

# Property Management

## Old West evolves into new town

**G**one are the days of gunfights on Main Street at high noon. But the spirit and personality of these old Western towns lives on in the most recent development trend of mixed-use lifestyle centers.

Trends in the retail market have changed dramatically since the days of the old Western towns. Open-air markets and Main Street-style shopping dominated the retail scene up until the mid-1950s. This shopping was located downtown in the "town center," a mixed-use shopping destination, built with the flavor of several different builders, designers, and owners. Then, as cars became more popular and people moved to the suburbs, retail followed and the first indoor "regional mall" was born.

As the suburbs and accompanying malls grew, downtown areas increasingly were neglected. While indoor regional malls still had a local appeal, the shift into the new millennium saw the retail industry start to make significant changes. Lifestyle centers, another name for mixed-use retail developments, came on the scene. Gentrification of the downtown areas in many cities soon followed. In an attempt to keep up with the lifestyle center trend, indoor regional malls began to add comparable amenities such as those found at the Vistas, the newest addition to Park Meadows mall in Lone Tree.

Historically, as cities spread they grew into one another without an established town center and little sense of community. People relied on



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impersonal strip malls to do their shopping or a drive to the nearest regional mall. Realizing this, today's developers looked to fill the need for a center of community activity as well as

commerce. A prime example of this new development style is Southlands in Aurora. Created by Alberta Development Partners, Southlands is the town center that south Aurora residents never had.

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So what sets these mixed-use lifestyle center projects apart from the indoor shopping malls? Aside from becoming the town's center, they provide a sense of community and a place for people to socialize. Current research shows that suburbanites are looking for a

place to reconnect within their communities, which is exactly what these centers provide. People come to take in an outdoor movie with their neighbors or to watch their children ice-skate in the town center's ice rink. Most of these lifestyle centers offer many attractions for the shopper, including farmers markets, splash parks for the children, fountains, outdoor fireplaces, ice-skating rinks, movie theaters, restaurants, and bars that far surpass the typical indoor shopping mall's food court. A fireworks display or an Easter egg hunt may attract a family to the lifestyle center but the extensive shopping and dining options keep them there.

From the beginning of the lifestyle center movement, our firm has played a role in shaping the outdoor environment in many of these mixed-use shopping destinations. Designed as luxurious high-end shopping centers with impressive landscape architecture, and knowing that visitors will be strolling the streets of the center, owners invest in upscale hardscape features, including colored and textured concrete and pavers in eye-catching patterns that complement the buildings' architecture.

These enhanced exterior features offer today's communities a much more aesthetically pleasing experience than the Main Streets of the Old West. Owners are taking the shoppers' inherent need for community, localizing it to give it a small-town feel, and making it attractive from the moment people pull up.▲