

THIS WEEK'S TOP STORY



Jeff Hill, vice president of real estate development for Opus West Corp. (right) and city manager Doug LaBelle greet Chino Hills resident Karen Kaplan during the groundbreaking ceremony for the Shoppes. Mrs. Kaplan's husband, Scott Kaplan of CB Richard Ellis, was recognized during the event for his foresight in marketing the project for Opus West.

Champion photo by Marianne Napoles

Milestone for the Shoppes

Ceremony launches long-anticipated project

By Marianne Napoles

A groundbreaking ceremony for the Shoppes at Chino Hills took place March 16 on the site of the former Chino Hills Community Park. Moments after the event ended, park demolition resumed, with heavy equipment crumpling park rails and uprooting trees.

"This is a bittersweet moment for longtime residents who have seen their children raised on this community park," said Mayor Gwenn Norton-Perry. "This is a new era and the dawning of a new chapter for the city."

She said the Shoppes will bring in sales tax dollars and shopping opportunities, and the new Community Park will create memories for future generations.

Key players for the Shoppes spoke about the "twists and turns" in the complicated project that had its origins in the early 1990s and went through three developers, a lawsuit, and one name change.

Jeff Hill of Opus West described the Shoppes as one of the most complex deals he has worked on. He said the city council had a

vision for an urban lifestyle center on the property for many years.

Over those years, Mr. Hill said he developed a strong partnership with city manager Doug LaBelle.

"I call him a friend," Mr. Hill said.

Mayor Norton-Perry said Opus West experienced many setbacks, but never pulled out, and invested millions of dollars to make it a reality. "Opus stuck it out, and this is where we are today," she said.

Mr. Hill also recognized Chino Hills resident Scott Kaplan of CB Richard Ellis, for marketing the project and "taking Chino Hills to the front page."

Ronald Altoon of Altoon Porter Architects said he has noticed a lot of pride in the community, and described Chino Hills as "contemporary yet casual."

Mr. Altoon, whose firm designed Victoria Gardens in Rancho Cucamonga, said the Shoppes will be a place where residents can bond with one another.

In addition to the tenants that have been formerly announced, such as Trader Joe's and Barnes & Noble, the following were announced by Ryan Dan of Opus: White House Black Market, New York & Co., Active, J. Jill, PacSun, American Eagle, and Solstice. He described the following four tenants as "very close:" Yard House, Wood Ranch BBQ & Grill, Ann Taylor Loft, and Victoria's Secret.

The 400,000-square-foot open air center is part of the 750,000-square-foot master planned project that will include the government center and 240 residential units. The project is expected to be finished by June 2008.