

It's official: Bass Pro Shops coming to East Peoria



AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster

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Journal Star

Posted May 13, 2010 @ 01:06 PM

PEORIA —

This is no fish tale. East Peoria landed a luncker.

Bass Pro Shops will open their 58th destination outdoor superstore on riverfront property formerly known as the CILCO ash pond, north of the Murray Baker Bridge, city officials released Thursday.

“There is no other retailer in America like Bass Pro Shops,” said Mayor Dave Mingus. “Their one-of-a-kind destination retail stores attract an average of 3 million people a year to each store. Typically, when Bass Pro Shops comes to a city they attract more businesses which create more jobs, more taxes and a better community.

“We are thrilled they chose to part of our progressive city.”

The store will be 145,000 square feet — about twice the size of the Kohl’s department store on Main Street — and is tentatively scheduled to open in the fall of 2011.

It will produce about 300 full-time jobs when it completed. At least 200 other full-time construction workers will be hired during construction.

Bass Pro Shops stores are a combination of museum, art gallery, aquarium, outdoor education, conservation and entertainment. Each store is uniquely themed to the region in which they are located so that no two stores are alike.

“I really enjoyed meeting Mayor Mingus, the City Council and Jeff Giebelhausen (president of Cullinan Properties) and team,” said Bass Pro Shops founder Johnny Morris in a news release. “I appreciate them traveling to other Bass Pro Shops and developing the interest and enthusiasm to invite us to East Peoria. “We are grateful to them and the community for this great opportunity.”

At a special meeting Thursday night, the City Council will vote to approve contracts to Midwest Foundation Corp. of Tremont and AECOM of Peoria to begin preparation of the property.

The East Peoria store will offer outdoor enthusiasts the size of 3½ football fields of shopping with the area's largest selection of equipment and clothing for hunting, fishing, hiking, backpacking, wildlife viewing, camping, outdoor cooking and more. A gift and nature center will also serve up a wide variety of outdoor-related items from lamps and dishes to bird feeders and furniture. A restaurant and themed bowling facility are also planned.

An expansive boat showroom will feature Tracker, Nitro, Mako and SunTracker boats built by Tracker Marine Group — the world's largest manufacturer of fishing boats. A boat service center will also be available.

Stores are decorated in a cozy, hunting-lodge theme and boast an indoor water feature to showcase fish species that are indigenous to the area. The company also is known for its outdoor-skills workshops, teaching techniques such as fly fishing, Dutch oven cooking, archery hunting and GPS navigation.

The deal ends months of speculation about whether one of the most prominent and popular outdoor recreation goods companies would set up shop in East Peoria. It began last June when Morris visited the city, scouting sites for a possible new store location.

While no commitment was made then, the city still moved ahead with an engineering study of the property. Information from that study, conducted by AECOM in January, focused mostly on construction and infrastructure costs and permits needed for a "major outdoor retailer" to develop the property. While Bass Pro was not named as the potential developer, it was hard pressed not to think otherwise.

The new East Peoria store should be a significant draw for the area because no other Bass Pro Shops exist in Illinois between Bolingbrook and St. Charles, Mo. Bass Pro Shops stores rank among the top tourist attractions in their respective states, with well over 100 million people visiting their stores annually.

Its major competitors in the United States include retailers such as Cabela's and Dick's Sporting Goods. Across the river in Peoria, similar outdoor stores like Gander Mountain, Presley's Outdoors and Bushwhacker will vie for the same market.

Netting Bass Pro will also help further the development of the Downtown 2010 project -- 89 acres of vacant land between West Washington and Camp streets -- set to begin construction this summer.

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