

New Jack in the Box cause for celebration by Southeast Fort Worth Inc.

Posted Sunday, Apr. 10, 2011

BY SANDRA BAKER

sabaker@star-telegram.com

From the way Andre McEwing talks about the new Jack in the Box restaurant that will open in two weeks near Evans Avenue and Rosedale Street, you'd think the near southeast side had just landed the hottest five-star establishment ever to hit Fort Worth.

It's no disappointment for McEwing, executive director of the nonprofit advocacy group Southeast Fort Worth Inc., that it's a fast food eatery. The restaurant represents so much more than that, he said, including dozens of full-time jobs for the underserved Terrell Heights neighborhood.

"For me, it represents confidence in the retail community to believe and know they can be successful in the southeast sector of Fort Worth," McEwing said.

Grand plans for shops and restaurants have been on the drawing board for a long time, and the city spent several years priming the neighborhood for that. Terrell Heights is in the shadow of downtown's gleaming high-rise office buildings, bounded by Interstate 35W, Rosedale, Vickery Boulevard and Riverside Drive.

In 2004, a red-brick, parklike community plaza that recognizes the city's historic African-American leaders and neighborhoods was built by the city on Evans Avenue, just north of Rosedale, to spur the commercial development. Since then, the city has built the Hazel Harvey Peace Center for Neighborhoods and the Ella Mae Shamblee Branch Library.

But today, the plaza sits mostly unused. Motorists on Evans still see empty lots and empty buildings. Missouri Avenue, one block west of Evans, has been improved, but lots on that street are also vacant.

Developers believe that Jack in the Box, two blocks west of Evans and along the Interstate 35W access road, will attract more retailers. City and community leaders and company officials, will host a ribbon-cutting April 25 at the restaurant.

"We can't afford to have a new store come in and not make a big to-do," McEwing said. "We've got to embrace every step as we go."

Dallas-based Cypress Equities, developers of the bustling West 7th project west of downtown, has been the master developer on the Evans and Rosedale project.

Kirk Williams, Cypress' vice president of development, said the restaurant "is a nice start" but agrees with McEwing that it doesn't define what Evans and Rosedale can be. In fact, Williams said his team is being careful not to turn the neighborhood into a fast-food row.

"Jack in the Box symbolizes a tip of the iceberg of private investment in the Terrell Heights neighborhood," Williams said.

Jack in the Box Inc., which owns the new location, agreed to design guidelines putting the restaurant closer to the road, with parking and outdoor dining in the back. Typically, buildings are set toward the back of the lot, with parking in front.

The design "doesn't turn its back on the neighborhood," Williams said.

McEwing is eyeing some vacant buildings, including the shuttered Pinkston Mortuary on Terrell Avenue, for redevelopment.

"While I'm here, you will see development in this community," McEwing said.

Sandra Baker, 817-390-7727



Star-Telegram/Ron Jenkins

Community leaders Andre McEwing, left, and Al Piper with Jack in the Box in the background..