

Clovis Centennial Plaza opens in time for rodeo

By Marc Benjamin

Clovis Centennial Plaza to open Friday, April 24, 2015. Video by Marc Benjamin/The Fresno Bee. THEFRESNOBEE

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- If you go

Ribbon-cutting for Clovis Centennial Plaza, 11 a.m. Friday at Pollasky and Bullard avenues.

- *Clovis Centennial Plaza is an entry feature to downtown.*
- *Centennial Plaza will include two new business buildings.*
- *Centennial Plaza will attract pedestrians south of Fifth Street.*



Clovis Centennial Plaza will open Friday in time for this weekend's 101st Clovis Rodeo.

The downtown site where Clovis city officials once hoped that loft-style housing and businesses would be built will instead be an Old Town entry feature. On each side of the plaza are dirt pads for two buildings that measure 6,000 square feet and 4,500 square feet that the city plans for office, retail and restaurant spaces.

But much of the dream for Centennial Plaza remains intact. Business Development Manager Shawn Miller said the city has three proposals for business buildings and a city committee is nearing selection of one of the plans. The buildings could rise to three stories, he said. The plaza also can serve as a stage for plays and concerts, he said.

The project is a park-like setting with benches, brick facing, cement walkways and antique-looking lighting fixtures. The centerpiece is an oak tree that represents one of 100 planted around Clovis to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the city's incorporation, which was in 1912.

The site, where Pollasky and Bullard avenues meet, is at the southern edge of downtown Clovis and is intended to attract more visitors and pedestrian traffic to the area. The site formerly was home to the Department of Motor Vehicles office. Those with a longer memory can recall when the location was home to Clovis City Hall.

Patsy Linagen, who has operated a gift design studio for three years across the street, is looking forward to the plaza's opening.

"I think it's just what we need on the south end of town," she said. "I can't wait for the buildings to go in; I'm hoping it's retail."

Scott Dority, who began renovating a 3,500 square foot building for his insurance agency across the street from Centennial Plaza early in 2014, didn't realize the project would be built so soon afterward.

He moved his business from Clovis Avenue because he liked the family atmosphere he observed on Pollasky.

"I didn't do this (move) for my business, but it's going to turn out to be a great business move," Dority said.

Citing Clovis Chamber of Commerce estimates, Dority said 300,000 to 500,000 pedestrians will walk by his corner every year.

The plaza was expected to cost the city about \$2 million that will come from bond revenues. Another \$1 million from the city fund will be used downtown for Americans with Disabilities Act improvements, landscaping and parking improvements, city officials say. The bond money came from the city's former redevelopment agency. The site was identified for a project before the state dissolved community redevelopment programs.

After the DMV left the site in 2007, the building was razed. The site has been a vacant lot used for the city's weekend farmers market and overflow parking.

Four years ago, developer Darius Assemi of Granville Homes proposed a three-story, 35-unit project on the site, but the Clovis City Council denied the plan. Assemi wanted the city to lower the \$645,000 price set by its appraiser to \$245,000. He also wanted fees for the project reduced and said that without the concessions the project was not financially viable.

It was the second time Clovis tried to develop the land with loft-style apartments and ground-floor businesses. Developer Peter Herzog decided against building there in 2007.

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