

Gatlin, Gate to Launch Durbin Lakes Retail Center

Thursday, January 28, 2016

By Karen Brune Mathis, Managing Editor



Frank Gatlin

When veteran developer Frank Gatlin moved his company's headquarters to Jacksonville in June, he promised to bring more retail stores and restaurants to the area.

That promise should start yielding results over the next year as he develops at least 600,000 square feet of commercial space in a joint venture with Gate Petroleum Co. at Gate's Durbin Creek property along Interstate 95 in northern St. Johns County.

Gatlin said Wednesday the first phase would comprise 80 acres anchored by three major big-box retailers.

He is targeting a discount department store, a home improvement center and a membership club for 450,000 square feet, but declined to identify them until the leases were approved at their corporate levels.

The other 150,000 square feet of space would include restaurants, small shops and outparcels.

Gatlin estimates the first phase represents an investment of more than \$125 million with Gate. He plans to break ground in the first quarter of 2017 and complete that phase a year later.

"I think it's very, very important for St. Johns County, where there is an explosion of growth, to be able to have all of their shopping needs met within a few minutes' drive, from day-to-day restaurants to grocers to apparel," Gatlin said.

Gate Petroleum Vice President Ken Wilson said the company is looking forward to partnering with Gatlin.

The Durbin property is along I-95 where Florida 9B connects. Florida 9B is a four-lane divided highway that connects Duval and St. Johns counties from I-295 south to County Road 2209, which is St. Johns Parkway.

Gatlin said he intends to open the first phase as Florida 9B is completed, which is slated for summer 2018 but appears to be running ahead of schedule.

About a year ago, the St. Johns County Commission approved Gate's Durbin Urban Services Area, which encompasses 1,624 acres east and west of I-95, south of Race Track Road.

It is designed in four five-year phases to eventually total up to 2.4 million square feet of shopping-center retail space, almost 2.8 million square feet of office space, 350 hotel rooms and 999 multifamily units.

Within Durbin, the main street of Peyton Parkway will circle throughout the property and tie onto Race Track Road. Jacksonville-based Gate Petroleum was founded by Herbert Peyton.

Gatlin said of the 1,600 acres, about 600 acres can be developed. The remainder is lake, wetlands and other undevelopable property.

He said the land includes 200 or more acres for the retail development, which could represent an investment topping \$500 million in four phases.

“It’s a great development. It will create thousands of jobs,” he said.

Gatlin also has been assigned by Gate to work with the long-awaited Bass Pro Shops for the second phase. Bass Pro Shops will own its land, he said.

The company announced in late 2012 it would locate a Bass Pro Shop Outdoor World in Gate’s property by mid-2014, but that was delayed.

“I have been delegated the task to bring the Bass Pro Shops to fruition,” Gatlin said.

Future phases will be determined later. Gatlin said he hopes to work with Gate on those phases and envisions lifestyle and entertainment components, such as a theater.

All of the retail phases will be individually named, but he doesn’t have a name yet for the first one.

Separately, Gatlin said he also is working on four new grocery-anchored shopping centers, totaling up to 400,000 square feet of space, for two sites each in Duval and St. Johns counties. He expects construction to start by early next year and be completed by the end of 2017.

Gatlin declined to identify the grocery stores until the leases were approved. However, Gatlin has developed five of the Walmart Neighborhood Markets in Northeast Florida.

The remaining space in those shopping centers would be leased to retail tenants. There also would be outparcels for sale.

One of Gatlin’s current projects is Collins Plaza in southwest Jacksonville, where he bought 44 acres and sold 16 acres to Walmart for development of a Supercenter. He also sold a 2-acre outparcel there to Gate for development of a gas station-convenience store.

Gatlin intends to talk about the projects Thursday morning during a panel discussion at the International Council of Shopping Centers North Florida Idea Exchange. The event is scheduled at the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront.

Gatlin Development Co. is a nationwide developer with a commercial portfolio of 2.5 million square feet of retail space under ownership or development. Since 1984, it has developed more than 15 million square feet of retail shopping centers.