
Mason plans big high-risedevelopment

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One of metro Atlanta's most influential developers wants to create a "mini Atlantic Station" in the Gwinnett Place mall area.

Wayne Mason plans to recast two nearly empty shopping centers in the heart of the retail district with high-rise condos and upscale stores. It could be a smaller version of Atlantic Station, the midtown area mixed-use redevelopment that has brought acclaim to the city of Atlanta.

Mason recently purchased 42 acres on Pleasant Hill Road, which includes a vacant Kroger, for \$24.7 million. He bought the land with several Asian investors. It sits in a triangle formed by Pleasant Hill Road, Satellite Boulevard and Old Norcross Road. The site contains two retail centers — Gwinnett Prado and Gwinnett Station.

A long time coming

Bob Williamson this week took home Gwinnett's top award for small business owners.

It was the pinnacle of an arduous climb to entrepreneurial stardom for the founder of Horizon Software International in Loganville.

Almost 35 years ago, Williamson hitchhiked to Atlanta so poor he had to donate a pint of blood just to earn \$7.

He later hooked on with Glidden Paints and saw a way to save the company thousands of dollars, displaying the smarts and creativity that propelled him into management and that eventually enabled him to launch several businesses of his own.

When he stood before a few hundred of his peers this past Thursday to accept the Gwinnett Small Business Person of the Year Award, he said, naturally, "One of the most important ingredients a business person should have is persistence."

Full speed ahead

Commuter rail from Athens to Atlanta continues to gain momentum.

Emory University in Atlanta has pledged nearly \$50,000 to the Georgia Brain Train Group, an alliance of political, business and academic leaders backing the plan.

Emory's donation will help the Brain Train educate the public on the benefits of the passenger rail line, said E.H. Culpepper, an Athens-area business leader who's helping spearhead the plan.

The energy behind the nearly 20-year commuter rail effort "is at its highest point yet," Culpepper said.

Staff Writer Bryan Brooks contributed to this column.

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