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WORLD OVERCOMERS OUTREACH MINISTRIES CHURCH PURCHASES HICKORY RIDGE MALL *News Press Release on Hickory Ridge Mall*

On Friday, October 10, our church completed negotiations and signed a contract to purchase the Hickory Ridge Mall concourse and the front Applebee's Restaurant from the Carlyle Rock Ridge Development Group. The sale price is \$1.4 million. The deal does not include any of the anchor stores at this time. However, we are in contact with the other anchor owners, and there are future plans to acquire them in phases.

Our church has been seeking commercial retail shopping center space in the surrounding area for about two years now. We were recently in negotiations with one of the neighboring shopping centers, but found reasons to cancel the deal in June. It seemed as if the hand of God had blocked everything to lead us to this point.

We initially called the mall after the tornado in March of this year to see if they had plans to sell, and we were told they still had plans to renovate and reopen. We read a Commercial Appeal article about the status of the Hickory Ridge Mall on July 16 or 17. We decided to try to contact the mall again to find out the status as a result of the February tornado and if they had plans to sell.

To our surprise, we were told that the owners were ready to sell and move out of the city of Memphis. At this point, we began to pursue the acquisition of the mall with visits, inspections, evaluation of the numbers, contract preparations and negotiations.

When we were about to sign with the owners in mid-September, we received word that the city of Memphis was interested in the mall. Of course, we ceased all negotiations at that time. We informed the owners to keep us in consideration if they were not successful with the city. We left them with a signed contract and an earnest money check.

As a result of the council's recent concerns and delays in making a decision on the property on October 7, we received a call from Carlyle Development (owners of the mall) on Wednesday, October 8. They expressed an interest to proceed with our contract with them because they did not think it would pass City Council, and they were ready to move on.

I, in turn, called Mayor Herenton's office on Thursday, October 9, to inform him of Carlyle's call and their desire to sell the mall to us. My desire was to make sure we would not be in any conflict with his plans. I wanted to find out if he still wanted us to wait until October 21 to see what the council would do.

The mayor was very gracious in letting me know that his office had decided to relinquish its part in acquiring the mall. The city CAO Keith McGhee can confirm this information, and we have the Mayor's contract withdrawal letter.

Carlyle's next highest bid was with another investment group from St. Louis, Missouri that was interested in buying the property at \$1.4 million, which is why we had to equal that price to get the deal. We did not want to see another investment group come in, buy it, sit on it, wait to sell it for a profit and leave town as the building goes down even more. We did not want to see the same thing that happened to the Mall of Memphis happen to this mall. The Hickory Ridge Mall is an icon in Hickory Hill and sits at the heart of the community. We want to see it revitalized and bring life back to this area.

This is a part of our church's Economic Development and Empowerment Initiative. On July 8, 2007, we closed down our church services, and all of our members were challenged to canvas the surrounding streets of Hickory Hill. We returned with statistics that revealed the concerns of the community. The heart of our ministry is to see the family restored with values that once made it strong. The mall will help to serve this purpose. We have been working with the schools in Hickory Hill area, canvassing and praying for the neighborhood with our prayer vans, doing graffiti cleanup, working with teens and children, providing security for the businesses, providing assistance for tornado victims, providing shelter for Louisiana hurricane evacuees, and working with established neighborhood watch efforts.

God has also given us a vision of raising up entrepreneurs in our church who qualify to operate their own businesses. We have several people who just need a start in life. Our church will give these members who have a dream, but lack capital, an opportunity to get established. Our hope is to assist potential entrepreneurs as much as possible during the critical incubation period of their businesses. We also hope to provide jobs for people not only in the church but also in the community, particularly to our young people. The mall units will house both membership businesses and other entrepreneurs as long as those enterprises do not conflict with who we are as a Christian church. For example, we could not allow a liquor store or a business that produced t-shirts with obscene or lewd behavior and images on them.

The mall will operate as a combination retail, community service organizations, and family fun, entertainment center. We envision a one-stop shop of community organizations that offer a wide variety of community services. Many family organizations are spread out all over the city that could offer support to each other under one roof. Our church will house its brand new *School of Family* classes for those involved in domestic violence. We would also love to still partner with our city and county to house some of their services to the area.

Many businesses are experiencing inside theft and lack of professionalism among employees. The mall will also house our School of Business and Workplace Excellence to address these issues. We want to offer local businesses a place to train workers. The school will also train youth in principles of excellence for employment in hopes that local Hickory Hill businesses will hire them. It will equip business employers with successful principles during times of crises. It will train individuals to go into business.

Our church wanted to get involved with a societal ill so we could help bring positive change to those less fortunate. We recently saw the 20/20 special *Babyland* that reported that Memphis had the highest infant mortality rate in the nation. In an effort to decrease those numbers, we want to offer plans that will decrease teen pregnancy and support those teen mothers who have children. Our ministry will house in the mall a Baby Thrift store for expecting mothers and teen mothers who already have children. This along with other support services will encourage them and offer support to these children so they can get a fair chance at life. We will also find ways to assist in the prenatal care of these expectant mothers and help these young girls avoid making the same choices again.

We want to see community organizations in the mall that provide possible services such as: legal services, senior citizens services, employment services, child care, mortgage assistance services, counseling centers, adult education, wellness and fitness center, family services, a pharmacy, Alzheimer's daycare, child care, disabilities services, and much more. New Directions recently expressed an interest in providing a medical services business in the mall, and we hope to partner with them. Many business tenants who left the mall after the tornado have also expressed an interest in returning to the mall.

There are plans for a 1500-seat banquet and conference center for weddings, receptions, family reunions, funeral repasts, banquets, conferences, plays, birthday parties, family reunions, lectures, workshops, seminars and other special events. The center will also include meeting and conference rooms for nearby businesses and organizations.

The old Hickory Hill 4-screen movie cinema is still in great shape. We plan to make it a Family Cinema where parents can take their children to a safe environment and enjoy Disney, cartoon, and other G-PG rated movies. Movies with horror, extreme violence, nudity, sexual content, and profanity will not be allowed.

With the closing of Libertyland, people are looking for somewhere to go. Hickory Hill is in need of a large venue where families can take their children for an evening of fun, food, games, and entertainment. On July 4 of this year, over 3600 people came on our church grounds to enjoy rides, games, and food free of charge.

We are very excited about our vision for a Family Fun entertainment center. The center will serve the interests of children ages 3-12. It will be similar to the Incredible Pizza operation in Cordova. It will offer go-carts, bumper cars, kiddie rides, party rooms, arcade rooms, other high-tech games and Putt-Putt miniature golf. The added feature will be a tutorial program and computer center that will motivate kids to study before having fun. We are also in contact with the local vendor who has worked with us over the last five (5) years that provides carnival games, rides, snack stands, and other equipment for an ongoing, outdoor amusement park. We believe this venue will bring traffic back to the mall to make it productive for the other businesses.

For our teens, ages 13-17, in one of the separate facilities from the mall, we plan to establish entities that will motivate creative performing arts in a clean, safe, smoke-free, drug-and-alcohol free environment. Teens will be challenged to produce their own morally responsible music with a recording studio and online radio station.

We offer a Gentleman's Academy for teen boys and a charm school for teen girls. There is also a plan for an urban leadership project designed to identify, cultivate, improve and motivate inner-city youth to become leaders and businessmen in their community. We also plan to offer an anti-gang intervention and prevention program.

Hispanics need several services to help integrate them into society. We are also planning to reserve mall units to meet the needs of the Hispanic community relative to their kind of food, movies, games, and social services.

- The Applebee's will serve as a Christian singles' club and restaurant.
- A restaurant is planned for the old Piccadilly's that will serve only healthy dishes and play smooth, instrumental background music.
- A childcare facility is planned for the community and employees who work at the mall.

This project will be financed by a combination of funds that include the church's funds, bank loans, government and private grants, possible investors, other funding resources, and faith in the Lord. Any profits left over from the mall will be used to either fund future phases of the mall or other church projects. Hopefully, this will lead to the acquisition of other vacant properties nearby. Having a large congregation of people with various skills will also lower a great deal of the expense.

All the aforementioned projects will be completed in phases. This will be a for-profit corporation. Therefore, the mall will be taxed like any other for-profit business entity. Our aim is to clearly be above board in our finances and pay taxes on what should be taxed. In this way, we will not have any issues from any business income that could negatively impact the church's corporation status.

I have learned that if we are not making an impact for the Lord outside the four walls of the church, then we are not making an impact at all. Jesus intended for His people to be involved in the marketplace. God's Word has sanctioned Christians to go into business. He tells us to occupy until He comes. The word *occupy* means to engage in business until He returns. Ecclesiastes 5:3 states that dreams can be accomplished through the multitude of business. Truly, this mall is a dream come true for WOOMC members and me.

We love this community, and we have invested money and effort in this community. We call it "putting seed in the ground." When you do that, God will give a harvest in return. That's what we see God giving us in this mall.

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For more information about WOOMC's purchase of the Hickory Ridge Mall, please contact Apostle Alton R. Williams at (901) 844-3800 or (901) 861-0133 or e-mail him at arw109@aol.com. You may also contact Al Cousins at (901) 473-3425 or (901) 827-3451 or e-mail him at al.cousins@woomc.org.