

Hobby Lobby coming to Blackstone?

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Surveyor Haled Darchalabi works at Sierra View Plaza Wednesday on what he referred to as "the Hobby Lobby file." Sierra View Plaza, a struggling strip mall near the intersection of Blackstone and Sierra avenues, could be the new home of Fresno's first Hobby Lobby.

A surveyor doing work at the mall this week confirmed that his company has been mapping the site as a potential future Hobby Lobby location.

Haled Darchalabi, who works for Dixon & Associates Surveying, has been surveying at the strip mall for several days now, working on what he referred to as "the Hobby Lobby file."

"That's the name on the work order I was given," Darchalabi said.

The strip mall, located on the west side of Blackstone just north of Sierra, currently is home to Dollar General, Goodwill, El Pollo Loco, Fashion Furniture Outlet and a number of smaller stores.

A 'Going out of Business' sale at Fashion Furniture Outlet is scheduled to begin tomorrow and several store owners at the mall believe Hobby Lobby is going to replace Fashion Furniture.

When contacted at the company's corporate office in Oklahoma City, Vince Parker, a spokesperson for Hobby Lobby, said, "We are actively looking for a location in Fresno but nothing has been signed yet."

The mall is managed by Corte Madera-based SVP Partners.

A number of storefronts at the mall are currently vacant and have 'For Lease' signs taped to the windows.

One of the mall's tenants, Bob Beal, owner of Beal's Vacuum, literally jumped for joy when he heard there was a possibility Hobby Lobby would be coming to the mall.

"Wow! That would be great," Beal said. "We need a good anchor. Hobby Lobby would bring at least a hundred people a day into this area."

Beal had another reason to be excited, he added. "My wife makes me drive her to Visalia all the time just to go to the Hobby Lobby there."

Hobby Lobby's corporate headquarters are in Oklahoma City.

The company was founded in 1970 by entrepreneurs David and Barbara Green, who started the business in their garage making miniature picture frames.

The company currently operates more than 600 stores across the U.S. and most of its locations average approximately 55,000 square feet.

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