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Robin Buckson / The Detroit News

Parisian anchors The Mall at Partridge Creek in Clinton Township, which also offers lavish common areas.

New mall fires up shopping war

Nathan Hurst / The Detroit News

CLINTON TOWNSHIP -- Metro Detroit's newest mall, opening Thursday on a bustling stretch of Hall Road, isn't just revving up consumers eager for a new place to spend free time and extra cash.

The Mall at Partridge Creek also is forcing other shopping centers in the region to get more aggressive by spiffing up their properties, adding amenities and attracting new stores to grow customer interest in a market that's already well saturated in many areas with diverse retail offerings.

Jaclyn Benninger, 19, of Livonia said malls have a lot to live up to for shoppers like her.

Benninger, who showed up early in the morning for the opening of the new wing at Twelve Oaks last month, said she's considering doing the same for the debut of Partridge Creek.

While she's excited about some of Partridge Creek's new stores, a return visit to the mall will happen only if she's truly impressed, she said.

"Malls have to set themselves apart," Benninger said. "Many of them have the same stores and look the same. I'm looking for somewhere that's got it all -- the stores, easy parking and a nice setting. There's always going to be something new and better coming along."

Taubman Centers Inc., the Bloomfield Hills-based developer behind Partridge Creek, is touting the center as the answer to a longtime lack of upscale retail stores in Macomb County.

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But its reach is expected by many experts to draw shoppers from all over Metro Detroit and beyond, making other malls' efforts to stay on the forefront of retail trends even more important.

Creating more appealing interiors and beefing up the listings on the mall directories aren't the only ways shopping centers are vying to remain competitive in Metro Detroit. Shopping center managers said they are increasingly focusing on customer service, safety and cleanliness to keep up with area's most upscale offerings. That means customers can expect valet parking at some entrances, along with a greater number of helpful faces at the mall information booths, which at many properties remained empty except during busy periods, like the holiday season.

Consumers can look to enjoy the fruits of retail competition for years to come, according to a recent report on planned shopping-centric projects in Metro Detroit by the International Council of Shopping Centers. Economists there say the region will see \$1 billion worth of new malls and other retail developments within the next few years.

Overhauled malls

At some malls, such as Lakeside in Sterling Heights -- two miles west of Partridge Creek -- the effort to keep current and looking cool to shoppers has turned into a regional renovation effort.

A redevelopment plan approved recently by the Sterling Heights City Council would pour \$3 million of public money collected through a special tax into upgrading roads, sidewalks, landscaping and signage in and around Lakeside Mall. The project also would seek to more firmly establish the branding of a "Lakeside District" for the community.

Other centers have undergone major renovations in recent years, as well, including Taubman's Fairlane Town Center in Dearborn and Twelve Oaks Mall in Novi, which unveiled a new wing complete with Metro Detroit's newest Nordstrom department store and dozens of smaller retailers late last month, making it one of the largest such centers in the state.

Troy's Somerset Collection mall, long the *piece de resistance* of Metro Detroit retail centers, has worked hard to maintain its immaculate image in the face of increased competition as well. Somerset's management has focused on playing host to a number of luxury-branded stores making their Michigan debuts, as well as encouraging big-name stores already calling the mall home to expand.

Recent additions include bluemercury, a high-priced apothecary, and Allen Edmonds, a high-end shoe and accessory store. Coming in the next few months will be boutiques for fashion-forward designer lines such as Salvatore Ferragamo, Michael Kors and Lauren by Ralph Lauren.

The Lauren store will be the first in the world, a company spokesman said. Louis Vuitton will debut its bigger boutique at Somerset next spring, while St. Croix will open in an expanded space at the center in February.



Todd McInturf / The Detroit News

Kelly Porcaro shops at Lakeside Mall, two miles west of the Partridge Creek site. Sterling Heights recently approved a redevelopment plan around the mall. See full image

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Sprucing up

Area malls are upgrading to maintain their appeal. Here are some of the steps they've taken:

Fairlane Town Center

Dearborn

Attracting new-to-Michigan tenants, it completed renovations earlier this year.

Lakeside Mall

Sterling Heights

Mall area is slated to receive many tax-driven renovation projects to compete with Partridge Creek.

Twelve Oaks

Novi

Major renovation and expansion completed and unveiled last month; added more than 30 new stores plus a Nordstrom.

Somerset Collection

Troy

It has many new-to-Michigan offerings, store expansions and renovations.

Great Lakes Crossing

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New H&M store opened in June, taking former anchor tenant spot.

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Somerset Collection , Troy

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Great Lakes Crossing , Auburn Hills

New H&M store opened in June, taking former

Rush to be freshest, newest

Area retail analysts have said the recent infusion of new retail -- especially stores in the upper-middle, upscale and luxury realms -- is filling gaps, geographical and socioeconomic, in the region's shopping offerings.

The band of new stores and shopping centers also is fueling a rush to be the freshest and newest mall in the region, a battle that arguably won't end anytime soon.

Ken Dalto, a Farmington Hills-based consultant, said Partridge Creek will most greatly affect Lakeside Mall, its closest major competition.

"Partridge Creek definitely has set the bar higher for others in the region, particularly on the east side, which hasn't seen anything new in so long," Dalto said. "But you also have to look at what kind of stores are going in there. Sure, they're going to skim off some of the higher-end business from Lakeside and a few others, but I honestly don't think they're going to take the thunder away from Somerset."

But Dalto said it's unlikely shopping centers on the west side and Downriver will feel much of an effect from the opening of Partridge Creek.

Peggy Mueller, 42, of Novi said the upgraded Twelve Oaks satiated her need for new stores, but not her hunger for certain brands. So while she enjoys perusing the women's shoe department at Nordstrom in Novi, she'll still be making the drive to Somerset.

"They always have the newest and the nicest," Mueller said. "That's something I've always noticed about them. It's the one place you can really get a big city collection of brands."

Catering to consumers

Shopping centers also have become more aware of how consumers perceive their look.

At Fairlane in Dearborn, managers were so concerned about the empty space left by Lord & Taylor that a wall was built separating the lifeless space from the rest of the center while renovations and construction continue on the former Saks Off Fifth wing, which closed after that store shut its doors for good last year.

Dalto said that comes as little surprise to him, as shoppers have come to expect a greater level of polish to their shopping experience in the midst of greater competition.

At Partridge Creek, that common area opulence is taking the form of a fireplace-lit center court, children's play equipment, bocce courts and amenities for dogs, which are allowed in the center.

"These are things people expect now," Dalto said. "People who shop at these types of malls, which are generally one step below real luxury malls, are very much about the experience and feeling rich while they're shopping."

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