

# Eastgate Plaza: Additional New Businesses, But Still Room for More

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**EAST ALTON** – East Alton Mayor Joe Silkwood said he cannot go far without hearing about the new developments at Eastgate Plaza.

The once-thriving shopping is being redeveloped by property owner Todd Kennedy, who also manages Julia's Banquet Center. He said as much as \$5.3 million has been invested into the property to bring it back to its brighter days. Since unveiling plans to redevelop the plaza more than a year ago, big news has come from East Alton's newest tenants. JJ Thermos, Blue Ice Creamery, Pancho's Mexican Grill and Club Fitness are just some of the names calling that plaza home. Kennedy said as many as 16 slots are still open.

“It's going a little slower than I thought it would, but it's still going good,” Kennedy said. “It's a big project at 25 acres, but we're still missing a few things. We would like to get a few more retailers and maybe a grocer. We have about 16 spots open, but we could put two together and make one as well.”

In fact, several of those open spots were combined to make room for the expansive new Club Fitness location set to open in July. Representatives from Club Fitness said the East Alton facility, which is moving from its current location in Alton, will have more room for the employee-owned business's newest amenities and up-to-date equipment.

Kennedy said Blue Ice Creamery has quickly become one of his favorite places to get ice cream. He said the cream is made in-house and utilizes as much as 18 percent butter fat, making it have a consistency more like gelato than traditional ice cream. He said he finds himself there every day as he works on the property.

“I've never been a mint chocolate chip guy,” he said, “but I love it there. I can honestly say with zero bias it is the best ice cream on the planet.”

He is also excited to see JJ Thermos open for business. He said an outdoor dining area currently in the works will soon be the talk of the town, adding it will be “the” place for mid-to-upscale dining when it is completed.

Overall, Mayor Silkwood said the developments at Eastgate are great for the entire area. Since they were announced, he said more interest has been shown in East Alton by businesses now than there has been in the past two decades.

“It's not just Eastgate they're interested in, either,” he said. “In the next two to five years, don't be surprised if you see new developments across that Route 3 Corridor. It's going at a good pace out there, too. It looks a lot different than it did at the end of the first year, and it will look like a whole new place after its third year, too, I'm sure.”

When asked what Silkwood said he would like to see fill those 16 slots, he said he was not picky.

“I've got foods I like to eat and clothes I like to wear like everyone else,” he said. “I think the market will decide what goes there. If you ask the general public, they'll give you a hundred different answers. Some of them will work. Some of them won't. I just hope it's sustainable and will bring people to East Alton.”

In the future, Silkwood said he would like to see more developments in the village. On the other side of town, he said he is speaking with the property owners of the Wilshire Shopping Mall plaza – another East Alton retail center, which has seen better days. He said he is working to maintain what is already there and to add to it.

“We don't want one side of town to rapidly develop at the cost of the other side of town,” he said.