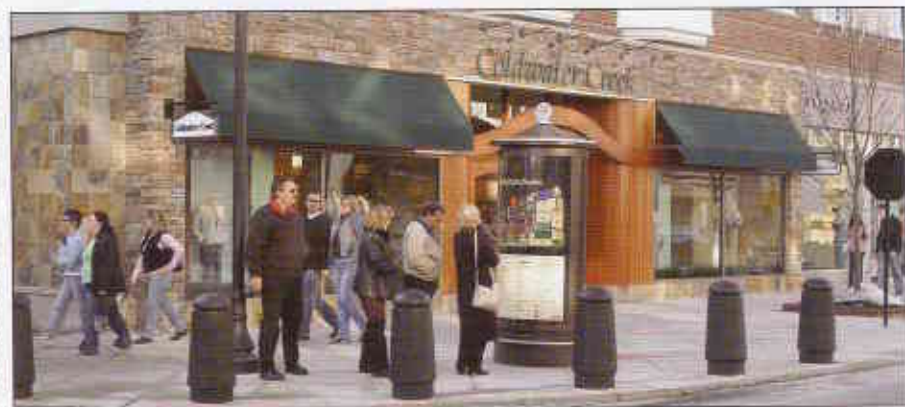
The fashion retailer will open a store at Crocker Park in fall 2005.

Several restaurants and a theater further encourage residents and visitors to stay — and thus contribute to the vibrant experience that sets Crocker Park apart from other shopping centers.

"Cleveland is a very sophisticated, worldly market," says Wade McDevitt, president of The McDevitt Company, exclusive representatives of Urban Outfitters, Inc. and Anthropologie, Inc. It has all the right demo-



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The project is "captivating charm and bustling energy."

graphics, he says. "And when I worked with Bob Stark on Eton Chagrin Boulevard, I saw his passion for building the right mix of tenants. You don't see that kind of commitment very often."

HOME SWEET HOME

The urban feel reaches full promise only when people live there, according to Stark. So, in addition to the 200-plus single-family dwellings (including condos, town homes, brownstones and row houses) that will be built on land surrounding the center, Stark built 160 one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments above the main street storefronts. Rents range from \$750 to \$2,200 per month.

"Apartments are part and parcel of a neighborhood," says Stark. "When people rent an apartment here, they feel like they own the city."

Traditional suburbs isolate people, according to Stark. At Crocker Park he said they've created an environment that fosters relationship-building. "It's rewarding to see kids and young adults coming here, making

friends, hanging out, being sociable, and really connecting."

DOING IT RIGHT

Lifestyle centers may be the rage in the U.S., but most don't provide a total "experience," according to Stark. Nor do they get people out of their cars to walk. Stark Enterprises focuses on the details that make the difference.

Crocker Park has public spaces that are pedestrian friendly — walkable and attractive. It's loaded with architectural details — designs, surfaces, textures, signage, street banners — that are compelling and beautiful. Its parking is compact — much of it using expensive multi-level construction — and easy to use.

"With this development, we've returned to the principles of planning that have worked since the beginning of time," says Stark. "We're reversing the post-war tendency to plan around cars and driving."

Attractions are critical. An appropriate mix of dining experiences — for-

mal, informal, varied types of food — and entertainment options is a must for creating the experience. Stark focuses on attracting proven winners like Champps and promising newer concepts such as Kona Grill.

Special events play a big part in attracting people, who come to enjoy the energy and experience.

"Use drives activity," says Stark. "Activity drives additional development — even redesign if needed. The successful experience that brings pleasure becomes the anchor."

"We've set the stage for people to infuse their souls into the place," Stark says. "To co-create the experience that compels them to return time and again and adopt Crocker Park as their own."

Crocker Park is still new, and like any successful city, is constantly under construction.

"Creating this environment is not the work of weeks or months," says Stark. "This kind of blending of social interaction and entrepreneurial spirit takes dedication, time and poetic imagination." **SCB**