

Changes a hit at Peoria Business Showcase

BY STEVE TARTER
OF THE JOURNAL STAR

PEORIA — This year's Business Showcase at the Peoria Civic Center opted for afternoon snacks over the power breakfast.

Both exhibitors and those attending the annual business expo responded well to the new afternoon format, said Sarah Stabler, director of member services for the Peoria Area Chamber of Commerce, the group sponsoring the event.

"It's all about business connections. People seemed to like the new format," she said.

The showcase ran from 3 to 7 p.m. Wednesday. It featured a number of food vendors, including the Butcher Block Steakhouse & Grill in Junction City Shopping Center. Chef and general manager Dustin Allen was handing out samples at the expo.

"We've got some new stuff in the works — things that are new to Peoria that you'll hear more about later," he said.

New stuff is a big part of the showcase. Janice Wong and Susan Scott of Scott Creations LLC displayed new luxury handbags that Scott recently designed.

"We're here to create awareness for the brand. The Versetta collection was a huge hit with both men and women at the Consumer Electronics Show at Las Vegas earlier this year," said Scott of the designer handbags with pockets that accommodate an iPad or other tablet device.

Also new is the name that the MassMutual Financial Group is adopting: WestPoint Financial Group, said Casey Johnson, a partner with Matt Milburn on the new venture. The group will make a formal announcement at an open house from 5 to 7 p.m. May 19 at 401 Water St., said Emily West, business development coordinator.

WestPoint also looks to hire 18 people by the end of the year, she said.

Also hiring is the State Bank of Speer, which looks to expand this year, said Jay Glatz, vice president of marketing.

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Maxine's damaged by fire

MORTON — A fire early Wednesday in a downtown building being renovated for a new restaurant caused an estimated \$60,000 damage.

Morton Fire Chief Joe Kelley said Maxine's on Main, 208 N. Main St., was scheduled to open in about three weeks. The building, owned by Robert and Joan Dittmer, formerly housed the Mustard Seed restaurant.

Firefighters responding to the scene shortly after 2:20 a.m. saw smoke and fire coming out of the building's second-floor windows in the back of the two-story structure.

While the fire was contained primarily to the second floor and attic, Kelley said, there is smoke and water damage throughout the building.

"The cause of the fire is under investigation, but it appears to have been accidental," he said.

It took firefighters about 45 minutes to contain the blaze. About 15 firefighters responded. There were no injuries.



PURCHASE THIS PHOTO AT PJSTAR.COM

LESLIE RENKEN/JOURNAL STAR

The building that once housed a Denny's restaurant near Westlake Shopping Center is being demolished to make way for a new commercial development.

Making way for developments

Abandoned buildings torn down; plans for new shopping center in works

BY JOHN SHARP
OF THE JOURNAL STAR

PEORIA — Years after the last Grand Slam breakfast was served at Denny's on Lake Avenue next to Interstate 74, the building has finally come down.

The abandoned building was demolished Monday so the developers of a commercial project between I-74 and Westlake Shopping Center could start their work.

Eric Heard, a real estate agent with Peoria's Coldwell Banker Commercial Devonshire Realty, said Wednesday the project is a two-phase development that includes a shopping center.

The shopping center, Heard said, will be located where a Burger King restaurant once stood. That building was torn down after the eatery closed, about the time of the Upgrade 74 project in 2004.

Heard said there are three tenants, including one restaurant, that will go into the 5,500-square-foot shopping center, expected to be built by August.

He declined to name the three businesses that were planning to move into the center.

No tenant has been lined up for the former Denny's property, Heard said.

Getting the old restaurant torn down has been a long process, largely because of complicated land leases on the property, Heard said.

"At one time, there were four different interests in

New commercial development

The first of a two-phase development next to Westlake Shopping Center will be completed by August with the development of a three-tenant commercial building where a Burger King restaurant once stood. The second phase is to redevelop the site where Denny's once stood. The former Denny's restaurant, which stood abandoned for years, was demolished Monday.



KEY:
■ Area of new development



Renderings courtesy Caldwell Banker Commercial Devonshire Realty

that property," he said. "It was more complicated than you think it would be."

Les Cohen, one of the owners of Westlake and president of Cohen Development Co., said the projects are "all a part of the redevelopment" of the area around Westlake, which has seen its own renaissance in recent years.

Cohen also announced

that Safelite AutoGlass at Westlake Shopping Center will open soon inside a former muffler shop that is located next to the former Denny's.

"It's a good service industry and will, at least, beautify that building," Cohen said.

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AMEREN

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is necessary to provide the energy for that area of town," Johnson said.

At-large City Councilman Ryan Spain said the city and Ameren Illinois should talk about the possibilities of relocating the substation to an area that "is more reserved."

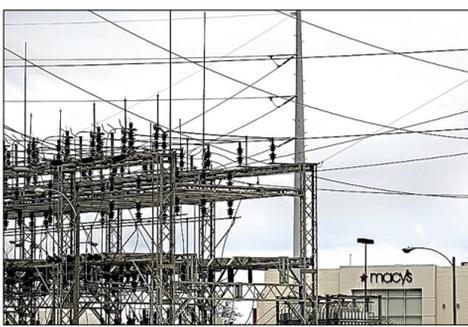
"I don't know what the answer is, but I appreciate Councilman Spears' (bringing up) the issue," Spain said.

Johnson said it would "cost millions of dollars" to relocate the substation.

At-large City Councilman Eric Turner said it's unfair to make Ameren Illinois pay too much money to dress up the substation at a time when companies are facing cutbacks. He, too, said he was unaware of any previous concerns over the appearance of the substation.

"You just don't spring it up on them overnight," Turner said about the beautification requests. "Companies just don't have the kind of money to go in and beautify a property when there won't be any returns on that investment."

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LESLIE RENKEN/JOURNAL STAR

Fourth District Peoria City Councilman Bill Spears says the Ameren Illinois substation next to Northwoods Mall is an eyesore. An Ameren spokesman says the company is to work with the city and address Spears' concerns.

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Central Illinoisans sing for 'X Factor'

Day full of ups and downs for local contestants at Chicago-area auditions

BY DANIELLE HATCH
OF THE JOURNAL STAR



TERRA EDGELL
CALEB HOPKINS

PEORIA — The two central Illinoisans who won a chance to try out for Simon Cowell's new talent show spent an hour waiting in the freezing rain early Tuesday morning in Hoffman Estates before getting a few moments in front of a producer.

Neither Terra Edgell, 34, of Washington nor Caleb Hopkins, 20, of Loda advanced in the "X Factor" competition, but they said they appreciated the chance to try out.

"It was definitely an experience, a great opportunity," said Edgell by telephone from the limousine that was shuttling her home Wednesday afternoon. "I'm disappointed and bummed out and sad, but I definitely feel like it was an accomplishment to do this, and I'm grateful."

Edgell and Hopkins performed with 110 other contestants April 16 at "The X Factor" Audition Pass Contest at Tower Park in Peoria Heights. By winning the Heights contest, they earned a chance to perform at the auditions for "The X Factor," which is Cowell's new Fox talent show, expected to debut in September.

The two, along with a handful of friends and family, were whisked up to Hoffman Estates by limousine on Tuesday night. They had to be at the Sears Centre by 6 a.m. Wednesday. Both were a bit sleep-deprived; Edgell said nerves kept her

awake, and Hopkins, who works nights at a hospital registering patients for the emergency room, struggled with an out-of-whack sleep schedule.

Edgell, a music teacher at Amie's Music Together in Washington, texted the Journal Star at 6:59 a.m.: "Standing in the rain getting soaked ... ugh! ... lines ... waiting ... arrgh!"

After waiting an hour in the rain, they were herded inside, where they waited to perform individually in booths separated by curtains. Edgell said she heard about 9,000 or 10,000 other hopefuls were trying out.

"There were people singing all around, it was mass chaos. Very loud, very noisy. It was very rushed," Edgell said.

Hopkins, who sang "God Bless America," then an excerpt of "You Raise Me Up," said the day amounted to an emotional roller coaster.

"We were very excited coming in, and then had to wait in the freezing rain for an hour," he said. "We got excited once we were inside, then we got rejected. Up, down. Up, down. But it was a very interesting experience. I'm not going to give up (on a singing career), I'm going to keep trying."

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