

# Wal-Mart plans Supercenter in Falcon

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*2007 is target for opening Woodmen-Meridian store*

By RICH LADEN THE GAZETTE

Wal-Mart acknowledged Friday what's been talked about for more than a year: it will build a Supercenter in the Falcon area, about 15 miles northeast of downtown Colorado Springs.

The move continues the retail giant's aggressive Pikes Peak region expansion and reaffirms Falcon's standing as El Paso County's fastest-growing unincorporated area.

Wal-Mart plans to construct a 180,000-square-foot store on 20 acres southwest of Woodmen and Meridian roads, part of a 26-acre retail center being developed by Jacksonville, Fla.-based Regency Centers.

Spokesman Keith Morris said Bentonville, Ark.-based Wal-Mart — the nation's biggest retailer and the largest Springs-area employer — hopes to begin construction next year and open the store by late 2007.

The store would be slightly smaller than Wal-Mart's Supercenters in the Springs, which are in the neighborhood of 200,000 square feet.

Last year, when asked if Wal-Mart was coming to Falcon, Morris said he knew of no sites being considered. Wal-Mart's latest store, at Powers Boulevard and Woodmen Road, is about 15 minutes west of Falcon.

But after being approached by Regency and then re-examining the number of rooftops in Falcon and additional residential developments on the way, Morris said, Wal-Mart changed its mind.

"A year ago, 18 months ago, at the time we initially looked, we didn't think it was built out enough for this type of store," Morris said. "Then, this developer had a plan for some retail out there. We went and looked at it again. There are a significant number of plans for residential subdivisions that are in the works."

Springs businessman Greg Timm, who is developing the Falcon Highlands project southwest of Woodmen and Meridian, said Friday that he plans to sell 26 acres to Regency. The company has a closing date of Dec. 31.

Wal-Mart then will buy 20 acres from Regency, which will develop the rest of the site with smaller retail users.

Timm predicted Wal-Mart wouldn't draw just from Falcon, which spreads out several miles in all directions from the Woodmen-Meridian intersection. Shoppers from Black Forest to the north, Ellicott to the south and other areas of eastern El Paso County will flock to the store, he said.

"There's nothing else there," Timm said.

Falcon was once an area of sprawling ranches, where cattle outnumbered residents.

But during the past several years, developers bought thousands of acres and began developing subdivisions with the promise to city dwellers of inexpensive homes, large lots and a rural flavor.

Subdivisions such as Falcon Hills, Woodmen Hills, Meridian Ranch and Paint Brush Hills have sprung up north of Woodmen and Meridian, and retailers took notice. Area homeowners now can shop at Safeway, grab a pizza from Domino's or rent movies at Blockbuster — without driving into the Springs.

As Morris said, more homes are coming in projects such as Santa Fe Springs, Falcon Highlands and the Banning-Lewis Ranch — which is inside the Springs' city limits.

Wal-Mart still needs approval from El Paso County officials; an initial review by the county planning commission could come Sept. 27, although additional scrutiny likely

will take place in October and November.

In the past year, Wal-Mart has received approval for stores in Monument, north of the Springs, and in Woodland Park to the west of town. Last month, it said it's planning a store at Powers Boulevard and the Hancock Expressway, on the Springs' southeast side.

Those stores, along with the Falcon Supercenter and six existing stores in the Springs and Fountain would increase its total to 10.

