

Gwinnett Place Mall, CID officials react to closing of J.C. Penney store

Store closure expected by April 4; to impact 69 employees

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JCPenney at Gwinnett Place Mall

J.C. Penney officials have released additional details regarding the closure of the Gwinnett Place Mall store.

On Friday, J.C. Penney communications manager Sarah Holland indicated the Duluth store will close on or about April 4, 2015.

"We continually evaluate our store portfolio to determine whether there's a need to close or relocate under-performing stores," Holland wrote in an email to the Daily Post. "Reviews such as these are essential in meeting our long-term goals for future company growth. While it's never an easy decision to close stores, especially due to the impact on our valued associates and customers, we feel this is a necessary business decision."

According to Holland, 69 associates will be affected by the closure of the Gwinnett Place Mall location. Associates who do not remain with the company will receive separation benefits and, when possible, the company will assist those associates in identifying job opportunities at nearby stores.

"Additionally, we're offering all associates an on-site career training class," she added. "The class will assist associates in writing

resumes, filling out applications, answering interview questions and more."

Shawl Pryor of Moonbeam Capital Investments, which operates Gwinnett Place Mall, said the company is currently working to determine future plans for the soon-to-be-vacated space. Pryor said company officials were not notified directly about the closure and only learned of it through media reports. J.C. Penney was one of the four major retailers left at the mall. Now only Mega Mart, Sears and Macy's remain.

Thursday's closure announcement followed upbeat news released earlier this week in which J.C. Penney reported a slight increase in sales during the holiday shopping season. According to the Jan. 6 press release, preliminary data indicates sales growth of 3.7 percent during the 9-week November and December period over the same time last year.

"Our highest priority over the last year has been to restore profitable sales growth at J.C. Penney," said Myron E. (Mike) Ullman, III, chief executive officer, in a released statement. "This holiday season was instrumental in that effort and our teams delivered. I would like to thank our associates for their hard work, warrior spirit and commitment to delivering an exceptional customer experience every day. Customers clearly responded to our combination of great merchandise and compelling promotions this holiday season. We are proud of these results, and believe the work we are doing will fuel the continued growth of our business."

That growth, however, will not include the 40 stores nationwide expected to close this spring, nor the 2,250 associates whose jobs will be eliminated.

While J.C. Penney's departure is disappointing for mall officials and those in the surrounding area, Joe Allen, executive director of the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District (CID), remains optimistic about the future.

"Of course we're disappointed, but we see it as an opportunity for the mall to do great things with that property," he said.

Allen emphasized the area is experiencing ongoing revitalization and economic growth including the addition of 450 new jobs within the past year. The area's best days, he said, still lie ahead.

"Gwinnett Place is still the strategic heart of Gwinnett County," Allen added.

Gwinnett County Planning Commission Chairman Chuck Warbington, who heads the nearby Gwinnett Village CID, is also upbeat about the direction the area is heading.

"Leaders in the County know the importance of the greater Gwinnett Place area to the future success of our community and are working on a redevelopment plan and vision for the future," he said. "While the loss of a retail establishment will temporarily leave a gap in the area, I am excited about the future possibilities of the greater Gwinnett Place area due to its location, existing infrastructure, and international flare."

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