

Sky is the limit for East Point

Diversity brings the essential shop, dine and relax factor to this state-of-the-art destination

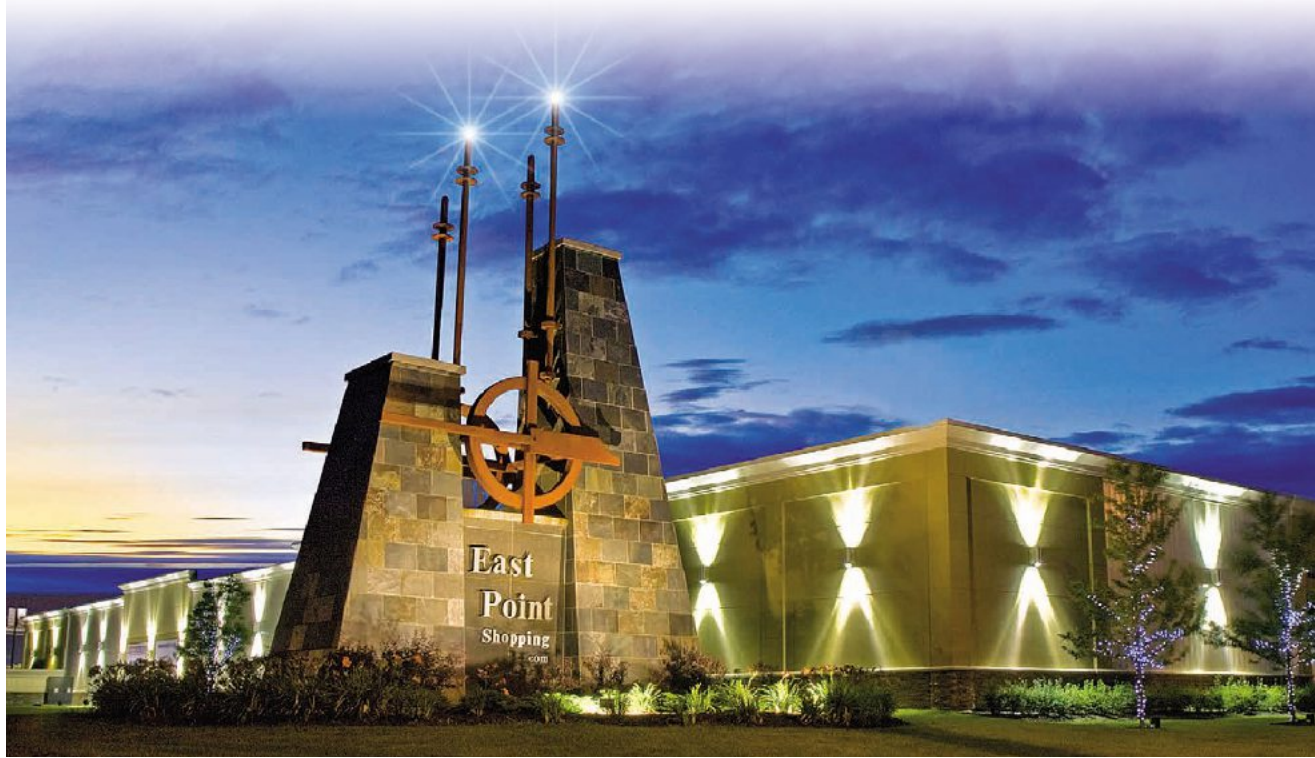
BY RON BARRY

On a clear night, the Hollywood spotlights of East Point Shopping can be seen in the Saint John region - just look skyward.

In an ingenious way, the lights provide a physical metaphor for what East Point has become – a beacon for Atlantic Canada’s 21st century-style retail sector. As the centre continues to grow with the addition of four new destinations, always in the forefront of developer Troy Northrup’s mind is ‘what’s next?’ “East Point has always been about the experience - shop, dine and relax,” said Northrup. “The key to all that is diversity and co-tenancy. That’s something we continue to work on every day to make sure we fulfill our goals.”

In 2014, the East Point family has added Wicker Emporium, Ana Banana, Mr. Lube and goji’s. Every new addition is done with a deliberate purpose in mind.

“What’s important in any centre is co-tenancy and ensuring that the tenants complement each other,” said Northrup. “The more depth of services we



East Point Shopping. PHOTO: SUBMITTED

offer, the greater the regional draw. We are positioned to be the largest centre in New Brunswick. We’re continuing to round out the co-tenancy, and those new stores add to that.”

As Northrup says, the brand connects exploring, discovering, shopping, dining and staying under one umbrella, made whole by the East Side’s diversity; in fact, its shopping district comprises the largest retail cluster in Atlantic Canada, at

2.5 million square feet.

“It’s a unique situation we have where you drive into one area and everything is right there – you don’t have to drive around the entire community to find these diverse retailers. In our case, we have two gems – the uptown and the east side, and that’s unheard of in Atlantic Canada. Here, you drive to the east side or head uptown and everything’s there – it’s convenient, it’s easy. It adds

strength to people who want to come, of why they want to come from a consumer and retailer’s point of view, and it adds strength for the retailers that exist because they help one another by keeping it all in one spot.”

Diversity is key, says Northrup: “The better the diversity of the tenants, the better the regional draw. The better the

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regional draw brings more people from away, and not just the local community. As the regional draw continues to grow, it will help feed further growth.”

The good things happening at East Point, and elsewhere in the Saint John region, provide a feel-good moment for Mayor Mel Norton, who understands that the city is not immune from the laches and pains of a tough job market and the ebb and flow of a fickle economic tide. East Point, he says, is part of a future worth sharing.

“The kind of vision and confidence that has been shown by East Point, to take literally an undeveloped section of the city and build from scratch what is easily, the highest and best retail shopping experience of its kind in the city, tells us the kind of future that Saint John has,” said the mayor. “East Point has been the template for Plan SJ, an award-winning national urban plan on how to do retailing right. Even just that fact

that it’s been done to such a high level that it would be used as the example for the whole community, and then to have new retailers, both this year and coming next year... that tells me about the future of Saint John and how strong it is.”

As is the case throughout the Saint John region, East Point is tuned into Black Friday. More and more, Canadians are getting used to this American-based calendar event, but in their own backyards and not just stateside. Count East Point among the converted.

“Each retailer will be running their own specials for Black Friday,” said Northrup, “and certainly the whole centre will be promoting special events. Black Friday is that magical date that launches the shopping season for the holidays and we’re going to celebrate it in a big way.”

Northrup has watched Black Friday manifest itself into something that matters to local merchants, especially after East Point went from a blueprint table to real, physical buildings. He sees a

uniqueness in all of that.

“When we think about East Point, we think about how it started with Home Depot,” he said. “That was in 2006, not that long ago. When you think about how shopping has evolved prior to 2006 to where it is today, there have been significant changes. You don’t have people creeping out of our region like they did eight to 10 years ago. A lot of that has changed and you don’t hear that kind of talk anymore. When we think about the evolution of the traffic and the traffic pattern, we see the increased change in frequency and the stores getting busier and busier. We see the diversity and the mix continually expand, which makes the centre busier and retailers successful.

“In the whole east end region, there’s a lot of good things in the growth in traffic. You love seeing people come to your community, invest and be successful. You love seeing locals continue to frequent their own town to do their shopping and it’s very nice for the

tertiary markets to see them recognize the regional draw, to see them come into the city and have their choice of destinations to do their shopping. That creates a stronger economy and jobs. It also gives people pride in their community. And, the community itself, has achieved that, by itself. They continue to support and they continue to build. That’s how we got where we are today.”

Northrup holds his confidentiality cards close to his vest, but assures there is more to come.

“I start to see now things that were once only on paper, things that were renderings and now, all of sudden, it’s turning into real things,” said the developer. “It’s all starting to fill in, I guess, the intangible vision that’s evolving. We are well past the halfway point, which is the tipping point for any project. We’re significantly built out, and this time next year we’ll be even closer to the finish line. The best is yet to come. When East Point is fully built out it will be the second-largest centre east of Montreal.”

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