

A civic center emerges

Once simply an office park, the development has become a downtown for Collin County

By **STEVE QUINN**
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PLANO — Marilyn Kasko was worried.

As development director for Plano's sprawling Legacy project for EDS, Ms. Kasko was mourning the loss of two high-profile companies — Fina Inc., which left for Houston, and Omnicom Group, which canceled plans to move to Plano even as its headquarters building was under construction.

On top of that, Ms. Kasko was struggling to pull together a deal to build a first-class business hotel at Legacy, and the bank official who was financing the project was getting cold feet.

"I'm thinking, 'I've got to convince this guy in spite of all that's happened, that the hotel will be successful,'" Ms. Kasko said.

That was in 1999. Today, Ms. Kasko can admire the six-story, 404-room Marriott Hotel as she inspects the seemingly never-ending construction projects at Legacy.

The 2,665-acre development is emerging as a 21st century civic center for the northern suburbs, a place where people can live, work, shop, eat out, work out and go to the movies. It has all the attributes of a traditional big-city downtown — without the skyscrapers and with better parking.

And unlike most Dallas-area "new urbanism" projects, which seem to rise fully formed out of the North Texas prairie, Legacy has been slow to take shape.

Only now, 25 years after Electronic Data Systems Corp. founder Ross Perot began buying the land that became Legacy, is the project — still owned by EDS — living up to its potential.

Legacy's also winning national attention — and not only because it's home to well-known companies such as EDS, Frito-Lay Inc., J.C. Penney Co. and Dr Pepper/Seven-Up Inc.

San Francisco-based architect

Daniel Solomon said he was "absolutely flabbergasted" when he visited Legacy recently.

"It's a coherent use of public space shaped by buildings which are not isolated, but part of a town," he said. "That's critical."

More than 36,000 people now work at the dozens of companies with offices in Legacy, "but they are not the whole story," said Jonathan Barnett, a professor of city planning at the University of Pennsylvania.

What makes Legacy stand out from the standard suburban office park, he said, is its variety, from the stores, to the movie theaters, to the Southern Methodist University satellite campus and the public parkland — there's even a lake.

'Sense of identity'

"What makes this work is the sense of identity created by the new street system and the lake," Mr. Barnett said.

Developer Robert Shaw of Amicus Partners Ltd., who's building a 255-unit apartment complex that is set to begin leasing in December, said he was attracted to Legacy because it's a "bit of urbanity in a sea of suburbia."

"It started out as a corporate amenity. Now it's a regional amenity," he said.

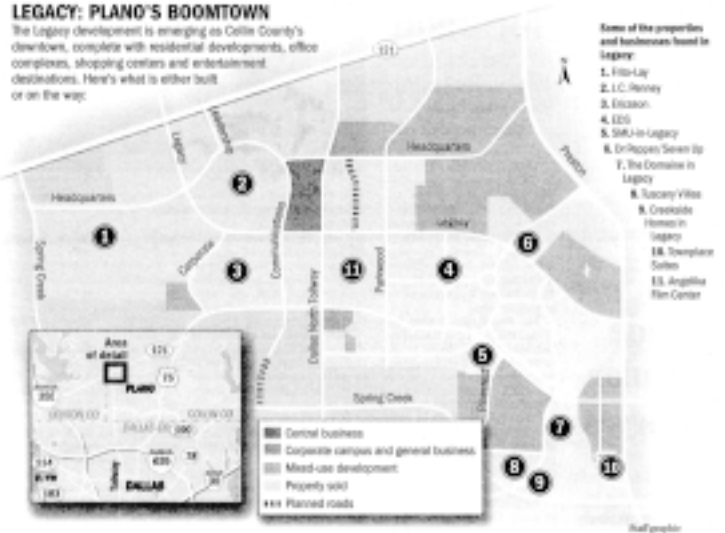
And it's far exceeded the dreams of Mr. Perot and Legacy's first director of development, Robbie Robinson. Their chief goal was to build a new EDS headquarters and find a couple of big companies to be its neighbors.

"We thought if we were able to get three major corporations at Legacy, we hit a home run," said Mr. Robinson, who joined EDS in 1981 and retired four years ago. "Well, we knocked the ball into the next county, and it's still going."

Frito-Lay actually became Legacy's first corporate tenant in 1985, beating the opening of the new EDS building by several months. Since then, J.C. Penney and Dr Pepper/Seven-Up have built their corporate headquarters

LEGACY: PLANO'S BOONTOWN

The Legacy development is emerging as Collin County's downtown, complete with residential developments, office complexes, shopping centers and entertainment destinations. Here's what is either built or on the way.



in Legacy, and Swedish-based LM Ericsson AB consolidated its North American operations there.

"Originally, it was envisioned as an economic engine and that in fact has happened," Mr. Robinson said. "But now it's also a hip place to be."

'Urban village'

Credit the hipness factor to developer Art Lomenick, who suggested in 1996 that EDS transform Legacy into an "urban village" that integrates people's business and personal lives.

"The companies there had great amenities for their employees but half of them were leaving every day just to get out of the sterility," Mr. Lomenick said. "It can feel very Stepford in an office park, and Legacy was not organic enough. We had to find a way to change that."

Ms. Kasko was sold on the idea, and she spent the next three years assembling a team of developers who would cooperate in building Legacy's 75-acre "town center."

She also traveled thousands of miles to visit similar projects in Virginia, Florida and throughout New England. Back home, she worked with city officials on zoning changes that would allow more densely populated neighborhoods, stores and businesses that fronted the streets and commercial signs with a little flair and a touch of neon.

"At first it was a struggle for the city to deal with," said Phil Dyer, a Plano City Council member and president of Legacy Bank of Texas. "She made one good decision after another. She convinced us that we needed to be creative, and she brought in the right developers."

Thinking big

And the developers were thinking big.

"We were not going to do this development just for Legacy business park," said retail developer Fehmi Karahan, who built the Shops at Legacy. "We were and are building this for all of North Dallas, Collin County and Denton County — for the masses, not just one city or the corporations."

Ms. Kasko also lured national furniture seller Robb & Stucky to build its first North Texas location in Legacy. It was the only retailer there when it arrived in June 2000.

Mr. Karahan's center — whose tenants include Circuit 2000 clothing, Empowered Women's Golf and the restaurants Mi Cocina and Bob's Steak & Chop House — opened in April 2002.

Last week, Mr. Karahan added Main Street Bread Baking Co. to the lineup.

"It's like a little oasis," said lunch customer Mary Reeves of Plano, who works for a Legacy-based radio ministry.

Nearby, two East Dallas suc-

cess stories are building their own Legacy outposts. Angelika Entertainment Corp., the company that runs the Angelika Film Center and Cafe at Mockingbird Station, will open a five-screen theater at the Shops at Legacy in December. Next door, Snuffer's, the Greenville Avenue institution, will begin serving up its hamburgers and fries this winter.

"It's fun watching it grow," said Antoinette Bellagrade, who works for Network Associates in Legacy and often returns on weekends for fun from her home in Arlington -- a 76-mile round trip.

"I love this," she said. "I'm an outdoor person, even in this heat, and I walk around here as much as I can."

SMU also has found a home in Legacy. It opened its SMU-in-Legacy satellite campus in 1997 to provide night classes for area workers.

But its mission has changed, and last month, SMU-in-Legacy opened the Hart eCenter for students who want to go into the elec-

tronic gaming business. So far, 32 full-time students have enrolled.

"Universities by nature are always thinking of new ideas," said campus director John Whaley. "And because of our space here, SMU now has the ability to implement them."

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