

DANDENONG

Plaza says farewell to Myer

Michael Randall

DEPARTMENT STORE TO MAKE WAY FOR BIG REDEVELOPMENT

RETAIL giant Myer will close its doors at Dandenong Plaza next month.

The plaza's key attraction had experienced a rapid decline in sales and customer traffic over several years, leading centre owner GPT Group to pull the pin on the struggling store.

Centre manager Mark

Tannahill said Myer had "stagnated" and the time was right to part ways, after a 24-year association.

"Myer's a 15,000sq m store, and when that happens, you need to make positive moves," Mr Tannahill said.

Myer will be gone next

month and year-long works will pave the way for an Aldi supermarket, JB Hi Fi, discount designer store Trade Secret and Japanese concept store Daiso.

Myer's general manager of corporate affairs Jo Lynch said all staff would be "redeployed".

"The Dandenong store represents less than one per cent of total group sales ... data indicates that the majority of Dandenong customers were also choosing to shop at the new Myer Fountain Gate store," Ms Lynch said.

"Continuing communi-

cation with our customers in the area will further encourage them to visit alternative nearby stores."

The *Leader* understands staff cried when notified of the closure on Friday.

The new retailers are expected to open in November 2014 and take up two of

Myer's three levels. Mr Tannahill said the third level was currently for lease.

He said Myer, which had a lease until 2016, had agreed with GPT to end it early.

Myer's battles extend further than Dandenong, with its reported net profit after tax down 8.7 per cent on the 2011-12 financial year.

Traders fear Myer's loss

By CASEY NEILL

DANDENONG Plaza traders fear Myer's departure next month will destroy the struggling shopping centre.

A Myer spokeswoman said the Dandenong store represented less than 1 per cent of total group sales and most customers were instead shopping at the new Fountain Gate store. She said the Plaza shop was expected to close in late October and all staff would be redeployed.

JB Hi Fi, Trade Secret, Daiso and Aldi are to take Myer's place as part of an upgrade.

"We anticipate that the introduction of the four powerhouse mini-majors will draw significantly more people and drive higher sales," Dandenong Plaza centre manager Mark Tannahill said.

Construction works are to begin

before the end of the year with the four new retailers to open late next year.

Mr Tannahill said centre management was "well aware of the importance of activation and marketing strategies to minimise the impact on the centre during the upgrades".

He said management had an open-door policy with retailers to ensure that any concerns raised during the construction period were "met with swift and effective actions".

Rita McCrae from Menzline, just a few doors from the department store, told The Journal that Myer was the centre's drawcard.

"I just think it's really disappointing and it's going to affect the Plaza something shocking," she said.

"It's going to destroy the Plaza. There's nothing that the Plaza has to offer anyone.

"It's pretty hard as it is now. Once we don't have Myer..."

Ms McCrae has worked at the centre for 20 years.

"I've seen it all," she said.

"It's sad. It's almost like an icon of Dandenong going.

"I think they need to have some real shops in here - not more \$2 shops."

She said the centre needed a facelift to combat the retail battle with online shopping, and even suggested making the centre a factory outlet.

"Everyone's on sale 12 months of the year anyway," she said.

"I think something like that would do really well here."

Other traders told The Journal that losing Myer was a big blow, but they hoped JB Hi Fi and the Aldi would bring in new customers.

"Myer's gone down in sales, it's not generating customers into the centre," one said.

Committee for Dandenong chairman Gary Casticum said the move was probably a positive for Dandenong.

"It's going to make the centre probably larger and more usable for a lot of the people coming to Dandenong," he said.

"The old configuration of Myer. I think it was good at the time but the whole structure of the centre and the Myer building needs a change."

Dandenong Retail Trader's Association (DRTA) chairwoman Glenys Cooper said the move would certainly have an impact, but Myer Dandenong had been underperforming.

"It certainly will be a loss, though," she said.

Huge crowds welcomed shopping emporium

By CASEY NEILL

THOUSANDS flocked to McCrae Street to watch Dandenong mayor Keith Miller open Myer's doors on 4 November 1974.

"And they even drank coffee as they waited for the store to open!" The Journal reported on its front page.

The \$10 million complex was touted as "four levels packed with values and excitement" and dominated the Dandenong skyline.

"Huge crowds thronged streets surrounding the huge emporium, but it was an orderly and patient grand opener to the biggest retail boost Dandenong has seen," The Journal reported.

The paper even brought "Australia's top recording star Johnny Farnham" to the event.

"Johnny, who went to school locally and whose parents live in Dandenong North, will be at the store for the official opening at 9am by the Mayor of Dandenong, councillor Keith Miller."

"The singing superstar will be at the store for about an hour."

Former Dandenong Retail Trader's Association (DRTA) chairman Roy Aspinall said central Dandenong was a completely different place when he and Margaret Spencer opened Highway Bowls Centre in Walker Street in 1980.

"Lonsdale Street was the focal point with stores like Katies, McEwan's and the Coles General Store with a famed Coles Cafeteria," he said.

"The arrival of Myer was a great boost for Dandenong but it was also the start of the massive change to trading.

"First there was the Capital Centre and then that was enlarged to be the Dandenong Plaza and that became the focal point.

"General trading became centred there and it was the specialist shops that kept the other areas alive.

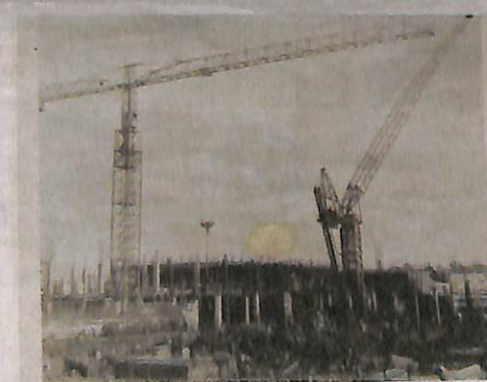
"Stores like ourselves, Rob's The British Butcher, Knit 'N' Pearl (then on Lonsdale Street) and in time Compleat Angler, Drummonds and the bridal shops that were destination shops."



Myer's opening on 4 November 1974 made The Journal's front page.



A "multi-colour special edition" in The Journal encourages shoppers to check out the new store.



The \$10 million store starts to take shape in 1973.