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## Granger's Heritage Square 85 percent filled



A shopper braves the elements Friday at Heritage Square shopping center in Granger. Tribune Photo/MARCUS MARTER

By HEIDI PRESCOTT *Tribune columnist*

A Granger shopping center owner has signed a lease with a fast-growing national retailer. The news indicates that value-oriented companies continue to consider our region for their stores as they expand.

Charming Charlie, a Texas-based company that focuses on women's fashion jewelry and accessories, is expected to open an 11,000-square-foot shop at Heritage Square, the Martin's-based center at Cleveland and Gumwood roads, in March.

The store will be located in spaces formerly pegged for a Brooks Brother store and Ann Taylor, which went to University Park Mall.

Charming Charlie will be equivalent in size to a Walgreens, stocking what sounds like an overwhelming number of products -- about 20,000 items including necklaces, earrings, scarves, belts and purses. But the way the store is color-coded, customers can easily navigate the store and find what they need to match an outfit.

There's a red section and a green section and a pink section, for example. And while there may be some overlap with items you'd expect to find at Claire's stores, Charming Charlie's core customers are women 25 to 54. Prices range from about \$5 to \$80. "In a down economy, life still goes on and people get married, you interview for jobs, you go to work, and you attend baby showers," says Patty Fadhouli, director of marketing at Charming Charlie.

"We are the right price point and the right product, and we can help a woman who buys her outfit at Coldwater (Creek) finish her accessories here," she says, referring to one of the nearby Heritage Square tenants.

With the addition of Charming Charlie, and the upcoming move of local restaurant Uptown Kitchen (see below) to the center, Heritage Square will be 85 percent leased. The center recently lost Sugarberry Lane gift shop, which had opened a second area location there.

Leasing has taken much, much longer than expected.

"We anticipated the first year to have the center 95 percent occupied, and then everything went the wrong way," said Manette Tepe, senior vice president of development for Holladay Properties, the South Bend-based owner of the center that opened in fall 2006. And with vacant retail space available

just about everywhere shoppers look, the competition for tenants has been heightened.

"Oh my gosh, it's very important to find those (businesses) that are expanding," Tepe says. "It's tight out there. Now they are looking again, but they're looking at prime spaces that were vacated for some reason. There's too much vacancy and too much good space available."

Because retailers scaled back on expansion plans, Heritage Square has courted and brought in some nontraditional shopping center tenants. Businesses like Edward Jones and Scottrade.

Nontraditional leasing is a trend that is happening not just here, but nationwide.

"The grocery store aspect warrants the development to include service providers in addition to traditional retailers," Tepe said about their grocery-anchored center. At the same time, Holladay has been very careful when presented with opportunities to court nontraditional users. Tepe says the leasing team spends a lot of time considering how a particular nontraditional tenant would affect the overall center.

Many questions are asked: Does the tenant promote cross-shopping? Would the business negatively impact an existing or future retailer? Is the tenant a "neutral" nontraditional user? And would the business bring a new customer into the center?

"So when you have someone out there prospecting and looking to expand, they go for the best spaces and do a deal that is pretty tough," Tepe says about retailers like Charming Charlie. "Fortunately, they are expanding all over the country and there's nothing like it in our market. It will bring a lot of life and activity to the center, complementing the current retailers who are there."

### **Uptown Kitchen gets ready for move**

Jonathan Lutz says it won't be long now. He anticipates closing his current Uptown Kitchen location at Toscana Park three to five days before the new location now under construction at Heritage Square opens, so equipment and furnishings can be moved. Uptown will be located across from Gino's East.

"We will absolutely be open by Feb. 1 at Heritage Square," Lutz says. Many changes have been made to the new location, which The Basket plans to feature in an upcoming column. **Have you heard?**

St. Joseph County officials say the activity that motorists have noticed at the southeast corner of Cleveland Road and Capital Avenue are for a driveway into a site where a developer has been planning to locate a gasoline station and convenience store. We're working on finding out more. ... A reminder that Flat Top Grill, which was featured in Friday's column, officially opens at 11 a.m. Monday at University Park Mall, Mishawaka. Flat Top is a Chicago-based restaurant company that features create-your-own stir-fry. ... Join us for our next live chat about retail and restaurants at noon Tuesday.

**Heidi Prescott's column runs on Fridays and Sundays. When she's not shopping, contact her at [hprescott@sbtinfo.com](mailto:hprescott@sbtinfo.com) or 574-235-6070. You can also check out her blog at [www.southbendtribune.com](http://www.southbendtribune.com) and [Facebook.com/thebasket](https://www.facebook.com/thebasket).**