

## A look back at retail in the Oklahoma City area in 2011

The Oklahoma City area got a new outlet mall, additional big box stores and a remarkably improved grocery market in the past 12 months.

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Oklahoma City made Santa's good list this year.

There was an outlet mall and a much anticipated Whole Foods Market under the tree.

Moore got a new Target store, and Midwest City received a Walmart Neighborhood Market. And several small, independent stores either opened or expanded.

As the city's economy has continued chugging along and unemployment rates have remained among the lowest in the country, retailers' interest in the market has grown. And those willing to take a chance on Oklahoma City have been rewarded.

Sunflower Farmers Market, for instance, opened its first metro-area store Aug. 31 at NW 63 and May Avenue. Less than a month later, the company announced plans to add a store in Edmond, set to open early next year.

Whole Foods, too, was so impressed with the response to its first store in Oklahoma City that the Austin, Texas-based company is scouting sites for a second location, said Alison Oshel, director of community redevelopment for the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber.

“We're getting a lot of looks from other grocery stores as well,” she said.

The Outlet Shoppes at Oklahoma City opened to record crowds Aug. 5 at Interstate 40 and Council Road. In its first month, sales were close to \$20 million, Oshel said. The mall is fully leased with 85 stores, many of which are new to the market.

“The opening was beyond our expectations,” said Gina Slechta, a spokeswoman for Horizon Group Properties, which owns the mall. “We think the whole state of Oklahoma and Kansas and Arkansas showed up for it.”

And Green Bambino, an eco-baby and cloth diaper store, tripled its space in a new location at 5120 N Shartel.

### Classen Curve adds names

Six new tenants opened in the Classen Curve shopping center this year, including Steven Giles men's clothing store, Carwin's Shave Shop, design firm Winter House Interiors, Black Optical eyewear, BD Home furniture store and Green Goodies cupcakes. Steven Giles and Green Goodies relocated from Nichols Hills, and Winter House Interiors moved from Northpark Mall.

Classen Curve, at Classen and NW Grand, is developed by Chesapeake Energy Corp., whose corporate campus is across the street.

## Malls thrive, too

The news has been positive at other metro-area shopping malls, such as Penn Square Mall, which remains fully leased and added three new stores this year: Apricot Lane Boutique, Fossil and Lush Fresh Handmade Cosmetics.

Quail Springs Mall added a new sit-down restaurant: HuHot Mongolian Grill, the first in the metro.

And Sooner Mall in Norman filled the spot vacated by Stein Mart in 2009 with four new retailers: Sun & Ski Sports, Jo-Ann Fabric and Craft Stores, T-Mobile and Earthbound Trading Co. (the latter two are under construction). Three other stores joined the mall's lineup: Image, Zumiez and Kitchen Collection.

Even the troubled Crossroads Mall had news this year when local investment group Raptor Properties purchased the property from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. The new owners plan to keep it as a mall.

## Wishes for the New Year

So what's in store for 2012? Oshel said to expect more high-end retailers such as Anthropologie, which is on track to open its first metro area store in January in The Triangle at Classen Curve.

An additional 14,000-square-foot building is under construction there, and its future tenants have not been announced.

The Container Store is one likely choice. Oshel said the retailer told the chamber a year ago that Oklahoma City was in its top five new markets, but the company only opens about three stores a year.

H&M, a value clothing retailer with 2,300 stores around the world, is a store the chamber is courting.

"They're giving us some indication they're interested in Oklahoma City and started to run TV ads, which is a good sign," she said. Officials also are hoping for a deal with Lululemon Athletica, a yoga clothing retailer based in Vancouver.

But don't count on any big department stores such as Neiman Marcus or Nordstrom, Oshel said.

“I think we're probably a few years from landing one of those department chains,” she said.



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