

Maricopa officials hope Wal-Mart construction will attract retailers

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MARICOPA - With work continuing behind them on parking lots and lighting, city officials and developers announced the start of construction of a Wal-Mart Supercenter.

The planned store is the key to the Shea Properties "Wells" project along Maricopa-Casa Grande Highway, which may also have national home improvement retailer The Home Depot. It is the first piece of the phased project scheduled to be built and should trigger interest from other retailers, Wal-Mart regional manager Frankie Ahumada said.

"We honor the historical significance of this place while we prepare for its future prosperity," said Ahumada, who has worked primarily in overseeing the Yuma Wal-Mart in recent years. "We believe this is a catalyst for future growth and development."

Ahumada said he couldn't pinpoint exactly what impact the Wal-Mart would have in retail dollars, but did say the community was ready for the new store.

"This is a very good size city for a development of this magnitude," he said.

Ahumada said he could not confirm whether an auto service center would be included as part of the store.

Maricopa Chamber of Commerce board President Mark Molus said having Wal-Mart continue plans for a spring opening was significant in light of an economic downturn.

"If you think of the current market conditions, to pull something like this off is huge," he said. "From the chamber's perspective, they are the ultimate client. We are excited about the tenants they will attract."

Mayor Anthony Smith said in prepared remarks that not only would Wal-Mart help bring in other retailers and keep more of residents' money spent locally, but it would provide a much-needed major employer.

"Wal-Mart has a large presence in Arizona and it takes pride in its community involvement," he said. "Wal-Mart is known as being a sizable employer ... and we are looking forward to seeing traffic flowing in here."

Smith said city estimates of tax revenue brought in by Wal-Mart during the 15-year development agreement would be roughly \$70 million.