

FORT WORTH NOVEMBER 5, 2015

Growth in north Fort Worth still going strong

HIGHLIGHTS

Construction underway on Facebook data center

New retail center opens on west side of I-35W

Hillwood's Heritage community just about built out





BY NICHOLAS SAKELARIS

Special to the Fort Worth Star-Telegram

FORT WORTH — Growth in north Fort Worth shows no sign of slowing down.

Dirt is being moved for the construction of a Facebook data center.

The Federal Aviation Administration just finished moving into its new southwest regional headquarters just off Interstate 35W north of Heritage Trace Parkway.

The Northwest school district's third high school was dedicated this week.

And work on I-35W continues across the Alliance Corridor, which started with the novel idea of building a cargo-only airport in 1989 and now has an estimated population of more than 250,000.

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WE STARTED WITH THE AIRPORT, THE CENTERPIECE THAT PUT US ON THE MAP.

Bill Burton, executive vice president of Hillwood

Planned and developed by Ross Perot Jr. and Hillwood, the 18,000-acre region has been transformed from pastureland into a vibrant mix of transportation and data centers, outdoor shopping, restaurants, apartments, middle-class and upscale subdivisions, schools and hospitals.

Flying in a helicopter over the corridor, called AllianceTexas, Bill Burton, executive vice president of Hillwood, explained how they master-planned the blank slate from the start — and they're far from finished.

“What we've seen is a maturation of this project,” Burton said. “We started with the airport, the centerpiece that put us on the map. It was a novel concept. It still is today.”

John Baen, a real estate professor at the University of North Texas, boldly says Alliance has the potential to become another Silicon Valley with several large corporate campuses. He said he also wouldn't be surprised if someday Fort Worth Alliance Airport opened to

commercial traffic.

“It’s unusual for someone to have the foresight to buy it so cheap 15 or 20 years ago and have the holding power not to sell it,” Baen said. “They’re in it for the long term. It’s a dynasty, I believe.”

The newness of far north Fort Worth has become a magnet for young families like Melanie Freidman, her husband and their two young boys. They always have a different shopping center or store to get excited about. Her in-laws visit twice a year and are amazed at how the area changes.

“Each time they come to visit, something new is there,” said Friedman, who lives in Tehama Ridge on the west side of I-35W. “It’s completely different.”

Here’s an update on some of the changes coming to the Alliance Corridor:

End in sight for work on I-35W

It’s impossible to drive in north Fort Worth without seeing orange barricades, but there is a light at the end of the I-35W traffic tunnel.

The reconstruction of the interstate from Loop 820 to the U.S. 287 “Decatur Cutoff” should be finished late next year. The Texas Department of Transportation project includes adding four managed toll lanes — two in each direction — and paving new free lanes, bridges, interchanges and frontage roads.

That stretch is considered one of the most congested roads in Texas.

ALLIANCE TEXAS IS HOME TO AN ESTIMATED 250,000 PEOPLE.

The next phase continues that construction north to the airport. The highway department will pick a contractor for the 8-mile project by year’s end, and construction will start in 2016.

Also in the transportation mix is Texas 170, which was built on land Hillwood donated to the department. The 5.8-mile stretch of Texas 170, from Texas 114 to I-35W, has been proposed as a toll road.

Regional planners are taking a second look at that as new sources of state funding become available, including funds from Proposition 1 approved by voters last year and Proposition 7 approved by voters Tuesday, said Amanda Wilson, a spokeswoman for the North Central Texas Council of Governments.

More retail options

The success of Alliance Town Center has spilled over I-35W to the new Presidio Towne Crossing project, a new retail destination with its own list of national box-store chains.

Presidio's first phase, which includes a Target, Costco, Ross, Old Navy, Petco and Shoe Carnival, all opened in the last month totaling 500,000 square feet. A bunch of smaller tenants will open in November, said John Weber, president of Weber and Co.

For Friedman, the new Target in Presidio Towne Crossing means she no longer has to travel to the Denton Highway store, which can be a hassle with two young children.

Future phases include Winco, Hobby Lobby, Mardel, Hemispheres and Main Event, all expected to open by summer. Restaurants include Uncle Julio's, Chuck E. Cheese's, Red Robin, Whataburger and Chick fil-A.

\$1 billion

The amount Facebook will invest in its Alliance site.

Alliance Town Center, a 900-acre mixed-used development that opened seven years ago and is just north of Presidio, boasts more than 1 million square feet, including a movie theater, major anchors such as Belk, JC Penney, Dick's Sporting Goods and Korger Marketplace and 25 restaurants.

It also includes Hillwood Commons, a three-story corporate office facility.

The next evolution of Alliance Town Center, called the Main Street district, will have 120,000 square feet of retail, restaurants, a hotel, office and a community park for concerts and other events.

There's no timeline for this phase of the project, though.

"We think the next five years, you're going to see a massive change," Burton said.

Commercial growth includes Facebook

Alliance already had four data centers when Facebook announced this summer that it was coming to Fort Worth.

The social network company is building a massive data center and office building in the first phase. Ultimately, Facebook will invest \$1 billion at the site on Like Way and Texas 170.

The first of three 250,000-square-foot buildings is expected to be operating by the end of 2016.

THE 110-ACRE FACEBOOK DATA CENTER WILL BE POWERED ENTIRELY BY RENEWABLE ENERGY.

"The location in Fort Worth offered a shovel-ready site; excellent access to fiber and power and a strong pool of talent for construction and operations staff," said Ken Patchett, Facebook's director of data center operations for the West Region.

The 110-acre data center will be powered entirely by renewable energy from a 200-megawatt wind farm outside the region.

In late October, Fort Worth-based Galderma Laboratories, which makes dermatological pharmaceuticals, said it is expanding to add a \$22 million research and development center. Galderma is building a 100,000-square-foot expansion next to its headquarters at the northeast corner of Texas Longhorn Way and Heritage Parkway, just north of Alliance Airport.

The building is expected to be completed in 2017.

Runway extension underway

For 15 years the city of Fort Worth, which owns Alliance Airport, and Hillwood have been pursuing funding to extend the runways north to 11,000 feet from 9,600 feet.

A milestone was reached in August when the City Council awarded a \$61.9 million contract to Virginia-based Lane Construction Co. to expand the two runways and build a taxiway.

Key to the three-phase project was the relocation of Farm Road 156 and nearby BNSF railroad tracks, which has already happened.

Phase one is under construction.

When completed in 2018, the longer runways will allow the largest cargo planes in the world to land and take off, Burton said.

“The expansion of the airport will broaden the scope of what we’re able to do here,” he said.

IN THE PAST 15 YEARS, MORE THAN 43,000 HOUSES HAVE BEEN BUILT IN AND AROUND THE ALLIANCE CORRIDOR.

Schools still being built

Enrollment in the Northwest school district has increased from about 7,500 in 2004 to more than 20,000 in 2015. All that growth prompted the district to call its share of bond elections, including a \$255 million referendum in 2012.

Last week the district had its grand opening for Eaton High School, its third high school. Since 2011, the district has built one high school, one middle school and three elementary schools.

The Keller school district has built 18 schools west of Denton Highway since 2000 and will open three more in the next two years, including a new middle school.

“Keller ISD has seen tremendous growth in the western portion of our district and along the I-35W corridor, much of which is directly linked to the growth of the Alliance area,” said Mark Youngs, the district’s chief financial officer.

Residential moving north

In the past 15 years more than 43,000 houses have been built in and around the Alliance Corridor, according to data from Residential Strategies.

But after years of single-family home construction in north Fort Worth, suitable land for houses is just about tapped out, said Angie Mastrocola, senior vice president of Hillwood.

Heritage, for example, a 2,300-acre master-planned community with more than 3,300 homes just east of Alliance Town Center, has only 40 lots left, she said.

The Texas 114 area of Roanoke and Trophy Club is nearly full, too. And developers can’t go west because the landscape is dotted with hundreds of Barnett Shale gas wells, she said.

“The growth, in our opinion over the next 20 years will be along I-35 north to Denton,” she said. “That’s where you’re going to see the activity popping up.”

Hillwood has already started the Harvest subdivision in Argyle, where builders will deliver 225 houses in 2015 alone.

“It’s just been booming like crazy,” said Jarred Briggles, who bought the second house in his neighborhood off Heritage Trace and North Beach Street. “The schools helped and then the proximity to everything.”

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