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**Retail - COVID, electric vehicles, DoorDash and their effect on the Southern New Hampshire retail market? - by Andrew Levy**

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The retail market has certainly changed, or rather accelerated, its trajectory over the last two years! The COVID-19 pandemic, technological advancements, changes in the economy and other local, national & global events have collectively significantly affected the retail industry – for better or worse.

It wasn't long ago that the only electric cars in existence were pricey and manufactured by the upscale Tesla. These days you can buy anything from sports cars to pickup trucks in an electric, or at the very least hybrid, model. How does this affect the retail landscape? Well, if more and more cars on the road are electric what will happen to gas stations? Will they be converted to charging stations or will they just close down? And if gas stations close down, what happens to the convenience stores attached to them? Who will supply us with our Doritos, Diet Pepsi and Powerball tickets?

Speaking of Doritos and Diet Pepsi – Instacart, DoorDash, UberEats and GrubHub have taken off exponentially. Some of these services aren't reserved just for restaurant pick-up and drop-off, either. Now you can have anything from a nice Italian dinner to some eye drops, a shower curtain and a pint of ice cream delivered to your door within the hour.

There was a point last year where it seemed like COVID-19 was going away, and then this new Omicron Variant emerged throwing the country back into a tailspin of vaccinations, booster shots, mask mandates, etc. After a spike in cases in NH mid-January, we have steadily been seeing a decrease in the number of new daily cases. Vaccine and mask mandates are being lifted, events are being put on and stores are being shopped at.

Now, it seems the biggest threat to consumers is rising inflation (7.5+% - the highest since 1982) and mortgage interest rate hikes, on top of higher gasoline and oil prices and sticker shock at the supermarket. Additionally, though we have low unemployment rates, businesses from factories to fast food can't find enough help to sustain current demand, let alone growth. The lack of both workforce housing and affordable housing for first time homebuyers is stifling growth and needs to be addressed immediately.

In regards to retail - although we have seen some store closures, many shopping centers have still been able to infill vacant units in a reasonable amount of time. Crumbl' Cookies opened their second Nashua location in the former Huntington Learning Center on Amherst St. Patel Brothers has opened in the former JC Penney Home Store on Daniel Webster Hwy. Apple Tree Shopping Center in Londonderry now has all units up and running with the opening of Jersey Mike's (who also opened in Plaistow on Rte. 125). Wrap City also opened up two new locations – one at the Nashua Mall on Coliseum Ave. in Nashua and the other at Hood Commons in Derry.

Hooksett Village Shops on Rte. 3 recently was sold and in Concord, Steeplegate Mall will be moving several tenants to make room for a yet-to-be-announced new tenant. At the end of 2021 Sleep Number opened a free-standing retail location and just down the street BJs opened their new gas station. In early February, Seth Dichard Golf Schools opened on Lowell Rd. in Hudson. Amazon

Fresh continues to be under construction both on Daniel Webster Hwy. and Amherst St. with no word as to when they will open.

In Bedford, Tuckers has opened at the former Outback Steakhouse and Pressed Café has begun construction in front of Target and Lowes on South River Rd. Tuscan Village has most recently added Sleep Number, Chase and Chick-Fil-A to their roster. It doesn't appear that there are any new shopping center developments on the horizon, there are several new apartment complexes under construction and/or recently approved and it appears that some will have a small mixed use/retail component to them.

After successfully fully leasing Apple Tree Shopping Center in Londonderry, Berkshire Hathaway Verani Realty has taken on the leasing assignment for the recently purchased Belknap Mall (new name to-be-determined) in Belmont, which will be undergoing a complete overhaul by the new owner. Verani Realty has successfully fully-leased three shopping centers in the last year, and aims to do the same with Belknap Mall.

Coming off of a strong first quarter, my forecast for the spring in Southern New Hampshire is that retail will be incredibly vibrant!

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