



## Malls shopping for nonretail tenants

Medical school opening in Nile's Eastwood Mall

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NILES - A Michigan-based medical education college will be opening doors to new students and potential employees on the second floor of the Save-A-Lot building on the Eastwood Mall properties.

Ross Medical Education Center, which will have 18 locations in Michigan, Indiana and Ohio, provides 30-week training in medical assistance, medical insurance billing and dental assistance.

The medical education center will be one of several nontraditional, nonretail tenants on the Eastwood Mall properties.

"We have a church, a driver's training school, a license bureau, a law firm and a television station studio," Joe Bell, a spokesman for Cafaro Co., said.

The school will be one of the first adult education programs to open at the Eastwood Mall. At one time, there was a day care for younger children.

However, it is not the first on Cafaro Co. properties.

The Cafaro Co. "had an adult education facility on its Kentucky Oaks Mall in Paducah, Ky., but that school moved after it outgrew the space that was available," Bell said. "Schools placing their campuses on mall properties are becoming increasingly common as they are looking at spaces with easy to access and adequate space."

Eastwood Mall will provide Ross Medical Education Center exactly those characteristics.

The school will lease a 6,000-square-foot section of the upper floor of the Save-A-Lot building. In size, it will represent a medium-size store.

"Having schools on their properties seems to be the direction that some mall operators are heading," Bell said. "The schools need space, and some malls increasingly need tenants to fill unused buildings."

Shopping malls across the country in the last two years have been looking for and opening their doors to nontraditional tenants to fill vacated retail spaces, such as the now-bankrupt Circuit City, as companies close their doors or move.

"This is not something that is new, but it has accelerated during this recent recession," Jesse Tron, a spokesman with the International Council of Shopping Centers, said. "We've seen dental offices, gym classes for children and schools opening in malls."

Mall owners are trying to combat vacancy space in their complexes.

"This is certainly not something we were seeing occurring during the boom times," Tron said. "They (mall owners and managers) are trying to do what they can to gain revenue or to attract foot traffic. Some mall owners believe if they can get people into the buildings, maybe the customers of these nontraditional locations also will shop at their other stores."

Tron does not know whether this is a trend that will continue once the recession is over and people begin shopping again.

"Some malls are signing short-term leases with these nontraditional tenants," he said. "What is going to happen in the future is really on a case-by-case basis."

Even before this new lease, Bell described the Eastwood Mall properties as being 90 percent occupied.

"We already have professional service offices in the mall," Bell said. "This is just the next logical step."

Ross Medical Education Center plans to have about 30 local employees once it is fully operational in the Eastwood Mall.

"We provide our students small class sizes and work to place them in jobs after they complete their training," Jim Walsh, president of the school, said.

When it is fully operational, the school expects to have no more than 200 students at any one time. Classes sizes are expected to be no more than eight to 12 students.

At its other schools, Ross' student demographics are primarily female, 23 to 28 years old, and high school graduates.

"Our goal is to get them into good jobs in the allied health fields," Walsh said. "It is not to get them a job, but careers."

Tuition at the school is expected to be around \$14,000, which includes books, lab fees and scrubs. A fully accredited school, Ross students are eligible to receive federal and state student aid.

Initially formed in 1976 in Flint, Mich., Ross Medical Education Center has been Ohio since 2008. It opened in its first Ohio school in Sylvania, took over a school in Cincinnati in the same year and now is moving into Warren.

"Ohio is a natural market for continued expansion," Paul Mitchell of Ross Medical Education Center said. "The demand from students and employers for allied health programs mirrors our experience in Michigan and Indiana."

Enrollment of new students will begin later this month once all necessary state licensing requirements have been finalized.

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