

Omaha is a city that sits at one of the endpoints of this economic development cycle. For years it has fought the negative image that it was just another small town lost in the heartland. The city has adopted pro-growth policies for years, and now, is finally reaping the benefits. Many retailers have upgraded Omaha from a third-tier city to a second-tier city, putting it in the same league as other midwestern middle markets.

"They [retailers] are all starting to recognize that Omaha is a place where they need to be," says Winsley Durand III, director of retail attracting with the Omaha Chamber of Commerce. "And part of that is because Omaha has a higher-than-average disposable income and a lower-than-average cost-of-living."

Omaha's efforts started with the city making the rounds at the various International Council of Shopping Centers shows and conventions, as well as mounting advertising campaigns, to raise awareness about the city.



Aksarben Village, a 72-acre mixed-use development located in Omaha, Nebraska, will contain approximately 100,000 square feet of retail.

"For a long time, we've been fighting the image that we're just out on the Plains," Durand says.

Once people started moving in, the goal became to supply these new residents with the retail they wanted. Growth in Omaha for the past few years has been focused on greenfield development on the western side and the suburban periphery, but with the new urbanism movement taking hold, the city is turning to its urban core for development.

The most talked about project lately has been the \$300 million Midtown Crossing at Turner Park, a project that many see as the catalyst for growth in the Midtown area. When completed in fall 2009, the development will feature 220,000 square feet of restaurant, retail and entertainment space, in addition to the 600 residential units planned.

North of that is the 72-acre Aksarben Village. Developed by Noddle Companies, the mixed-use development will feature retail, office, residential and entertainment components, and is set to transform the North Downtown area into an entertainment destination in the city. The development will contain 100,000 square feet of retail space, as well as a multi-screen theater and a fitness center.

The high-growth areas in suburbs are remaining active, though. RED Development's shopping centers, the 880,000-square-foot Shadow Lake Towne Center and the 650,000-square-foot Village Pointe, are continuing to see success in the southern and western markets, respectively. Sorensen Park Plaza, a 550,000-square-foot, Target-anchored development currently under construction, is also seeking to bring retail options to the residential western side of the city.

With development seemingly in all corners of Omaha, the city noticed that the north end of town had been left out of much of the growth cycle. The city recently completed a North Omaha growth study that seeks to foster growth in an area that has been lacking.

The city is also in the process of hiring an executive director to implement some of the study's findings, as well as oversee the growth of the corridor. With all of the development occurring in the city, Omaha is finally receiving the credit it deserves.

"With the retail market being kind of a small, close-knit community, the word is getting out that Omaha is the place to be," Durand says.

While different cities implement different strategies, all are working toward the common goal of bringing retailers to places that are often overlooked in favor of larger markets. Whether it is through a chamber of commerce, an economic development department or independent consultants, each of the cities is trying to establish itself as a place where retailers can come to and thrive. Many of these efforts are proving to be successful, and retailers are finally taking notice that the Midwest contains many untapped markets ready for retail.