

SHADELANDS GROWS UP

WITH DYNAMIC NEW TENANTS, THE BUSINESS PARK TAKES ON NEW LIFE BY PEGGY SPEAR

For years, the Shadelands Business Park and its surrounding areas in northeastern Walnut Creek have seemed like the city's poor stepchild, a collection of strip malls at the busy intersection of Ygnacio Valley and Oak Grove Roads. Just south the slowly fading business park — offices, medical facilities and the iconic, and now vacant, Contra Costa Times building — seemed to lose its vibrancy even as impressive growth in downtown Walnut Creek bloomed.

All of that is about to change, thanks to three major projects infusing much-needed life — not to mention tax dollars — into Shadelands Business Park and jumpstarting a resurgence that began a few years ago with the addition of Muir Orthopedics and Children's Hospital. You can already see the changes happening, as construction of The Orchards, a mixed-use development anchored by a new Safeway, is swiftly progressing, along with Viamonté at Walnut Creek, the area's first Continuing Care Retirement Community for seniors.

A major renovation across the street at Encina Grande Shopping Center will feature a large state-of-the-art Whole Foods Market and the newly reopened drive-through Walgreens.



Construction has been so extensive at Encina Grande that the shopping center is offering customers free valet parking. Yet the biggest changes may be coming from inside the business park itself where developers have grand plans for the area.

SPORTSPLEX

Traditionally, the Shadelands has been a hard sell for relocating companies who prefer the easier commute to San Ramon or Concord. The traffic on Ygnacio Valley Road is legendary, and until recently, area



Rendering of Hall Equities SportsPlex

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amenities such as restaurants have not supported a growing workforce. This has led to a 33 percent vacancy rate in Shadelands, says Colliers International Executive Vice President Jeffrey Weil, who has been leasing office space in the business park for 40 years.

Despite the presence of major tenants like Kaiser and Del Monte Foods, "the world has grown up and the Shadelands hasn't kept up," Weil says. Even with its affordability, especially compared to San Francisco and even downtown Walnut Creek, Shadelands appeals to companies whose customer base lives near the area.

"Over the next 48 months this 40-year-old, 246-acre corporate destination will transform into an innovative, multi-use Walnut Creek community, with a new website and branding, free BART shuttle service, and two multi-million dollar projects currently under construction," says attorney Angela de la Housaye, chair of the Shadelands Business Park Steering Committee. Her group is comprised of Shadelands' business owners who advocate for change and growth.

At the heart is Hall Equities Group's transformation of the former Contra Costa Times building into a massive athletic complex called SportsPlex anchored by The Ultimate Fieldhouse. Excel Basketball, Flight Elite and ASA Basketball are collaborating on the project and bringing their athletic tenure to the recreation space. "There's definitely a need for a safe and secure place for parents to send their kids for competition and training," says Mike Samuels, CEO of Ultimate Fieldhouse.

Slated to open in January, the 40,000-square-foot Ultimate Fieldhouse will run camps and competitions on its four full courts for basketball and volleyball players. "It's been a dream of ours since our years together at Northgate High School," says Samuels.

SportsPlex will also house Encore Gymnastics, Copa Real Soccer Centre, the American Swim Academy and Sparta Taekwondo School along with a restaurant (where parents can hang-out while waiting for their kids.) A portion of the

CC Times property has been leased to a skilled nursing facility, Plum Health Care, the largest skilled nursing care provider west of the Mississippi.

NEW VIBE

With diverse developments, retailers and enterprises opening, it's safe to say the business park has come a long way. Last year, the Shadelands Business Park property owners voted for a Property Business Improvement District (PBID), in essence taxing themselves and creating an annual budget of \$385,000 for special projects: beautification, signage and a local police presence. A portion of the PBID or \$80,000 subsidizes bus service to and from the Contra Costa Transit Village/Pleasant Hill BART station.

"The whole vibe is more energized," says Rocco Biale, owner of Rocco's Pizzeria in Encina Grande. "This will be a different place by the fall of 2016," he says. "A lot of people complain about the added traffic, but we will adapt. We always do." *Stay up to date on the changes at shadelands.org.* ■