

Sweatshop-free clothing sold at Carytown store

The nation's largest garment factory operator, which makes clothing in a sweatshop-free environment in downtown Los Angeles, has opened a store in Carytown. American Apparel took over space in the Cary Court Shopping Center, selling colorful basic cotton clothing with no



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logos or decoration that appeals to young, hip consumers. The fast-growing company sells fashions for women, men and children — even a shirt for dogs, spokeswoman Cynthia Semon said.

"It is good, basic casual wear," she said. "They are a solid staple in your closets."

American Apparel makes and designs all of its clothing. It began in 1997 by making T-shirts and selling them as a wholesaler.

But the company expanded its merchandise lineup and its reach by operating its own stores.

The first store opened in 2003, and now it has 140 locations globally. Plans call for about 70 more locations to open this year.

Sales soared to nearly \$250 million last year, up from \$20 million in 2001, Semon said.

The company opened its first Virginia store in Carytown because of the area's young and socially-conscious consumers. "The demographics were right and Richmond has been going through an urban renewal."

The merchandise, from polo-style shirts, skirts and shorts to sweats, underwear and socks, is

made with no sweatshop labor, she said. Workers earn between \$12.50 to \$20 an hour and have benefits including insurance.

"A sweatshop-free environment is good, but you have to make a quality product," she said. "We make that quality product and people come back."

Crocs connection

Richmond has a link to Crocs, those clog-like, rubber-like shoes that have become all the rage.

Richard L. Sharp, the chairman and co-founder of automotive retailer CarMax Inc., serves as chairman of Crocs Inc.'s board.

Sharp, the former longtime chairman and CEO at Richmond-based Circuit City Stores Inc., has been chairman of the Crocs' board since April 2005.

New retailers

The developers of the planned West Broad Village in western Henrico County say they are close to inking a deal with Recreational Equipment Inc. and Borders.

"We are in serious negotiations with them," said Chuck Whittall, one of the principals of Unicorn National Developments Inc., the Orlando, Fla.-based developer.

He expects those deals to be completed in the next 60 days.

Recreational Equipment, an outdoor gear and clothing retailer

known as REI, and Borders bookstore would join Whole Foods.

The project, across West Broad Street from the Best Buy and Kohl's stores, would have about 450,000 square feet for retail. The developers said they have commitments for 50 percent of that space.

Other tenants, real estate sources say, likely will include Old Navy, Ulta cosmetics and Drexel Heritage home furnishings.

Starbucks in the Fan

Look for Starbucks to open its first coffeehouse in the Fan District in the next month or so.

Starbucks is taking over the northwest corner of North Robinson Street and Stuart Avenue.

The Fan Market had been there since 1978 but closed in 2000. Capitol-Mac used the space after that. More recently, a video store and tanning salon operated there.

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