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The Shops at Canton Crossing opens Tuesday

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The Shops at Canton Crossing, a sprawling \$105 million shopping center on Boston Street in Canton, has been years in the making.

In preparation for its official opening Tuesday afternoon, landscape crews planted trees Monday along pathways dotted with benches and bike racks, workers at Old Navy arranged jeans and sweater displays, and servers at Mission BBQ prepared to serve their first lunch.

About two-thirds of the center's 30 shops and restaurants have opened or are on the verge of opening, among them Target's 135,000-square-foot anchor store; Michaels; DSW Shoe Warehouse; Ulta Beauty; Loft; Five Below; and Vitamin Shoppe.

Mission BBQ opened Monday and will be joined by Red Robin burger restaurant and Yogi Castle, a smoothie and yogurt shop. Samos Greek Island Grill, a fast-casual concept from Greektown's Samos restaurant, will open Oct. 14, while Jimmy John's sandwich shop will open Nov. 15.

A half-mile from the Boston Street exit off Interstate 95 and just south of nearly 1,000 new apartments in the Brewers Hill neighborhood, the center is expected to have a major impact in a city where new retail development hasn't kept pace with residential growth, said Mark Sapperstein, a partner in BCP Investors, the center's developer.

BCP Investors is made up of Sapperstein's 28 Walker Development, Chesapeake Real Estate Group and Birchwood Capital Partners. The group aimed to attract retailers and restaurants that lack a presence in downtown Baltimore, as well as national retailers without city locations.

"It keeps people in the city," offering an alternative to the suburbs, Sapperstein said Monday.

Construction is underway on a 54,000-square-foot Harris Teeter grocery store with a drive-through pharmacy. Other tenants, including a two-story Farmstead Grill restaurant that will open onto a grassy pocket park and the city's first Chick-fil-A, are scheduled to open next year.

Only one vacancy remains at the 326,000-square-foot center, and tenants are starting to line up to join a second phase of development on an adjoining 10-acre parcel, Sapperstein said.

Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake said the project not only renews a former brownfields site but will help attract and keep families in the city.

"We've been fighting to get this type of retail development in the city for years," she said. "We spend a lot of time advocating for the city and selling the city to national retailers."

The mayor, who said she's already shopped at DSW, said she was glad to see the center end up with some "Baltimore flavor," with regional eateries Mission BBQ and Samos.

Though the facility is laid out much like a suburban shopping center, it has a decidedly urban feel, Sapperstein said, thanks to the use of glass, metal and brick facades on the storefronts and pathways designed for pedestrian ease amid the more than 1,400 parking spaces. A grassy pocket park outside several eateries, planned as a central gathering spot, features planters and benches equipped with outlets where shoppers can charge electronic devices.

On Monday, developers announced four more tenants would be moving in, including Atwater's restaurant, opening its first downtown location in a 2,000-square foot space; Venti-Tre Modern Italian, a 3,000-square-foot fast-casual Italian concept from the Fazoli's restaurant group; Canton Crossing Wine and Spirits; and a TD Bank branch.

The Farmstead Grill will be a 200-seat restaurant focusing on locally sourced and affordable food, said Galen Sampson, Farmstead's chief operating officer and executive chef. The eatery, now under construction and opening in the spring, also will operate a companion kiosk, the Farmstead Shack, for carryout with 30 outdoor seats. Both are owned by Charles Nabit and Michael Klein, owners of the Waterfront Kitchen in Fells Point.

Mission BBQ, with locations in Glen Burnie and Perry Hall, opened its first city location Monday at the Canton center. The chain donates some of its proceeds to programs to benefit local firefighters, police officers, military members and veterans.

"This is a game-changing project," co-founder Bill Kraus said of the Canton center.

On Monday, Canton resident Beth Christman, also a member of the board of the Canton Community Association, strolled

the shoe aisles at DSW with some visiting friends. Christman said she and many of her neighbors welcome the new shopping center.

"To walk to a Target — I don't have to drive to Glen Burnie or White Marsh," she said. "We're ecstatic."

Neighborhood residents do have concerns about increases in traffic, she said, but hope public transportation eventually will relieve some congestion. She expects to do her grocery shopping at the Harris Teeter, as well as the Safeway in Canton, instead of driving through the Fort McHenry Tunnel to the Harris Teeter in Locust Point.

The grocer had been scheduled to open in December. But construction delays have pushed back the opening, likely to March, Sapperstein said.

He said the developers are about a year and a half away from starting work on the adjoining parcel, which still is undergoing remediation. The site was once an oil refinery. Sapperstein said he plans to build another 90,000 square feet of retail space.

The center, with its future development, will help support downtown's emerging neighborhoods, said Neil Tucker, a principal in Chesapeake Real Estate.

"Shopping close to home instead of traveling to the suburbs will greatly improve their quality of life," he said.

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An earlier version misstated the number of parking spaces. It also misstated the opening of the Red Robin. The Sun regrets the error.

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