

# Woodland Park puts on a new persona

Nov 11, 2005

## *Walgreens just 1 of new merchants*

*By DEBBIE KELLEY THE GAZETTE*

Doing business in Woodland Park is no longer one of those best-kept secrets.

"People are coming to us — it's like we've been found out," says city planning director Joseph Napoleon.

As new businesses open in town, the mostly mom and pop retail scene in this 7,100-resident town west of Colorado Springs is changing to include stores owned by two of the biggest chains in the country.

Today's opening of a 13,850-square-foot Walgreens, the first of the nation's largest drug chains in Teller County, means mountain residents don't have to drive 18 miles down Ute Pass to shop at a big, full-service drugstore. The store is off U.S. Highway 24 at the eastern part of the city.

Thursday's debut of The Brass Pig, an upscale home décor, collectibles and gift shop at 555 E. Chester Ave., along with next week's debut of Woodland Auto Valet, a fullservice carwash and detail center in the same new \$2.2 million building, are meant to keep more shoppers buying locally.

"I want to spend my money where I live, and I'm tired of driving to the Springs to get my car washed," said longtime Woodland Park resident Diana Hazlett, who with husband Ken built the 9,000-square-foot building that houses the 40-employee carwash and includes retail and office space.

"We've been watching the amount of people moving here and decided the time is right," Hazlett said.

The additional retail and lifestyle offerings are returning the town to its Gold Rush status as a "service center" destination, Napoleon said.

"We lost that identity over the years as people started going to the Springs for commodities like banking, medical needs and shopping," Napoleon said.

Next year, construction of a Wal-Mart, the world's largest retailer, as well as a regional hospital and a municipal recreation center are expected to begin. Voters approved the Wal-Mart, which will be off Highway 24 on the city's eastern side, after some residents resisted the mega discounter's advances.

And in accordance with a master plan that city leaders adopted in 1993 and amended in 1999, a 300,000-square-foot downtown shopping village and a theater venue will be built in coming years.

Woodland Park is a good place to do business because it's a gate to the Rocky Mountains, said Brian Mauldin, who owns Java The Hut with his wife, Vi. Sales at the coffee shop and outdoor gear store have increased steadily since the couple opened it three years ago, Mauldin said.

"Growth is good for business — I can't say anything negative about it because I moved here, and growth is new people from new places," he said.

Business development also will substantially sweeten annual tax collections, which account for nearly half the city's revenue.

City finance director and treasurer Kellie Case anticipates a 23 percent increase in sales, use, lodging and franchise tax revenue in 2006. Wal-Mart is not included in the estimate.

That's compared with a projected 6.5 percent increase in sales tax revenues this

year over the \$3.3 million collected last year. That amount reflected a 5.5 percent increase over 2003.

"Our retail market has been limited; that's why so much leakage goes down the pass," Case said.

In a town where residents measure growth by the number of stoplights, the building boom fosters sometimes heated conversation over coffee.

"We're glad to have the services, but sad to see the growth," Hazlett said. "Nothing replaces the personal service and quality of local ownership, and we hope we will be able to maintain that hometown atmosphere."

Some Woodland Park business owners, like pharmacist George Drake, wonder whether they can weather competition from the chains. Drake, owner of Drake's Pharmacy and Ben Franklin for 22 years, has said he's faced competition before and will rely on old-fashioned customer service to keep his customers.

"We do things the chains can't or won't do," he said.

And growth isn't infinite, Napoleon said. The city's population will tap out at 11,500 residents and be restricted by water resources and physical boundaries, he said, adding, "We're taking a balanced and well-planned approach to growth to maintain a small-town flavor and quality of life."



**KEVIN KRECK, THE GAZETTE** - On Thursday, the last day of preparation for the opening of the Walgreens in Woodland Park today, Michael Reed, left, and Glen Ganger with AAA Stucco cleaned the parking lot after their crews finished applying stucco to the new building.