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Macy's closing sparks fear of Mesa Fiesta Mall's demise



Macy's at Fiesta Mall announced that it's closing its doors.

Maria Polletta

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Fiesta Mall Macy's one of 5 company stores closing nationwide

By Maria Polletta and Gary Nelson

The Republic | azcentral.com

Wed Jan 15, 2014 10:32 AM

Though Mercedes Tucker's catalog of Valley memories spans nearly three-quarters of a century, she easily recalls the excitement that surrounded the birth of Mesa's Fiesta Mall more than 30 years ago.

"It was one of the biggest malls being constructed around here at the time," said Tucker, 74. "Everyone was so happy. They loved it."

Now, Tucker worries she might witness the death of the mall, too. Macy's Inc. announced Jan. 8 that it would close its 159,000-square-foot Fiesta location as part of a nationwide cost-cutting effort, capping off at least a decade of slow decline for the mall.

"I don't know how this mall can survive without Macy's," Tucker said. "If you go to the food court, you already see vendors leaning against the counter, waiting for business. This can't continue."

Adolfo Lopez, manager of Fiesta's Dairy Queen/Orange Julius, confirmed Tucker's observations.

"This mall is already really slow, and now it's going to be even more slow with the closing," he said.

Final clearance sales at the Fiesta Macy's, expected to last 10 to 11 weeks, began Jan. 13. That afternoon, the closing and discount signs hanging from rafters and plastered across clothing racks drew a thin but steady crowd of shoppers.

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Macy's has said it may offer the 98 Mesa employees positions in nearby stores, if available, and it will offer severance benefits to eligible full-time and part-time associates it lays off.

A spokesman for Cushman & Wakefield of Arizona, which recently took over management of Fiesta Mall, said that while the company clearly "wasn't crazy" about the news, he couldn't speak to the impact the closure might have on the mall as a whole. A representative for special servicer LNR Partners Inc. also declined to discuss the broader impact.

City economic-development officials, who have focused efforts on revitalizing the surrounding area, said they didn't have any information beyond what had already come out.

Mesa Councilman Dennis Kavanaugh, who represents the Fiesta District, said the Macy's closure aligns with recent department-store industry trends.

For one thing, he said, brick-and-mortar stores have been hit hard by online sales that often are not assessed sales taxes.

Further, old-line stores have seen competition from lower-priced competitors such as Kohl's and Target, as well as continuing rounds of consolidations that parallel those of the airline industry. Macy's itself swallowed up the Robinsons-May chain that had a store in Fiesta Mall.

Since Macy's owns its building at Fiesta Mall, a common practice among department-store mall anchors, Kavanaugh is "curious as to what plans, if any, they have for that site," he said.

Despite the blow of losing a major retailer, Kavanaugh remains optimistic about the Fiesta District overall. He noted that three shopping centers in the area — Poca Fiesta, Mesa Fiesta and Fiesta Crossing — have gotten new owners within the past two years, and those "new owners are reinvesting into those properties."

A potential redevelopment is in the works for the southwestern corner of Alma School Road and Southern Avenue, directly adjacent to Fiesta Mall, he said. And a fast-food restaurant is looking to set up shop on the north side of Southern, on a site surrounded by the vacant Fiesta

Village center.

Interest in building a multiuse indoor sports arena in the area, an idea that has circulated for several years, also persists.

Though the changes may have sparked some nostalgia for Tucker, she ultimately sees them as the mark of an evolving region.

"The East Valley has grown so much over the years," she said. "This is part of that natural movement and growth."

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B Thomas Cooper · Top Commenter · Phoenix College

We stopped shopping at Macy's after the Trump scandal last year... their merchandise is overpriced garbage and they don't deserve our business.

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Floyd White

Too many mex. phx gone to ruin it w as nice w hen Woolw orths w as dow n tow n coffeshops & rest lined up central ave lite rail never was in the picture Frys was at 16th st . Huh

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Ben Gordon · Top Commenter · Business Development at Off Madison Ave

Retail as we knew it is slowly dying...check Amazon's stock price in the past tw elve months...not an illusion.

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Jolene Will · Top Commenter

They should close the stores at MetroCenter. That is a real dump. You could shoot a cannon and not hit anyone.

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Michael Budge · Works at Themortgageadvantage.com

That's not true. Metrocenter may not be as bustling as it once was but it is in no way a dump.

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Mark Jones · Top Commenter

Metrocenter is a dump. I remember w hen it w as built and the years w hen it w as packed. Just like Fiesta Mall, it is a dead mall. I was in both malls last month and you could shoot multiple cannons in both and not hit anyone. Not that there w ere even a handful of people in either mall to shop at the handful of mostly crappy stores in them.

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Brad Burdick · Top Commenter

Michael Budge You must not have lived here long or have a high tolerance for crappy neighborhoods, clientele, and ghettos. It's a perfect illustration of w hat happens w hen The Arizona Republic, EJ, and liberals let the illegal aliens come here in droves, and support it. Yes, it is a dump, as w ell as everything around it.

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Diane Eldridge · Top Commenter

More jobs lost. Wonder w hat the newly unemployed w ill tell those w ho tell them to "Get a job."

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Piston Honda · Tempe, Arizona

The city of Mesa is dying. The leaders do not care. The residents do not want to invest in taxes.

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Derek Hofmann · Top Commenter · Mesa High School

Why must the city of Mesa force Fiesta Mall to have a parking lot that's so overbuilt that the market equilibrium price of parking is zero on all but a few days of the year? The most economically efficient amount of parking is not the amount w here there's never a shortage w hen the price is zero, but the amount w here the marginal cost (MC) of adding a unit of supply equals the marginal revenue (MR) if you add that unit of supply. But for some reason Mesa w ants the marginal revenue to be as close to zero as possible.

With this and Mesa's high sales taxes, it's tough to make a profit in retail in the city. Mesa Councilman Dennis Kavanaugh can blame online retailers all he w ants, but that doesn't solve the problems he has allow ed to perpetuate.

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Joni Cage · Westwood High School, Mesa AZ

Macy's is/w as overpriced. I liked Robinson's May and found it extremely disappointing w hen they w ere removed and Macy's took over (only). Our family moved into the West Mesa area before Tri-City Mall, and later Fiesta Mall w ere built. We're still here, but Tri-City is gone. I hope that some positive changes can come about for Fiesta Mall that w ill give myself and others reason to shop there. At this time, there isn't. Dillard's outlet, w hatever they call it, is a trash pit. But, sometimes a transition dow n, leads to a transition ever upw ard and positive.

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Carl Skornik · Top Commenter

Dennis Kavanaugh the on again off again council member w as the same guy w ho w as in the seat w hen the "fiesta" district started to go to pot. Now he in office again and lookie here.

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