

Permission to reprint or copy this article or photo, other than personal use, must be obtained from The Seattle Times. Call 206-464-3113 or e-mail resale@seattletimes.com with your request.

Highlands becoming a true "urban village"

By Sonia Krishnan
Seattle Times Eastside bureau

It has been only a month since Caffe Ladro opened in the Issaquah Highlands, but manager John Mathwig already knows the names of the loyal java addicts hankering for their daily cup o' joe.

"We have a good core group of people who come here every day," he said. "They've been waiting for us to open."

A coffee shop often operates as a neighborhood nexus, a melting pot of meetings and conversation. When the first residents moved to the Highlands in 1998, there was nowhere to buy a mocha, much less a place to hang out and chat.

It seemed to fly in the face of the Highlands' urban-village concept, built on the idea of living, working and playing. Eight years later, that's changing, albeit incrementally, as more retailers start to occupy the 18 acres adjacent to Highlands Drive.

A spa/hair salon and dry cleaner have moved in. Other tenants, including an optical store, a wine bar and restaurant, and ricensroll, a fast-food sushi place, are expected to set up shop between February and June.

That's not all. Curves, a fitness center for women, is expected to open next month. And Marcella's, a sister restaurant to Rosita's, a popular Mexican joint in Seattle's Green Lake neighborhood, will likely move in by April or May, said Sergio Uvence, owner of Rosita's.

"I think it will do well," Uvence said. "They say location, location, location — that's what makes good business. And this is a neighborhood of people with income."

Issaquah was ranked this year as the second-fastest-growing city in King County, according to the state Office of Financial Management.

That growth is reflected in the number of people moving to the Highlands. About 3,000 live there now, and once all the home construction is completed in two years, the population likely will jump to about 7,000 people in 3,250 homes, said developer Judd Kirk of Port Blakely Communities.

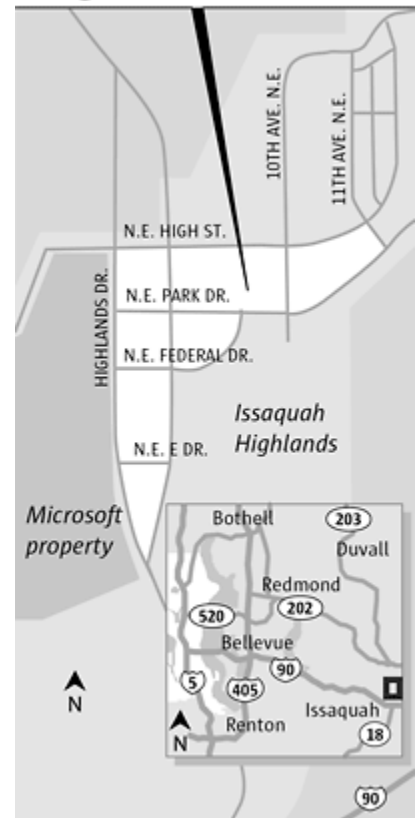
There are also 34 acres set aside for a "lifestyle center," a mixed development of high-end retailers, local shops and restaurants, modeled after University Village. Kirk said he expects plans to start on that as soon as next month.



BETTY UDESEN / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Lindsey and Justin Marshall live close enough to walk to the new Caffe Ladro in Issaquah Highlands. It has quickly become a popular gathering spot in the neighborhood.

Highlands retail area



THE SEATTLE TIMES

Nothing is in the works yet for a grocery store, he added.

It remains to be seen which employer will anchor the Highlands, which was created to cater to an educated work force. Microsoft had purchased land in the urban village for a future expansion, but announced last year that it would focus its growth in Redmond for the time being.

Swedish Medical Center of Seattle is one possible contender. It submitted a proposal to the state to build a 175-bed, full-service facility on 15 acres in the Highlands. Overlake Hospital Medical Center of Bellevue also is vying for a chance to build in Issaquah and has expressed interest in the Highlands.

But last year, the state Department of Health rejected both proposals, saying the region had more than enough beds to serve residents. Both sides appealed, and the case is before a state administrative-law judge.

Sonia Krishnan: 206-515-5546 or skrishnan@seattletimes.com

[Copyright © 2006 The Seattle Times Company](#)