

Baldwin Bulletin

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136 S. Wayne St. Milledgeville, GA, 31061

Baldwin Bulletin, Thursday, September 12, 2013, Chistian McKearney

The landscape of the new Kroger shopping center is set to change, as construction will begin next month on a new strip mall on the southwestern side of the property.

More than half of the 14,600-square-foot strip mall already has been leased. Already on board are Biba's Italian Restaurant, Great Clips, Avalon Nails and Oconee Primary Care, which is a local doctors' group. Biba's will be one of the anchor tenants and will occupy the space closest to Kroger. Biba's currently has two locations in suburban Atlanta and one in Chattanooga. The prices at Biba's apparently will be cheaper than other Italian-based restaurants in Milledgeville.

According to its menu, all of its dinner pastas are less than \$10, while none of its subs are more than \$7. The average price of appetizers is somewhere between \$6 and \$7. Biba's will feature outdoor patio seating. "We feel really good that we have some quality and exciting tenants," said Robby Boggs, a partner with Sofran, the development company that's managing the Kroger property. "We're building some momentum and look forward to growth in the future."

Earlier this year, Shane's Rib Shack, another Atlanta-based restaurant, had plans of opening a restaurant in the Kroger shopping center. That's no longer the plan, however, according to Boggs. "Shane's is no longer focused on Milledgeville, at least not in the near future. They decided to slow down some of their growth and expansion," Boggs said.

In late 2010, the development group in charge of the new Kroger project on US 441 finalized its plans for the new shopping center. The new Kroger grocery store would be built at the same time as several outlying businesses and strip malls.

By the middle of 2011, however, the development company was receiving very few bites from businesses who wished to locate in the new shopping center. So, the plans were changed and the construction of the outparcels was postponed. Kroger eventually opened in October 2011, and business began booming. "We decided to let Kroger go first and establish itself and build momentum. And, Kroger has done great, and their business is great. Right now, we feel as if the economy is beginning to turn around and now is a good time to begin new construction," said Robby Boggs, a partner with Sofran, the development company that's managing the Kroger property.

The Kroger shopping center actually was designed with a total of 250,000 square feet of retail space, including a 65,000-square-foot "big box" space and another 30,000 square foot "big box" space (think Target, Dick's Sporting Goods or Best Buy). The development company could never get another "big box" retailer to commit, however, which further threw a wrench into the original plans.

Now, however, the development group feels the economy is turning the corner and the market is right