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ALGONQUIN - Joe Barrett closed his Barretts Home Theater store at Spring Hill Mall in West Dundee in 2003 because he wanted a free-standing location.

It took Barrett two years, but he said he has found "the perfect fit for what we are looking for" in the Algonquin Commons upscale retail center at the southwest corner of County Line and Randall roads.

This weekend's opening of Elmhurst-based Barretts Home Theater's consumer electronics store marks what could be termed the second wave of retailers at the Commons, giving shoppers more pause to stop and shop along Randall Road.

David Harris of Crystal Lake said the mall has cut several minutes off his trips to stores.

"I save a lot of gas," Harris said. "I don't have to drive to Woodfield [Mall in Schaumburg]."

One of the other chains that arrived recently at the Commons is White House/Black Market. Owned by Fort Myers, Fla.-based Chico's FAS Inc., the store sells black or white clothing, accessories, gifts, jewelry and lingerie.

It opened last month.

There now are 57 stores and restaurant inside the Commons, which opened in October 2004. For Barretts, the retail center has allowed the chain to continue with a plan that shifts away from enclosed malls.

"Our strategy is to move to free-standing locations," said Barrett, who also owns a store in Naperville and recently closed another at Stratford Square Mall in Bloomingdale.

"That allows us to have much more of an exciting and demonstrable store, with more square footage [10,000 compared to 4,000 at Spring Hill]."

Express and Bath & Body Works - owned by Columbus, Ohio-based Limited Brands - and Venetian Nail Salon also have opened in the Commons since the beginning of the year.

Meanwhile, Galyan's, a sporting goods store that is one of the larger tenants, has changed its name to Dick's Sporting Goods, reflecting the name of its new Pittsburgh-based owner.

And more stores are on the way.

Jim Pratt, senior property manager for the Commons, which is owned by Cincinnati-based Jeffrey R. Anderson Real Estate Inc., said the lifestyle center has eight remaining vacancies.

If the Commons is fully leased, it would consist of 81 stores and restaurants.

"Leasing efforts have been superb," Pratt said. "By midsummer, occupancy [will be] above 95 percent.

"Ownership of the Commons is extremely pleased with sales and traffic. With the upcoming new store openings, the center will be poised for an exceptional back-to-school and holiday season in 2005."

Barrett said his company has been getting about five telephone calls a day from former Spring Hill customers asking when Barretts Home Theater will return to the area.

He promises the two-year wait will be worthwhile.

"We are back, bigger, stronger and more knowledgeable than ever," he said. "The extra space will allow us to show customers what we are able to do. We will have six rooms dedicated to home theater."

Led by the Randall Road corridor, retail growth in Algonquin has exploded in the past few years.

And the village has benefited, Assistant Village Manager Jeff Mihelich said.

The village expects to take in more than \$4 million in sales tax revenue during the fiscal year than ends June 30.

That would be up about \$1 million from a year earlier, Mihelich said.

And Mihelich said the village is projecting sales tax revenue of between \$4.5 million and \$5 million for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2006.

"People continue to be very excited about the Commons and the village's other retail [offerings]," he said. "Many of our residents now do almost all of their shopping within the village.

"We are seeing a lot of visitors coming to the village, spending money and leaving. That is wonderful. We reap the benefits of the sales tax dollars without having to pay to provide these people village services."

Mihelich said the Commons' specialty stores and restaurants are doing very well.

Larry Cappos, managing partner of the Cheeseburger in Paradise restaurant that opened in November, agreed.

"We have been drawing great crowds," Cappos said.

His restaurant is a joint venture between West Palm Beach, Fla.-based Margaritaville Holdings Inc. and Outback Steakhouse Inc. in Tampa, Fla.

"The Commons works well for us. We draw a lot of shoppers, especially early in the evenings and on weekends.

"With the addition of more stores, the potential here is tremendous."

* Northwest Herald reporter Derrick Gingery contributed to this story