

# Buckeye Shopping Plaza Gets Makeover, Primed for Success

By Grant Segall

Waiting her turn to enter Key Bank, La'shawna Ford scans a repaved stretch of the parking lot at the Shoppes at Buckeye. "It looks a lot better," she says. "It's not bumpy as it was."

Across the lot, Joe Ashkar says business is picking up at his Cajun Joe's due to stimulus checks and also improvements by the shopping center's new owner, Adam Lubkin of Ibis Development Group in Miami, Florida. "People will come to a place when it looks nice," says Ashkar, a long-time tenant of the 31-year-old center at 11301-11501 Buckeye Rd.

At Lee's Beauty Supply, Heeja Lee says of the center, "It's really looking good." She says of Lubkin, "He's a really good owner."

The Floridian Lubkin is big on Buckeye. He sees potential along Buckeye Road, with its wide views and short drives to Shaker Square, University Circle, and downtown. He likes recent improvements,

including the expansion of Edwins Leadership & Restaurant Institute and progress on the intersecting Opportunity Corridor. And he likes plans for more, including Benedictine High School's \$4.5 million campaign to upgrade the campus and Cleveland's \$6.2 million project starting next year to repave and landscape the road.

"The future of Buckeye is fantastic," Lubkin says.

Besides the Shoppes at Buckeye, Ibis owns Kennywood Shops outside Pittsburgh and three shopping centers in Florida and Massachusetts. "My focus is finding neighborhood centers like Buckeye, where I can really improve not only the center but the community."

The community seems pleased. "Improvements at Buckeye Plaza have been appreciated by the residents," says Michelle Bandy-Zalatoris, who has studied the Buckeye corridor for the city. "This is an important commercial hub for the neighborhood, and reinvestment in the property has been long overdue."

The Shoppes at Buckeye have 116,905 square feet of stores on 9.32 acres. Lubkin bought the place two Decembers ago from Slate Asset Management of Toronto, Canada, for a net \$4.5 million.

Last year, he repaved most of the parking lot, installed bright lights, cut back trees encroaching on the lot, added landscaping and wheelchair ramps, and created some short-term and dedicated parking spaces. He introduced a logo with a buckeye for the center. He repainted the main building from a brown mustard color to a light beige called linen. He renovated an outbuilding for Ace Cash Express. He hired Signal 88 security. He won a permit for a big new sign.



Debra Walker, left, and Heeja Lee, both employees of Heeja Lee's family-owned Lee's Beauty Supply.



Cajun Joe's owner Joe Ashkar, seated in front of his business, says he sees business picking up due to stimulus checks and improvements made by the new owner of the shopping center.

He says he's spent about \$500,000 so far and will spend some \$250,000 more this year. He plans to finish repaving, raise the sign, and landscape around it. He also hopes eventually for another outbuilding.

He says the center is 87 percent occupied, and he's weighing many offers to fill it up. He says business is way up at his anchor store,

Simon's Supermarket, and his smaller stores too.

He also says that several tenants have spruced up their premises. "Whenever I fix up any of these places, people step up and make their spaces look really good."

Lubkin says he's looking to buy other shopping centers in Cleveland and beyond.



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