

Much-debated Spring Hill ushered in 'year of the mall'

By Dave Gathman

WEST DUNDEE — Dundee-Carpentersville and the upper Fox Valley's retail community underwent their most drastic change in decades during 1980 as Spring Hill Mall shopping center opened for business at Illinois 31 and 72.

As the year opened, most of the arguing about whether and how the mall should be built was already over. D. Hill Nursery Co. had moved its tree farm off the site, bulldozers had graded the earth, and skeletons of buildings were beginning to appear.

Two question marks still hung over the project, however—a lawsuit by five Dundee residents seeking to block the construction, and the search for a fifth anchor department store to replace Lord & Taylor, which had backed out of the project.

A 16th District Circuit Court had thrown the lawsuit out, but the plaintiffs appealed. Unperturbed, Homart Development Co. went on building its mall. On June 11, the Second Appellate Court ruled that the legal challenge did not hold water, ending a seven-year effort by one faction of Dundee residents and business people to fight the shopping center.

The last anchor spot also was filled as Carson Pirie Scott & Co. indicated it would open a major store at Spring Hill.

PLANS FOR MAJOR roadwork also had been unveiled before New Year's, and they began turning into concrete and asphalt as the snow melted. Every time one turned around in the Dundees last spring and summer, it seemed that someone was digging up a road or tree bank.

Before the year was over, Illinois 31 had been widened to four lanes from the Chateau Louise to Hillside Street. Illinois 72 was four lane from the west edge of the mall to the Fox River bridge. A Carpentersville institution, the Buckhorn Lodge tavern, fell victim to the bulldozers, and West Dundee's rustic Main Street hill began to look more like a highway.

Similar roadwork planned for East Dundee and Carpentersville never materialized, however. In Car-

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pentersville, plans were kicked back and forth between the village engineer and the Illinois Department of Transportation until it was too late to begin widening Illinois 31 and Huntley Road. That part of the project was rescheduled to 1981.

East Dundee demanded an off-street parking lot for its merchants before it would allow East Main Street to be widened. A war of wills broke out between the village and Homart, with each wanting the street widened but not wanting to pay for the parking lot. A breakthrough came in September, however, as the state relaxed some requirements, and both East Dundee and Homart felt confident that a compromise would allow Main Street widening in the spring.

ANOTHER PROBLEM MAY remain in the Main Street bridge. As reported in the Courier-News, a midnight experiment with parked trucks in July showed the present bridge is too narrow for four lanes, and engineers claim the roadway can't be widened.

Homart's Spring Hill executives were keeping their eyes on roadwork reports from their offices in the Sear's Tower as road improvements held the key to the mall's opening.

Construction at the mall went on as scheduled, but as roadwork fell behind, the opening date of Aug. 6 had to be set back to Oct. 1. As it became clear the Carpentersville roadwork wouldn't get off the ground this year, Homart made the decision to open without those widened roads.

For participants in a VIP tour of the mall June 17, the beauty of the mall's plants, wood beams and Welsh tile shone through the dust of construction. But the center's 140-odd shops were still empty spaces se-

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Area Report

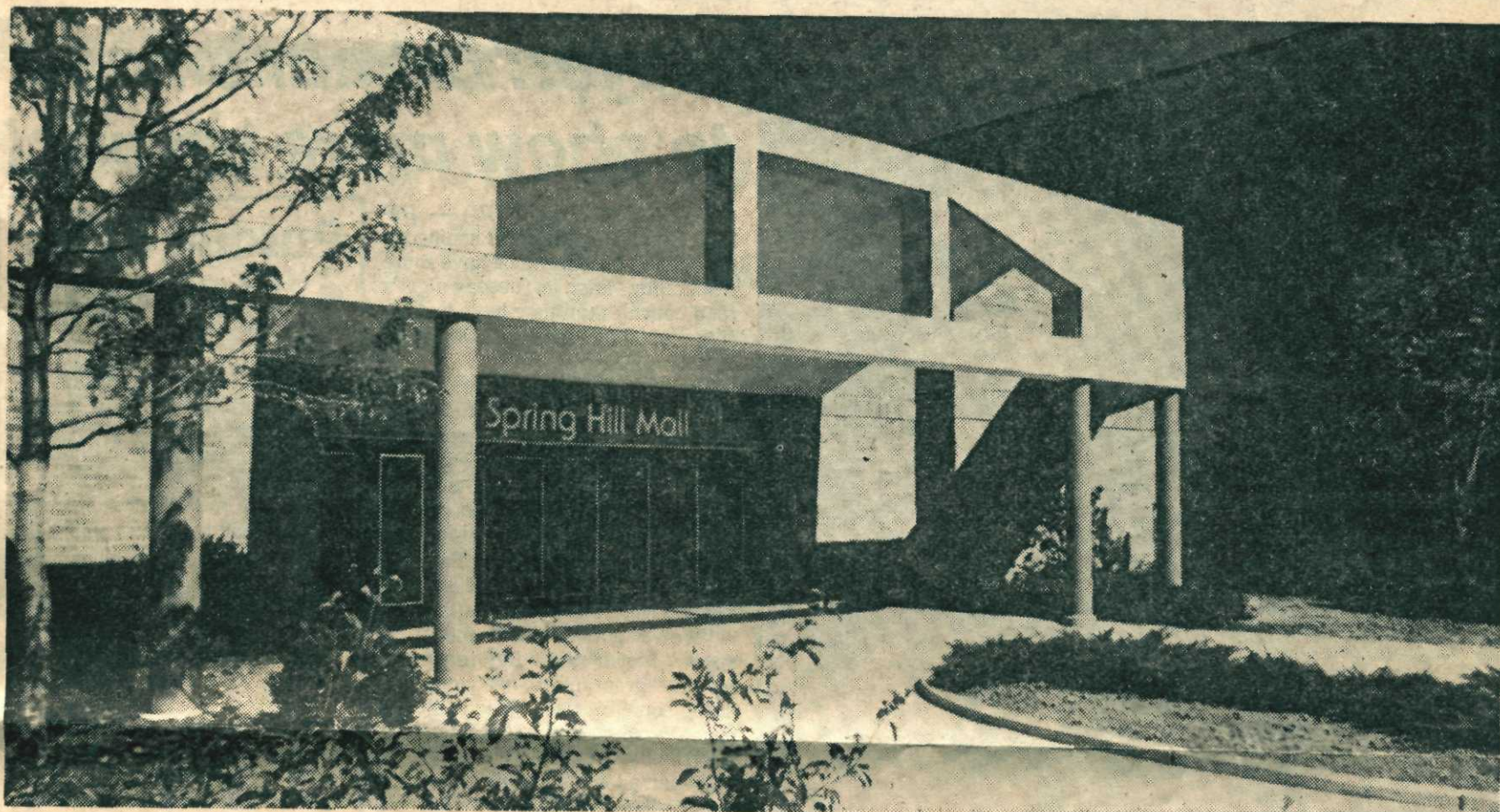
Local History

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Courier-News File Photo

Spring Hill Mall opened its doors in 1980 and changed the face of shopping in the Dundee-Carpentersville area.

●Spring Hill alters shopping patterns

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parated by open aluminum studs. Many wondered if the center could open on time Oct. 1.

But open it did, with Sears and Marshall Field's department stores, and 66 smaller stores. Forty thousand people showed up that opening day. Wally Phillips and Larry Lujack, sitting atop Chicago's radio ratings on their opposite poles, both showed up. The Dundee Scots played. Miss Illinois smiled. Mayors and company vice presidents spoke.

THE ECONOMY AND relatively remote location of the mall apparently have caused some skittishness among potential store owners. More lessees than expected wanted small-area stores, requiring 132 minor-store spaces to be carved up into 145 or more. Homart had expected 100 smaller stores to be open by Christmas. This week, there were 82,

though most vacant spaces have been leased out.

For stores that have moved in, business reportedly has been booming. The first month went "better than we'd hoped," says mall manager Marc Munaretto, and November figures were strong.

The mall already employs 1,000 people. "I think every teen-ager in Dundee has a job out there," said one West Dundee village official. Some officials have predicted a windfall from mall taxes, especially in West Dundee, which includes 80 percent of the shopping center. (The other 20 percent is in Carpentersville.)

Spring Hill's third department store, the European-oriented Bergner Weise, is getting set for a Feb. 12 opening. J.C. Penney and Carson Pirie Scott plan to break ground in the spring and open in 1982.

The West Dundee and Carpenters-

ville boards talked about guidelines for businesses in the mall fringes. A Toys R Us design was rejected as inappropriate. Ground was broken for a First Bank of Dundee branch. The fringes were expected to develop quickly during 1981, largely with restaurants.

ONCE THEY HAD lost their battle to keep the mall away, Dundee's downtown merchants this year began thinking about how to live with their giant neighbor. Consultant Robert Teska prepared a \$10,000, 62-page report urging downtowners to create a historically oriented, unified shopping place with the theme "Old Dundee."

In August, a vigorous new leader showed up in Mike Murphy—one-time lion in the anti-mall battle, now elected president of the Dundee Business and Professional Association and leading the fight to implement the Teska report.

The first major renovation project, Barrow's restaurant, got under way with private money, and a controversial plan to create a downtown special taxing district was headed for West Dundee Village Board consideration later this winter.

Dundee downtowners spent most of the year debating parking. There never seemed to be enough to satisfy everybody, especially now that Main Street was being widened. In West Dundee, the village opened a large new parking lot and doubled the size of another one, more than making up for lost Main Street spaces, at least in quantity. In East Dundee, hopes for a parking lot were at the heart of the Main Street roadwork delay.

At year's end, the debates were far from settled. But people seemed to agree that, with the mall half-full, cars which weren't parked were getting through Dundee smoothly.

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