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Shoppes on Peoria project holds 'topping off' ceremony

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The \$3.8 million Shoppes on Peoria project, a multitenant shopping center under construction in north Tulsa, hit another milestone Friday as the final steel beam was hoisted into place.

"Here we are today with concrete beneath us, steel above us and nothing but blue skies. It's a great day," Mayor Dewey Bartlett said during a topping-off ceremony at Peoria Avenue and Reading Street.

"Shoppes on Peoria will provide the first great step for additional retail facilities in the northern neighborhoods of the city," he said.

The project has been four years in the making and at one time was in danger of losing its funding.

But Rose Washington, executive director of the Tulsa Economic Development Corp., took oversight of the project, with Katie Plohocky being named project manager. The corporation is the developer.

Plohocky told the crowd gathered for the event that the success of the project lies in the collaboration between hundreds of community volunteers, organizations, businesses and the city.

"When community partners unite for a single project, we can make progress," she said.

A topping-off ceremony is a tradition that celebrates the completion of a structure's frame by placing the last beam, adorned with a flag and spruce tree on top, Plohocky explained. A spruce tree is a symbol of growth and good luck for the future occupants, she said.

The project was federally funded through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 as administered by the city.

Jack Henderson, the city councilor for the area, thanked Bartlett "for taking something that had almost died on the vine and resurrecting it."

Henderson said that at events such as this he feels so good he wants to "break dance."

"One of these days I'm going to show you just how really good I feel," he quipped.

Henderson said nobody "in their wildest dreams thought this would be happening as soon as it did. This is the start of something big for north Tulsa."

"To stand here today and know that one of these days I'll be able to go in here and shop and buy

something in our community rather than going out south to buy something is a great feeling," he said.

Washington said the placing of the final steel beam is symbolic of north Tulsa, "a structural element in the city that has withstood many types of challenges and trials."

"The Shoppes will allow us to create momentum that will soon be followed by natural, organic growth of other businesses in north Tulsa," she said.

The project was initiated by former Mayor Kathy Taylor with the formation of the North Tulsa Economic Development Initiative. The plan is to create space for franchises through a program provided by the Tulsa Economic Development Corp.

Washington said Friday that four tenants - Wing Stop, Tropical Smoothie Cafe, Solemates Shoe Boutique and UPS - are already committed to locating in the center.

In 2009, controversy erupted over grant funds for the project's construction, which then was overseen by Reuben Gant, executive director of the Greenwood Chamber. The chamber's development arm, Greenwood Development Corp., was a partner in the project.

Then in 2011, HUD's Office of the Inspector General issued a harsh audit report about Greenwood's lack of capacity to complete the project on time. The report included a suggestion that sanctions be levied against Greenwood.

Although Gant disputes the report's findings, he agreed to transfer the project's construction to the Tulsa Economic Development Corp. under Washington's direction. No enforcement actions by HUD have been taken against Greenwood.

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Associated Images:



Mayor Dewey Bartlett stands underneath the final beam as workers put it in place Friday at the Shoppes on Peoria project's "topping off" ceremonies. MICHAEL WYKE/Tulsa World



Shoppes on Peoria project manager Katie Plohocky speaks during ceremonies Friday. MICHAEL WYKE/Tulsa

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Rose Washington, executive director of the Tulsa Economic Development Corp., speaks at the Shoppes on Peoria project site during ceremonies Friday. MICHAEL WYKE/Tulsa World

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