

The Star-Ledger

DECEMBER 7, 1999

Elizabeth Ave. stores launch marketing effort

By Jonathan Jeff
Star-Ledger Staff

ELIZABETH—Business owners along Elizabeth Avenue in Elizabeth say the downtown area has plenty of shopping excitement and have formed a special improvement district (SID) to launch their own promotions.

"If they don't pay attention to business and allow themselves to be defeated, yeah, the (Jersey Gardens) mall will kill them," said Donald Smartt, a private SID consultant. "If they fail to invest and assume they are dead before they die, then they will die."

The new Jersey Gardens mega-outlet mall is 3.3 miles from downtown Elizabeth. The SID will be operated through the Elizabeth Avenue Partnership, comprising 18 business and property owners. The non-profit group is launching the first marketing campaign at 5 p.m. today when city officials and local merchants are to light a Christmas tree in Union Square, the heart of Elizabeth Avenue. This is the first time in recent memory that Elizabeth Avenue has hosted a holiday tree.

"The mall has a marketing department and its common space is managed by one group," said Michael Zeik, owner of Leonardo Jewelers on Elizabeth Avenue. "We're now bringing that to Elizabeth Avenue. Instead of each business working on its own, we are marketing the avenue as a whole."

The partnership is arranging a visit from Santa Claus on this Saturday and next Saturday at Banco Popular at 817 Elizabeth Ave. Children can get free photos with Santa from noon to 2:30 p.m. each of those days. Children can also drop off letters to Santa, postage free, at the post office in



At the Whiteway Pet Shop on Elizabeth Avenue, Jonathan Ferreira, left, and his cousin, Jeffrey Vitoria, both of Elizabeth, ask Teleka Harriett, a sales person, about care of the dog they recently adopted.

Union Square before Dec. 24.

"As part of this new investment in Elizabeth Avenue, the partnership has purchased more than 140 lighted Christmas wreaths to line the 1.5-square-mile district. About \$20,000 has been earmarked for holiday decorations," Smartt said.

There is \$441,000 to be budgeted over the

The Community Advocates have assisted The Elizabeth Avenue Partnership in creating a SID and implementing many successful development programs to enhance the commercial district.

next 12 months for new marketing strategies. The bulk of the budget, about \$330,000, is coming from the state Urban Enterprise Zone program. The remaining \$110,000 is being divided by 165 business owners within the SID's boundaries, who are getting 9 percent surcharges on property tax bills.

"It's money well spent and I'm more than happy to contribute," said Eugene Goldfarb, owner of Dan's Camera on Elizabeth Avenue, a business his father started in 1955. The merchant is paying \$500 more in

property taxes each year to support the SID. "I think we've had the nicest Christmas ornaments on the light poles since I've worked here," noted Goldfarb.

Smartt said the SID has been in the works since last June and began Dec. 1. Business owners are now developing a five-year plan for the commercial strip. Major projects are to include 80 to 100 off-street parking spaces, as well as new buildings and businesses. "There will be district signs that say 'Welcome to Elizabeth Avenue,'" Smartt said. "There will be public relations, marketing and advertising. Fences and landscaping will be put around empty lots so they don't look desolate. There will be private security, new trees and banners."

Smartt said Elizabeth Avenue can't compete head-to-head against the mall, because they serve different clienteles.

"Does Jersey Gardens have pet stores, accountants and lawyers?" Smartt asked.

"Elizabeth Avenue does. Does the mall have a post office? We do."

Crystal Stell, a Jersey Gardens spokesman, acknowledged yesterday she was unaware of the Elizabeth Avenue district, but said all retail areas in the city can thrive

in the booming economy.

"We strongly feel merchants in Elizabeth can benefit from the traffic and the recognition we bring to the area," Stell said. "We can successfully coexist in this market."

While the mall is designed to serve shoppers from New Jersey, New York, Connecticut and Delaware, the Elizabeth Avenue business owners want their strip to be an attractive destination for residents in the neighboring towns of Roselle, Roselle Park, Hillside and Linden, Smartt said.



Don Smartt and The Community Advocates