

SUNCREST TOWNE CENTRE

Development 95% filled

BY CAVAN TARLEY
CTarley@DominionPost.com

Suncrest Towne Centre has been moving at a steady rate of growth during the past 12 months.

According to David Biafora, one of the developers at Suncrest Towne Centre, 95% of the buildings are filled.

"We're quite happy," Biafora said about the position the shopping center is in.

Biafora added that he hopes to get more of the buildings filled during the next 12 months.

"At one point, we were at 80%, and we'd like to see that again, and we think we can," he said.

The story of Suncrest Towne Centre first began in 2001, right after the terrorist attacks on 9/11. David Biafora, his brother Rick and a few other development partners — Pat Alexander, Larry Palumbo and Bob Toth — bought the land where the shopping center is now and discussed their plans for what types of businesses/offices would work in the area. As soon as the plans for permits and financing were handled, development work officially started around 2004-05.

After bringing more tenants to the area and committing to the leases, Suncrest Towne Centre was officially built in 2009. Kroger was among the first businesses to open during the first year of operation for the area.

The shopping center opened in the midst of a financial collapse during 2008-10. However, Suncrest Towne Centre managed to push through the rough economic climate, Biafora credits their ability to succeed during this period to



Submitted photo

Monthly Cars & Coffee events are among those held at Suncrest Towne Centre.

the location, quality and convenience of Suncrest Towne Centre.

In 2021, the Biaforas' business partners decided to retire, so the balance of their stock was sold to the brothers. Biafora's Inc. — which is run by the Biafora family — is the corporation that currently owns Suncrest Towne Centre.

The town center has a wide selection of stores, restaurants and offices in the area. In total, there are about 70 entities. Among the big-name brands with buildings at the shopping center are Hilton Garden Inn, Buffalo Wild Wings, McDonald's, WesBanco and Verizon.

WVU Medicine also has multiple offices in Suncrest Towne Centre. The WVU Medicine Urgent Care, Endocrinology, Nephrology and Rheumatology buildings are all located there.

Biafora believes much of the longevity of Suncrest Towne Centre is due to the range of businesses/institutions there.

"The mix of tenants is important in any place," said Biafora. "It's really nice for Morgantown and creates a lot of jobs and convenience."

He also associates the

growth of Suncrest Towne Centre with how well the shopping center is managed. "It's very well-kept and managed in this area, so it's a nice place to do business," Biafora said.

Apart from the various businesses located in the area, Suncrest Towne Centre also holds social events. Morgantown Cars & Coffee is held at Suncrest Towne Centre for people to meet up and check out unique cars. The event is typically one Sunday a month during spring and summer months.

Suncrest Towne Centre is also a popular spot for tailgating due to the convenient location to the WVU football stadium. A shuttle bus is available during home game days to transport fans.

In the next 12 months, Biafora expects that more business will come to Suncrest Towne Centre.

"We've got a list of tenants looking to get in," he said.

"We plan on maintaining and keeping Suncrest Towne Centre going with the trends," Biafora added. "Nothing too fancy, but we are continuing the stuff we've been doing for the last 15 years."

BUSINESS GROWTH

WVU supports and fuels innovation across the state

BY DAVID BEARD
DBeard@DominionPost.com

Part of WVU's mission is to advance the state's economy and Gen. Jim Hoyer, vice president for Economic Innovation, and Erlenne Olesh, executive director of the Office of Student and Faculty Innovation, are working on that.

Jim Hoyer

Hoyer's focus, he said, is "to help operationalize the land grant institution and its capabilities to grow economic opportunities in the state." In keeping with West Virginia's history in the energy and manufacturing

fields, part of that focus is growing the work in the national security space.

Another is to be an asset to the state and federal government. His office works with the state Departments of Commerce and Economic Development, the governor's office and the Congressional delegation.

Looking back at some accomplishments, he cited his work with Liz Vitullo in his office, the governor, Legislature and Marshall University to launch the Grant Resource Centers, focused on helping state and local entities to identify opportunities for federal and private grants to bring resources into the state to grow the economy and help with other projects — to help improve health and safety and to revitalize communities.

"That's been exceptionally successful."

He's also partnered with companies to fill positions with quality in-state students and repeat hires. Ascend WV is an example of that work. "I'm excited about what's going on — particularly in north-central West Virginia and the growth."

His team has engaged with FCX, Azimuth and Trilley Innovations in Bridgeport and Morgantown. Hope Gas has moved into the WVU Innovation

Corp. space. The Civil-Military Innovation Institute on Collins Ferry Road has a relationship with U.S. Cyber Command, which helps manage the National Center of Excellence for Cyber Security in Critical Infrastructure in partnership with WVU and Marshall.

"I think there are more opportunities going forward," Hoyer said. Students and faculty are getting opportunities to make impacts in the state.

Moving forward, he wants to exploit the success of the Grant Resource Centers to help more communities. An example is in Clay County — one of those affected by the decline of the coal economy — where the Civil-Military Innovation Institute is having more than 20 Clay County High School students participate as interns. "That's a big deal in a community like that."

He cited two goals. One is that companies already in state and those new to the state need a quality workforce. "We're going to have a unique opportunity to attract people in that 18-40 age range back into the state and keep people that age range in the state by helping match job opportunities with those folks."

And he wants to continue to grow opportunities in next generation technology.

"We are in a unique position in time" as the nation faces various challenges. "We've got to continue to bring manufacturing back on shore." He wants to grow those opportunities in West Virginia, revitalize some of that former capability to attract people here. "It's time for us to take advantage of those opportunities and be that national asset that we've been in the past."

Erlenne Olesh oversees WVU's innovation and entrepreneurship centers. It works with students and faculty interested in commercializing technology — forming startups and connecting with resources and training.

The WVU LaunchLab Network, located in Morgantown and Beckley,

serves as a comprehensive, one-stop innovation and commercialization center and has helped 322 businesses launch since 2014.

Looking at the office's accomplishments, Olesh cites movement in supporting startups and seeing growth in the number of startups coming out of WVU and across the state.

As an example, the Morgantown startup surgical device company Endolumik now selling its innovative Gastric Calibration Tube across the country

in that direction.

"Across the board we've made a lot of positive movement in that direction."

Right now, the office is involved in

the Build Back Better Regional Challenge project and, working with Huntington-based Coalfield Development, has helped 11 startups to date.

Looking forward, the office is working with Pitt and Carnegie Mellon and other partners in West Virginia under a National Science Foundation Regional Innovation Engines award — on an 18-month project to harness that legacy energy production infrastructure and deploy and reuse it toward the energy transition to enhance energy and grid resilience security.

That means, she said, taking new and emerging technologies and applying them so the region can continue to be important to the energy sector. The goal is to secure a smart and systematic transition to make sure communities are benefited and not negatively impacted by the transition.

"I think that there's a way to get there. I think that we just have to work together to do it."

The old view of a backwards West Virginia is dying, she said. "We're just getting started in West Virginia. I think we have a really positive future ahead of us, fueled by innovation and entrepreneurship."

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SPACE TRAVEL

Boeing is on the verge of launching astronauts aboard new capsule

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — After years of delays and stumbles, Boeing is poised to launch astronauts to the International Space Station for NASA.

It's the first flight of Boeing's Starliner capsule with a crew on board, a pair of

NASA pilots who will check out the spacecraft during the test drive and a weeklong stay at the space station.

NASA turned to U.S. companies for astronaut rides after the space shuttles were retired. Elon Musk's SpaceX has made nine taxi trips for NASA since 2020, while Boeing

has managed only a pair of unoccupied test flights.

Boeing program manager Mark Nappi wishes Starliner was further along.

"There's no doubt about that, but we're here now."

Provided a tryout goes well, NASA will alternate between Boeing and SpaceX to get astronauts to and from the space station.

Both companies' capsules are designed to be autonomous and reusable. This Starliner is the same one that made the first test flight in 2019. Unlike the SpaceX Dragons, Starliner has traditional hand controls and switches alongside touchscreens and, according to the astronauts, is more like NASA's Orion capsules for moon missions.

One big difference at flight's end: Starliner lands on the ground with cushioning airbags, while Dragon splashes into the sea.

Boeing is committed to six Starliner trips for NASA, which will take the company to the station's planned end in 2030. Boeing's Nappi is reluctant to discuss other potential customers yet. But the company has said a fifth seat will be available to private clients. SpaceX periodically sells seats to tycoons and even countries eager to get their citizens to the station for a couple weeks.

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