



## **Ace Hardware will anchor new shopping center on US 1 in Ponte Vedra Beach area**

By Stuart Korfhage  
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A new commercial development anchored by an Ace Hardware store off U.S. 1 in northern St. Johns County is under construction.

Ash Properties made an announcement Monday that Ace would be the major tenant at The Shoppes of St. Johns at 10850 U.S. 1 in Ponte Vedra Beach.

The shopping center will include about 26,000 square feet of retail space, and there will be an additional 16,000 square feet of office space.

Randall Whitfield, chief operating officer of Ash Properties, said there is at least one restaurant and other stores signed up. He couldn't release the names of the businesses yet, but he said the overall response showed it's the right time for this development.

"We're doing a lot of good leasing on the space," he said. "We probably only have about 12,000 square feet left to lease.

"There's a tremendous amount of housing going on now. Twin Creeks has just kicked back up. Nocatee is going great guns. The U.S. 1 traffic has increased tremendously."

Ash knows something about the commercial market in the area, having been in business for four decades. It has several properties in North Florida, including the nearby Panther Plaza across the street from Nease High School.

"We have a shopping center close to there (The Shoppes of St. Johns) that is very well occupied, so we just felt there was a need for more," Whitfield said. "We've gotten some great comments from community people that Ace Hardware is going in there. They can't wait for it to open."

Whitfield said the retail part of the development is expected to open in late fall. The office space will be open afterward, around the first of the year.

"They won't be far behind," he said. "They'll lease that rapidly as well."

Building office space for general leasing is a sign of Ash's confidence in the local economy, Whitfield said. And his company is not alone.

In addition to the strong home construction growth in the county, commercial development is also up this year.

In the county building services division's most recent activity report, numbers through March showed the commercial investment in March 2017 was about \$4 million more than March 2016. And the fiscal year-to-date total was \$10 million more this year than in 2016.

"I'm encouraged to see the variety of new commercial projects being announced to complement the residential development underway," said Melissa Glasgow, director of economic development for the county, in an email to The Record.