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## EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

### A city wide economic development revitalization **Wilkes-Barre attracts new business with its new and improved city center**

The lengthy list of new businesses in the new and improved center city proves that Wilkes-Barre, PA is well on its way to a rebirth. The city's new and improved Entertainment District hosts a bevy of new and popular dining options - Thai, Italian, American, Japanese, pizza and coffee & donuts, plus seven new nightspots, a history-making \$32 million University Corners movie and retail complex, and the nation's first joint college Barnes and Noble College Bookstore, serving thousands of students living within a five block radius is the first of many steps enabling Wilkes-Barre to fulfill its college town potential.

A city-wide economic development revitalization, fueled by aggressive city leadership by Mayor Thomas Leighton and the support of PA Governor Ed Rendell, is in full swing. According to Robert Finlay, CLS, President of Humford Equities. "When other areas are seeing a dramatic loss of business, Wilkes-Barre is seeing



*Wilkes-Barre Center*  
a steady growth," Finlay reports. "We have signed 15 new leases within the last 18 months consisting of 50,000 s/f of space."

Finlay says the anticipated opening of an Intermodal Transportation Center and 750 parking garage by September 2009, will centralize public transportation in the city, and make it easy for people to move in and around the city with the utmost convenience. The center will serve as a hub for privately owned Martz Trailways, Luzerne Cty. Transportation Authority busses, and taxi services. In the past the city's original anchor, Boscov's Department Store's customers parked in a rear garage never setting foot on

South Main St. The Intermodal Transportation Center and Garage will now put pedestrian foot traffic in the middle of South Main St. and the front door of Boscov's and surrounding retailers.

Another keystone in the rebirth, the University Corners project, is responsible for attracting thousands to the center city. The Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce undertook the initial purchase of this prime commercial space at the intersection of South Main and Northampton Sts., redeveloping a historic retail complex around a newly constructed 14-screen stadium style movie theater. Nationally-recognized developer Carlsberg Management Co. recently took majority ownership and is teaming with the Colliers Arnold and Susquehanna Real Estate to develop the retail and residential portions of the complex which include 30,000 s/f foot of street-level retail space and 21 condominiums which is now under construction. Retired local AHL hockey hero Dennis Bonvie is opening

a Blue Chip Gourmet Cookie franchise that will join local favorite, Januzzi's Pizza.

Confirmed by the lines of patrons waiting to buy movie tickets, it is estimated that as many as 11,000 people visit the Entertainment District weekly. In addition to the Movies 14 Theater, the city's F.M. Kirby Center for the Performing Arts, a historic, art-deco era Performing Arts Center, draws thousands of visitors to an average of 140 performances per year. Patrons are also enjoying the variety of cuisine options offered by Thai Thai Restaurant, Café Toscana, Rodano's Pizza, Katana Japanese Restaurant, and Bart & Urby's American Grill. New nightspots include the Hardware Bar, Bourbon Street Saloon, Reflex Nightclub, and the latest, Luna, offering both a Miami-themed lounge and New York-style nightclub under one roof.

The nighttime surge in foot traffic has been aided by an aesthetic rebirth that includes new street lighting and a new streetscape that

replaced the 30-year-old glass canopy structure that covered many of the center city walkways. "By removing the canopy, the street is brighter and offers better visibility and signage for storefronts," Beginning in the Fall the City will begin installing new sidewalks and new diagonal parking around Public Square.

Another attraction is on its way as the city eagerly anticipates the completion of the River Common Project that will transform a necessary dike system into an environmental and entertainment mecca along a four-block area that reaches from the Luzerne County Courthouse to Wilkes University. When completed, visitors will get to enjoy a picturesque view from two 60-foot-wide portals that will provide direct access to the Susquehanna River. The project includes a 700-seat riverbank amphitheater and fishing pier that will be home to concerts, festivals and community events, expected to attract thousands of visitors each year and opening in June. ■