

## Midwest City



An Oklahoma Centennial clock stands at the center of Midwest City's Town Center Plaza. PHOTOS BY JEFF HARRISON

# Town Center Plaza shows resiliency in face of economic challenges

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Restaurants and retailers have faced plenty of challenges in recent years.

The pandemic forced many businesses to close or change how they serve customers. And inflation, rising interest rates and low unemployment have hampered economic growth.

Midwest City's Town Center Plaza has experienced those lulls and a resurgence.

Just months before the pandemic hit, Town Center had zero vacancies. Several businesses closed in the coming months, including J.C. Penney, which left a gaping hole in the shopping center.

Fast forward a few years, and many of those vacancies have disappeared.

"Retail in some areas has looked pretty dismal, but Town Center Plaza is still vibrant and doesn't have many vacancies now," said Robert Coleman, economic development director for Midwest City. "The retailers are doing well, and we think that will continue to improve as the economy stabilizes and inflation levels off."

The former J.C. Penney building is being transformed into a new Mathis Home Store. The 100,000-square-foot store is expected to create about 100 jobs and draw more than 115,000 new customers to Town Center. The store will feature separate areas for La-Z-Boy and Ashley Furniture as well as a restaurant and bar area.

"They've been making a lot of progress on the inside and outside of the building," Coleman said. "The way they're going, they should have their finals permits and occupancy permit in a few weeks."

The store is expected to open by April.

Carter's, 7185 SE 29th St., opened in January, filling a void for kid's clothing store in Town Center since A Children's Place closed. Maurices is expected to open soon. And Big Biscuit, a breakfast restaurant, is set to move into the old Panera building.

Town Center did take a big hit after the holidays when Dicks' Sporting Goods closed its Midwest City store. Coleman said a potential business has shown interest in the property

and is in the process of completing a market study. The building owner could also divide the 50,000 square-foot building into smaller parcels.

"Dick's Sporting Goods loss at the end of the year was a major blow because of the size of the space, but it did not come as a complete surprise," Coleman said after the store closing was announced. "DSG has seen a significant drop in sales since it chose not to carry hunting gear about five years ago."

