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Shopping Centre Spotlight East Point Shopping Propels Saint John, New Brunswick's Transformation

By: Romina Sestito

Troy Northrup's passion for the future and the transforming face of Canada's oldest city, Saint John, New Brunswick, may as well be written on his sleeve - or for starters you can grasp a solid idea about his enthusiastic outlook for his home town by checking out his latest project, East Point Shopping.

"My hope is that it sets an example for developers and the community," Northrup says.

Set atop a plateau, standing like a mini-acropolis, East Point is located at the aptly named streets of Retail and Fashion Drive.

With a price tag up to \$200-million, this 80-acre site is not your ordinary open air centre occupied by ordinary looking retailers.

The creative polished design of East Point started when Northrup travelled south of the border, amassing a wealth of knowledge as he observed the detailed finishes on a number of U.S. lifestyle centres.

Once back on domestic soil, Northrup rounded up Canada's top three architects. He took them around to view other big-box centres.

"First thing we said to them is this is what we don't want," referring to the often plain faces big-box centres wear.

A wealth of detail is and continues to be implemented at East Point including a massive 13-metre welcome sign, upscale storefronts with 2-36 ft. high marquee anchor signage, vertical tenant signs, Arizona-inspired, three-metre wide sidewalks, park-

ing lots inundated with trees and a Sky Tracker light (also used by Universal Studios) used to illuminate the site at dusk.

"It's the subliminal things, little details that create an atmosphere," he says. "Most people like to be surrounded by beautiful things."

Aside from the 'beautiful things' that accentuate the property, East Point boasts retailers who are first-timers to Atlantic Canada. Take Urban Planet for example. Their entrance is a first for the Maritimes.

Other reputable retailers and restaurants include an over 100,000 sq. ft. Home Depot (the first to jump on board), Starbucks, Cotton Ginny, Moores, International Clothiers, Fairweather and Randy River.

East Point is meant to combine a unique shopping experience as well as hospitality services. The Hampton Inn - which is the first hotel to be built in Saint John in decades - is slated for a late end-of-summer completion. It will be located at Fashion Dr. and boast 118 rooms complete with a pool, hot tub and waterslide.

Once fully executed, (it's projected this will occur within the next decade) East Point will be home to 40 retailers, occupying 700,000 sq. ft.

"This will be the beacon that attracts other retailers," says Saint John's Mayor, Norm McFarlane.

McFarlane has given his fair share of accolades to this project.

"It will change the face of Saint John because of the design standard. It set a standard for the city and for future ones," he says.

Mayor McFarlane's participation with East Point doesn't stop with his boost of energy.

"We've agreed to extend lighting on road and trees spending over \$100,000," he says.

Mayor McFarlane wasn't the only civil servant to offer a generous contribution. New Brunswick's premier Shawn Graham recently announced \$700,000 in provincial funding to construct an exit ramp off Hwy. 1. It's estimated that this will translate to \$200-million worth of spinoff revenue for the city.

It's also projected that the highway's connection to Retail Drive will make way for spontaneous shoppers. Over 36,000 cars drive through Hwy. 1 making it the busiest highway in New Brunswick.

Northrup surmises East Point will act as a magnet for both out-of-province and U.S. shoppers, placing Saint John as a retail destination.

With East Point as a highly visible site off Hwy. 1, it's part of Northrup's vision to assist in the solidification of Saint John, standing as the gateway to Atlantic Canada.

Saint John's plethora of strong economic activity and growth proves just that.

The city's retail sales were up 6.4% over national per capita, and 9.4 % above provincial per capita (FP Markets-Canadian Demographic 2005).

The retail component of the city's boom is a sliver of the prosperous pie. Oil production scored an impressive milestone in March 2006: two billion barrels of crude oil were processed by the refinery.

The new five to seven billion dollar oil refinery at Canaport is the first major refinery to be built in North America in 25 years. It's slated to be the largest private sector investment in Atlantic Canada's history.

Supplies of up to 300,000 barrels of refined product per day are produced servicing primarily the US Northeast. This will inevitably further strengthen Saint John's stance as a strong energy sector in the Northeastern seaboard.

In addition, the strength of the housing market in Saint John is unprecedented. As many as 570 new homes were tracked in 2006; up 13.77%. Housing starts were up 92% in the last five years (2006).

In the next 60 months, it's been forecasted that an influx of 25,000 people will flock to Saint John, outstanding for an existing provincial population of 133,000.

Saint John, however, is more than stats and figures to the 41-year old real estate developer- it's home. To others in the community like Mayor McFarlane it's a landmark.

"I think because of Troy's East Point and his vision it has put Saint John on the map for shopping centres in Canada."

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