

Whitehorse's new mall a hit with tenants

Jesse Winter Friday June 6, 2014

Alistair Maitland/Yukon News



Pharmacist Deah Sutton and co-owner Tracee Vickerman stand in the Medicine Chest pharmacy in the newly opened NVD Place on Thursday.

Whitehorse's newest indoor mall is open for business, even if it's not quite finished yet.

Northern Vision Development's NVD Place had its official opening on Tuesday and, while the owners are still putting the finishing touches on the exterior, the new tenants seem to love the site.

"For us, it was all about the location," said Jim Lindsay, co-owner of The Medicine Chest pharmacy, which opened a second location in the mall.

"The medical clinic made it an ideal space for us. I would say that's the

anchor business, at least for us,” Lindsay said.

“We were extremely busy at the other location, crammed in there like sardines,” said Tracee Vickerman, the pharmacy’s other owner.

She said the new building has been great so far. The pharmacy has been open for about a month and things are going well for the most part.

“The construction is a little frustrating, and there are accessibility issues right now,” Vickerman said.

“We had one person in a wheelchair who couldn’t make it through the dirt. We had to go out and push them through it. I keep asking when it will be finished. It sounds like Monday. On the whole, though, I think they’ve done a good job,” she said.

Bobbie Lucas is the executive director of the Teegatha’oh Zheh Society, a non-profit that provides support and day programming for adults with intellectual disabilities.

“We love it. This is quite a step up from where we were as far as professionalism goes,” Lucas said.

The society’s old location was out in the Marwell industrial area, which made transportation and community access a big challenge for the society’s clients.

“I think it’s really inclusive. It’s really diverse, there’s a number of different types of businesses here, so it’s really integrated. Community inclusion is a big part of our vision, and this is really enabling us to get that much closer to it,” Lucas said.

But the ongoing construction is also causing minor headaches for Lucas and her staff. There is no access to the mall proper through the Teegatha’oh Zheh facility because it’s not a public space, but some would-be patrons try anyway.

“We get people just wandering in here off the street trying to get to the mall,” Lucas said. That causes problems because the clients they work

with need and deserve privacy, she said.

Once the front and side entrances are done, Lucas said the problem should take care of itself.

Another draw to the mall will likely be Robbyn's Street Grill. The business moved from its old home in an abandoned gas station on the Alaska Highway to take advantage of the extra space and the prime location.

"We decided, if we're going to do this, we're going to do it right," said co-owner Robbyn Burke.

The new space is laid out like a mini streetscape with umbrellas and decorative streetlights. The idea is to keep the ambiance light and fun, Burke said.

The fare focuses on sports bar style food, with lots of burgers and fries, but also includes a dinner menu with Robbyn's well-known ribs. Burke herself does a lot of catering and cooking for athletes in town, so you can also get healthier meals if you so desire.

But they've also taken stock of their neighbours, and included things like a coffee bar and kids play area, hoping to take advantage of customers who are already hanging out in the mall, waiting for pharmacy prescriptions or to see a doctor at the medical clinic.

The building's commercial space is about two-thirds full now, including some tenants who still have to finalize their leases, said Northern Vision Development's Taylor Love.

"It is a perfect location. That is number one the best thing about that place," Love said.

"There's 165 parking stalls, and it gives the public easy access from both Second Ave. and Fourth Ave." he said.

Love said the developer didn't have to do too much hunting to find tenants. Most people came to them when they heard about the project.

"It was a combined effort, I think. We've had a lot of interest from people

for sure,” he said.

Some businesses slated to move in have backed out, though Love declined to say why. He said he’s not worried about finding tenants to take over the remaining spaces.

The building was vacant from 2007 until this year. Northern Vision started looking at it as a potential development just over a year ago.

The sidewalk paving should be finished by early next week, Love said. The siding will take a little longer thanks to the vagaries of northern construction. It’s being custom-made in Quebec, but Love said that should be done soon as well.

Rick Karp, president of the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce, said the mall’s opening is “outstanding.”

“I think it’s great that we’ve taken a building that we used to say was an eyesore and Northern Vision Development have turned it into something that is going to be really great,” he said.

Karp is particularly excited about the coming indoor marketplace that NVD is planning. The idea is to give artists, craftspeople and small business owners a more affordable space to test out their businesses with market-style booths.

Love said that project should be up and running in about six months.

Contact Jesse Winter at

jessew@yukon-news.com