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Duluth Asian project kicks off

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Asian Centre Development broke ground Wednesday morning on a 431,000-square-foot Asian-themed shopping center on the site of what was to have been Wayne Mason's \$700 million mixed-use Global Station project.

The 42-acre project at Pleasant Hill Road between Old Norcross Road and Satellite Boulevard in Duluth continues a trend of Asian-branded retail development in the area around Gwinnett Place mall. The project will be located on the site of the Gwinnett Prado and Gwinnett Station shopping centers, both of which are largely vacant.

Other nearby Asian-themed projects include the renovation of a former Wal-Mart shopping center on Pleasant Hill Road by Rhee Bros. Inc. for its Assi Plaza brand. Korean retailer MegaMart also plans to enter the U.S. market with a nearly 270,000-square-foot store called M Marketplace at Gwinnett Place. Numerous other Asian retailers already occupy space around the mall, an area that has a significant Asian population and business community.

The development means that all of the large, vacant retail centers in the Gwinnett Place area will be filled, said Joe Allen, executive director of the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District.

"Most everything else is filling or if it does have empty spaces, it's part of the normal retail cycle," he said.

Ken Kee, project manager for the development, did not respond to e-mailed questions about the scope of construction at the project, the center's projected opening or its cost by deadline for this edition.

But Allen said it was his understanding that much of the existing shopping centers will be retained and refurbished.

Asian Centre's project, called Asian Galleria, will include Dong Fang International Supermarket, Dong Fang Palace Restaurant, Apparel Mart, a bank, furniture store and an existing fitness center and office store, according to documents supplied by Kee.

Gwinnett investor Wayne Mason once owned the land, on which developers planned as many as 10 office and condominium towers. But Mason pulled the plug on the project in July 2007 after Asian investors were unable to secure financing for development.

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