Greetings!

No doubt you are ready for the sights and sounds of Spring. But listen closely for the chirping birds and look for the blue, cloudless skies and you are likely to encounter the buzz of bulldozers and trucks and the progress of buildings growing right before your eyes. Construction and remodeling in the retail sector is making way for new opportunities in employment, shopping and business in Harford County. This month, EDAB e-news reviews the state of retail in the County and reports on some innovative programs that have helped retailers weather the winter and get ready for clearer skies ahead.

Don't miss a retail newcomer to the County highlighted in Business Spotlight, and check out Fast Facts for interesting tidbits about the market.

For more information or to get involved in the efforts of the Economic Development Advisory Board to advocate for positive growth in the County, visit www.harfordbusiness.org.

Sincerely,

Eric McLauchlin
Chairman, EDAB

Raising The Roof On Retail

With the new retail signings and ground breakings at the Boulevard at Box Hill, the remodeling and leasing activity in the Harford Mall and the renovation of key restaurants in Bel Air, a positive climate is emerging in the heart of the County's retail community, despite a still difficult economy. Ward Properties and MacKenzie Commercial Real Estate, the management team for the Boulevard at Box Hill, are optimistic about the County's retail outlook. The Boulevard is approaching its last phase of construction, with the final two buildings to break ground this spring.

Tenants include Carrabba's restaurant, opening its 10th Maryland location in 5,800 square feet of space this summer. LOFT, Ann Taylor Inc. signed a lease agreement this month and plans a late Spring opening.

The remaining North building offers 49,000 square feet of retail space and will likely be anchored by a national home furnishings retailer, according to Tom Fidler, executive vice president/principal at MacKenzie Commercial.

"These strong tenants give us the leverage needed to pursue other upscale retailers and demonstrate to them that we have the market for success in Harford County," Fidler explained. "We are trying to create a dynamic tenant mix that the market does not already have." Fidler estimates that at completion, the Boulevard at Box Hill's mix of tenants will be 20-25 percent food, 50 percent fashion and the remaining 25 percent soft goods or services. Carrabba's and existing tenants like XO Saxons, Menchie's frozen yogurt and Lemon & Ginger restaurant are new to Harford County. Anchored by Wegmans and JC Penney, the area is shaping up to be a sought-after destination for other retailers as well as customers from in and around Harford County.

These retailers and others are bringing money back into the County, and keeping residents working where they live. Fidler estimated more than 15 percent of visitors per week come from outside of the County - nearly 8,000 people. Many of these visitors come for the unique retail experiences, and others simply come because of the center's proximity to Interstate 95. He says the majority of employees at the center are from Harford County.
Retailers at Harford Mall have also found success in the customer base from Harford County and surrounding areas. The Mall itself ranks in the top half of parent company CBL's national portfolio, according to Manager Lauri Altman. In the last year, the Mall has welcomed three new tenants - T-Mobile, Encore Shoes and Maurice's - and completed three renovations: Red Robin, Spencer's and Claire's Boutique. Altman said they have experienced 100 percent lease renewal for those that have come due, as well as some valuable short-term leasing tenants under the Mall's specialty leasing program.

"Short term leases are great for business - both at the Mall and for the retailer," she explained. "They refresh the Mall and give the business a chance to see if a Mall lease is right for them." Harford Mall's specialty leasing program offers a strong opportunity for businesses to supplement their storefronets at certain times of the year by targeting the mall customer. Typically, these spaces are in demand for peak buying seasons, like Christmas and Easter, but they are available at any time of year with flexible locations. "We try to place businesses where they will be most successful," Altman said. "Many businesses count on our specialty leasing program, and they come back at the same time year after year.

Altman cited a notable experience through a short-term lease by the Humane Society that saved hundreds of cats. Mall shoppers were able to visit cats displayed in special "cat condos." Over 200 cats were adopted in the first month of the program.

Across the street from the Mall lies a pile of rubble that was once a McDonald's Restaurant. The restaurant will be remodeled with a sleek new look and re-open later this year. In the same plaza, IHOP opened its doors in late February. Forest Hill welcomed a new yogurt shop with the opening of Yogurt Mountain by the Klein family.

The retail landscape, with its variety of merchants on every level, is positioned to satisfy the diverse demographics of the County's population. Not only is it attracting customers from within and around the County, it is also creating local jobs. Even as we raise the roof on these new venues, Harford County is becoming a retail destination with an identity to call its own.

Business Spotlight: Menchie's

Among the new businesses opening in the Boulevard at Box Hill is a frozen yogurt shop that hopes to differentiate itself in that burgeoning market through premium product and strategic marketing. Menchie's, North America's largest self-serve frozen yogurt franchise, offers a privately mixed product in a variety of innovative flavors, along with a simple mission: to make people smile.

Local owner John Carnesi says the national franchise is family and community oriented, and he strives to mirror those qualities at his store. Open for just four months, Menchie's has already generated a "buzz" around the County. Fundraisers support local schools, and awards are available for teachers to recognize student achievements. Both Carnesi and his business partner, Larry Dukes, have teaching and education backgrounds, and they understand the value in these programs. "We created the program to reinforce the student's achievement with a certificate and a free Menchie's frozen yogurt," Carnesi says.

Menchie's also welcomes field trips from local organizations like the Brownies and Boy Scouts. A customer loyalty program, "My Smileage Card," provides a smile for every dollar spent at the store, with 50 smiles rewarding customers with $5 in free yogurt.

Menchie's in Abingdon employs eight part-time team members, three of whom are team, or shift, leaders. "We've gotten lots of comments on the yogurt and the fun, but when we hear positive reactions to our service and our staff, it means so much more, because they are representing me," Carnesi said.

Menchie's celebrated the opening of its 350th location in 2013, one of 130 new U.S. locations last year. The company has approximately 400 units in development, worldwide, and its rapid growth has resulted in its ranking at number 127 on Entrepreneur Magazine's Franchise 500 list, 49th on Forbes Most Promising Companies list and Number 1 in Restaurant Business Magazine's Future 50 list in 2012. Menchie's CEO, Amit Kleinberger, appeared on the CBS reality series "Undercover Boss."

Visit www.menchies.com for more information.

Fast Facts: Retail Madness

- The Boulevard at Box Hill has 450,000 square feet of leasable space for retail and 50,000 square feet for restaurants. Plans also include 88,000 square feet of office space and 3,500 parking spaces by the time the complex is completed.
- Harford Mall offers 505,372 square feet of gross leasable space, anchored by Macy's and Sears and
including more than 75 stores and restaurants inside the mall. Harford Mall Annex, across the street from Harford Mall, has 107,656 square feet of space and is currently occupied by four major retailers.

- Harford County has 9,110,000 square feet of leasable retail space. Vacancy rate is less than three percent.
- Local retailers are giving back to the communities in which they do business by supporting and sponsoring local non-profit events and organizations like the Humane Society, RAACE (Race Against Abuse of Children Everywhere) and local Boys and Girls Clubs of America.

Sources: [www.cbproperties.com](http://www.cbproperties.com); [www.warddevelopment.com](http://www.warddevelopment.com); [www.theboulevardatboxhill.com](http://www.theboulevardatboxhill.com)

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**David R. Craig, Harford County Executive**

The Harford County Economic Development Advisory Board consists of a number of subcommittees - including technology, workforce development, finance, tourism, and land use - dedicated to the positive growth and Economic Development of Harford County.