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New Hampshire retail market remains positive that the coming year will bring additional tenant interest and development

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Summer is wrapping up and as much as we hate to admit it the next season(s) will soon be here so it's time to get going on this article.

A year ago I forecast that better days are coming-and that we will start showing some real positive signs of growth: increased retail leasing, new tenants entering N.H. markets, existing tenants looking for new store locations, less store closings, ground breaking on new development projects, etc. Looking back in retrospect that was pretty much accurate. We are definitely seeing an increase in the positive signs, the economy is doing better and I predict this will continue for the fall/winter and 2013.

Landlords have figured out that in order to make deals they must be flexible, adjust (lower) base rent, and offer necessary concessions in order to make a deal. Inquiries on space has been consistent all spring and summer. Today the new "hot" tenant seems to be frozen yogurt franchises, and folks copying them. I have closed one and am working with two others.

Store openings from some of the most active tenants such as Great Clips, 5 Guys Burgers, Planet Fitness, Get in Shape for Women, Massage Envy, Aspen Dental, AutoZone and Subways seems to have slowed a bit but certainly not stopped. The same can be said for cellular, nail salons and Chinese restaurants, but I have noticed several new upscale salons.

I guess regardless of a recession people like to eat out and drink and enjoy themselves as there have been many new restaurant openings including but not limited to; Villagio Ristorante, The Farm, and 324 Grill, in Manchester, River Road Tavern, Tek-Nique, Shorty's Grill, and the Copper Door in Bedford. Pacific Fusion on DWH in Merrimack, Portland Pie, MacKenzies Restaurant & Bar, and Latin Alley Caf   in Nashua.

Jakes Wayback Burgers has opened along side Jay Gees Ice Cream on So. Broadway in Salem in the former Hooters, and Moos Place Homemade Ice Cream in N. Salem. In the seacoast The Norwood Group and The Kane Co. leased three restaurants to Thirsty Moose Taproom & Pizzeria, Le Chat Sauvage, and at the former Wings Your Way in North Hampton. Community Oven is opening in Hampton.

For the most part these are independent owner operators not casual dining chains with some exceptions. British Beer Co. took over the Chili's site, and Masa Hibachi Japanese Steakhouse just opened in the former Famous Dave's BBQ on South Willow St. At the Mall of New Hampshire Blake's Ice Cream has closed after 35 years, but a Tutti Frutti frozen yogurt franchise and Extreme Pita have opened in the food court. There will be two additional Tutti Frutti's in Nashua and Salem. Panera Bread is moving ahead to bring a bakery/caf   to Stateline Plaza in Plaistow, and Buffalo Wild Wings recently was approved for a location on Loudon Rd. in Concord.

Dunkin' Donuts continues to seek new locations in many cities and towns. Their newest Manchester location opened on Hanover and Page St. at the former Brennan's Restaurant property, and are at the planning board for a Granite St. location.

Dollar General, Family Dollar & Dollar Tree are still fighting it out trying to find sites, as is Advanced Auto, though all the low lying fruit has obviously been picked a long time ago, and there's not a heck of a lot of decent sites out there unless some new shopping centers get built or existing properties converted to retail.

There has been new bank development and openings as well. Service Credit Union now has 21 branches in N.H., eight of which are inside Wal-Marts. In Manchester Northway Bank will break ground on the triangle site at Cilley Rd., South Beech and South Willow. Laconia Savings Bank (now Bank of NH) opened their new branch on Hooksett Rd., Sovereign Bank opened at 1111 South Willow St., St. Mary's Bank opened on Perimeter Rd. and just held a groundbreaking ceremony for their new headquarters on McGregor St.

It seems that the drug stores have either taken a break or have finally reached their saturation point. The same can be said for new gas station-convenience stores although a few have been renovated.

Several retail leases of various sizes and types were completed including: Dollar General on West Hollis St., Chipotles on Amherst St., and Tuesday Morning at Westside Plaza in Nashua. Flooring America on Rte. 28, and Sylvan Learning Center, and Learning Express at North Broadway Crossing in Salem. Creative Fitness, and Gold & Diamond Traders opened at the Crossroads Mall in Londonderry. South Willow Animal Hospital & The Dance Studio opened at Manchester Commons, and Half Off Cards at Eastside Plaza in Manchester, Twice In a Lifetime Consignment in Hooksett, and Firestone Tire in Plaistow.

Title Cash has made a huge push into N.H. with stores opened in Hudson, Rochester, Salem, Plaistow, and several others opening soon. Trader Joes will soon open stores in Nashua on DWH at Webster Sq. and in Newington at the Crossings at Fox Run according to Ben Star at Atlantic Retail and Don Mace of KeyPoint Partners. West Marine held a grand opening on Lafayette Rd. in Seabrook, and Goodwill Industries signed a long term lease also on Lafayette Rd. in Portsmouth according to Kent White and Chris Young of CBRE|The Boulos Co.

The Bedford Mall has been totally renovated with the addition of Kohl's and Fresh Market. Two fast food pads are under construction, rumored to be for Starbucks and Chipotle. TCBY just announced they were re-entering the market moving into the Stop 'N Shop center across the street.

Waterstone Retail Development's Brickyard Sq. project in Epping at the intersection of Rtes. 125 and 101 has really taken off with its Phase II tenant line up including; Marshalls, Petsmart, Rue 21, Dress Barn, Michaels, Great Clips, and Famous Footwear joining Market Basket. This fall O'Neil's Cinema 12 screen stadium seating will be open.

On Rte. 101 and 114 in Bedford a mixed use development is being built consisting of the Copper Kettle restaurant, Bellwether Credit Union, and a 84 unit assisted living facility. Future plans include an office building, day care center, multi-family housing, a medical office and additional retail space. In Rochester, Great Bay Community College will be opening in the front 17,000 s/f free standing building at the Lilac Mall on Rte. 125. The Academy of Science & Design is moving to a larger facility in Nashua.

There have been some really tremendous large scale leases, and developments such as; Lord & Taylor in 122,000 s/f and ALDI'S next to Lowes in Salem. Fresh Market's first N.H. store at the

Bedford Mall, Ocean State Job Lots on Loudon Rd. in Concord. Savers and Hobby Lobby on South Willow St. and LaQuinta Inns & Suites opened on Front St. in Manchester. Tractor Supply Co. opened in Brentwood, and is under construction in Plaistow. Autozone has broken ground for a store on Amherst St. in Nashua.

Super Wal-Mart will open soon on Rte. 28 in Derry next to the abutting newly opened Goodwill Industries, Bow Meow, and Panera Bread with a drive through.

Market Basket has continued its domination of the market with new stores opened in Epping, Londonderry, Hooksett, Salem, and downtown Elm St. in Manchester, and one under construction on Rte. 114 in Bedford.

The grand daddy of them all-The Merrimack Premium Outlet Mall has opened its magnificent 100 store gem off exit 10 in Merrimack accros from Fidelity which is anticipated to generate almost 6 million annual visits. It's hard to imagine the economic effect this will bring to Southern New Hampshire over the coming years!

There are also several notable new developments already proposed for next year. John J. Flately Company has broken ground on Tara Commons and Tara Heights in Nashua which will include a retail strip center, two medical office buildings, a bank, and 180 luxury apartments.

The Shops of Londonderry, a proposed 100,000 s/f shopping center is at the Planning Board for Exit 5 at Vista Drive in Londonderry. Tuscan Kitchen will bring major changes to the Pleasant and Main St. intersection in Salem when the restaurant adds a specialty Italian market, bakery and courtyard. A plan for a bank and fast food restaurant on Tenney Mountain Hwy. is at the planning board in Plymouth. Roedel Companies is planning a major renovation and conversion to the Fairfield Inn in Merrimack.

What could be the largest development in Southern New Hampshire's history "Woodmont Orchards" for Exit 4 in Londonderry continues being discussed with the planning board and town. If/when this is approved it will be a game changer. A 1 million s/f mixed use development that would take 20 years to construct. It will be fascinating to see if this comes to fruition!

Certainly all this activity is indicative of a very healthy market with renewed activity and potential for the future. Hopefully this Holiday season we will see consumers loosening their purse strings with a renewed sense of confidence to give retailers a shot in the arm.

In summary we continue to see signs of recovery in our economy, and remain positive that the fall, winter and coming year will bring additional tenant interest, development, and prosperity for all of us in the retail leasing, management, and related services business.

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