



What's News

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The wildflowers seen along Texas roadways create a scenic trip, but they also reduce the amount of maintenance needed, which is why TxDOT buys and sows 30,000 pounds of wildflower seeds each year. more.impactnews.com/8051



Courtesy Fred Deal

Before

When Mike Elmore of MPE Realty first bought the former Aquatic Industries campus, the buildings were aluminum warehouses, but Elmore had a vision to reconstruct empty buildings into a small business and warehouse complex.



Jenn Rains

After

Building One of Business Park 2243, which houses the office of Seth Tanner's Farmers Insurance Agency and is the future location of Smokey Mo's Bar-B-Q, shows the stone work, awnings and other details added to the buildings during the renovation of the former Aquatic Industries campus.

Developments breaking ground in Leander

Developers' visions transform growing community

By Jenn Rains

Leander's plan for economic development centers on sustainable prosperity, or creating a place where residents can live, work and play.

"We want everyone to work in Leander, regardless of their education level," said Kirk Clennan, Leander's economic development director. "To do that we must have a variety of manufacturing, office, service, retail and public employment options available to residents."

The plan has been years in the making, but businesses are dotting the horizon of Leander. Business complexes opening along Crystal Falls Parkway, the upcoming groundbreaking of Joule Biotechnologies and the popularity of Business Park 2243 are helping to make the plan a reality.

Other projects, such as Bill Hinckley's Crystal Falls

development, the transit-oriented development (TOD) and The Vision of Leander, will continue development trends in the city.

"All of the public and private investment that is taking place in Leander is contributing to sustainable prosperity by diversifying our tax base," Clennan said. "These are incremental steps in our overall endeavor to increase the employment and service opportunities to the community."

Implementing the city's economic plan takes a lot of work and planning. Clennan said several ways Leander is working to achieve its goal is through fostering entrepreneurship, undertaking a significant business retention and expansion program, attracting businesses to relocate to the city and trying to pursue destination tourism.

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Wilco Entrepreneurs Community provides a boost to local businesses

Story Highlights

- Group helps local businesses start up or grow
- Entity promotes networking, training and funding

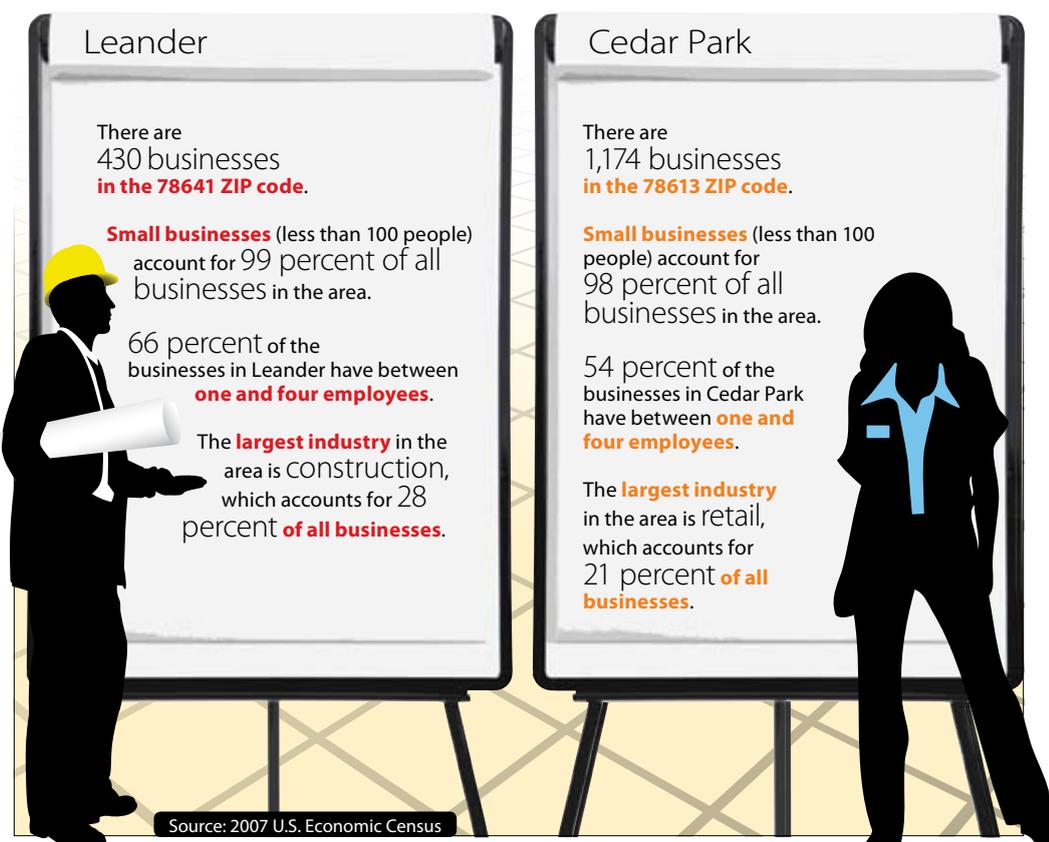
By Joseph M. de Leon and Kathryn Eakens

With a state unemployment rate of 7.4 percent in 2009—in contrast to a national rate of 9.3 percent—Texans have fared moderately well during the economic downturn.

Cities in Williamson County performed even better. Leander's unemployment rate for 2009 came in at 5.7 percent, with Cedar Park at a close 5.8 percent, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Despite comparatively low job losses, there are still residents who have found themselves looking for employment. Kirk Clennan, economic development director for City of Leander, said a rise in the number of unemployed people with high-level skills has helped boost entrepreneurship in Williamson County.

"People who have lost their jobs can either wait around and see if a job appears or they



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Development

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Despite the economy taking a toll on Central Texas, developments—residential and commercial—are still taking shape in Leander. Catering to small businesses and warehouses, Business Park 2243 is filling up fast with the potential to be full by October, a year after renovations started.

Hinckley's Crystal Falls development, which will feature residential and commercial elements when complete, continues to build new homes and attract residents.

New developments are under way in Leander, but there is still more to come in the future. The Vision of Leander and the transit-oriented development are just two big projects that will shape the scenery of the city in future years.

Business Park 2243

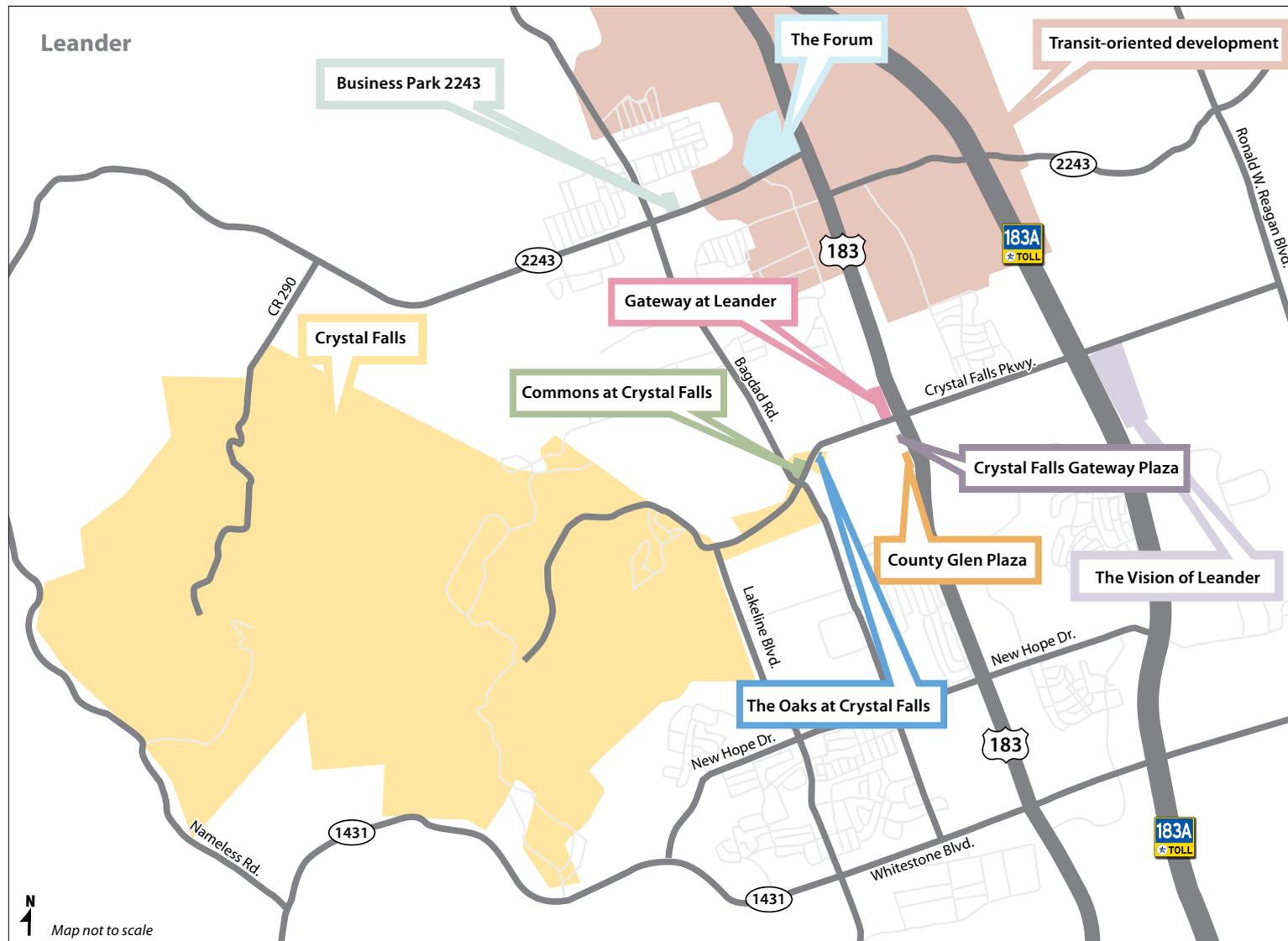
The multiple warehouse buildings that were once home to Aquatic Industries is becoming a popular hub for commercial development in Leander.

The campus stood empty after Aquatic Industries relocated in June 2009 until Mike Elmore, owner of the development group MPE Realty and president of Austin Capital Concrete, came up with an idea.

"I saw the business and thought, 'I wonder if I can take the warehouses and break this thing down into smaller businesses,'" he said.

Elmore started renovating the seven buildings in October 2009 and planned to offer retail space in the front portion and office warehouses in the back part of the 80,000-sq.-ft. development.

Instead, Business Park 2243 is becoming home to a diverse group, as retail, offices, a school and a theater company are committed to locating in the park. A



skating rink is also a possibility for the back 10 acres, which is zoned heavy industry.

"This is becoming more than what I had envisioned, and I think it's coming together great," Elmore said. "There's not a lot of office and warehouse space in Leander for smaller businesses and there's a need for that."

The overall value of the development is expected to be about \$5 million to \$6 million.

Crystal Falls

The idea for the Crystal Falls development was born 15 years ago when Hinckley, while horseback riding, discovered rolling hills in the middle of nowhere.

"I knew we had to have it," said Hinckley, president of The Lookout Group Inc. "This 1,500 acres surrounding the Golf Club at Crystal Falls was the start of the complicated assemblage of ranches and small tracts that now comprise the Crystal Falls Master Plan."

The Crystal Falls development began in 1997 with 1,500 acres and has grown to 5,000 acres spanning from Bagdad Road west to Nameless Road between RM 1431 and FM 2243.

The project is 10–15 percent complete with 1,300 homes built and about 3,500 acres left to develop, Hinckley said. The homes

will range from the traditional 60-foot-wide lot to 5 acres—and everything in between.

"We have everything except starter homes below \$200,000," he said. "Our hope is to have a vertical move-up market within the community, so folks can move up or down within the community as their lives and incomes change."

The award-winning master planned community boasts five subdivisions, churches, three elementary schools and a Walgreens, but Hinckley's plan includes more commercial in the future.

"We are holding out for

commercial business partners who raise the bar, and we have resisted the temptation to sell to convenience stores and gas stations," Hinckley said. "We have serious interests from a grocery chain, upscale retailers, restaurants and a host of medical and wellness providers."

The Vision of Leander

The southeast corner of Crystal Falls Parkway and Toll 183A is just farmland and trees today, but it will soon house The Vision, a commercial mixed-use development.

Rick Castleberry, principal of Paladin Cres Commercial Real Estate, conceived the idea

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Past developments

Commons at Crystal Falls, 2006

Sean Whitehead State Farm Insurance, Sylvan Learning Center, Walgreens, Luigi's Italian Restaurant

The Forum, 2007

H-E-B Plus, Subway, Papa Murphy's, Twin Liquors, Leander Smiles Dentistry, Live Oak Chiropractic, Goodwill, Jack Brown Cleaners, Blockbuster, H&R Block, Gamestop, TGF Hair Salon, Chase Bank, PostNet, Luxury Nails, Fantastic Sams, Family First Healthcare (opening in July)

The Oaks at Crystal Falls, 2008

Texas Family Eyecare, Majak Office Suites and Business Support Services, Harris & Schroeder Law Firm

Gateway at Leander, 2008

Lowe's Home Improvement, Kohl's, International Bank of Commerce, Taco Bell, McDonald's, AT&T, Great Clips, Leander Eye Care

Crystal Falls Gateway Plaza, 2009

Cricket, Starbucks Coffee, Southern's Pizza & Sports Bar

County Glen Plaza, 2009

La Chaparrita, Kumon, Hudson's Jewelers, Baby Face Day Spa (relocating at the end of May)



County Glen Plaza has space for future growth.

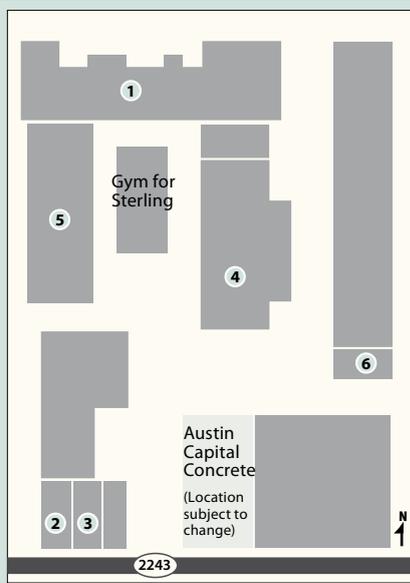
Current developments

Business Park 2243

- 1 Sterling Classical School, opens July 1
- 2 Smokey Mo's, opens July 1
- 3 Seth Tanner, Farmers Insurance Agency, opened April
- 4 Way Off Broadway Community Players, opens Aug. 1
- 5 Hill Country Bible Church Leander, in negotiations
- 6 Texas Swing Company, opens June 1

• Negotiations are in the works with companies in the industries of catering, dry cleaning, furniture and several dry warehouse users

• 10 acres in the back are zoned heavy industry



Crystal Falls



The swimming pool at The Boulders features the limestone theme found throughout Crystal Falls.

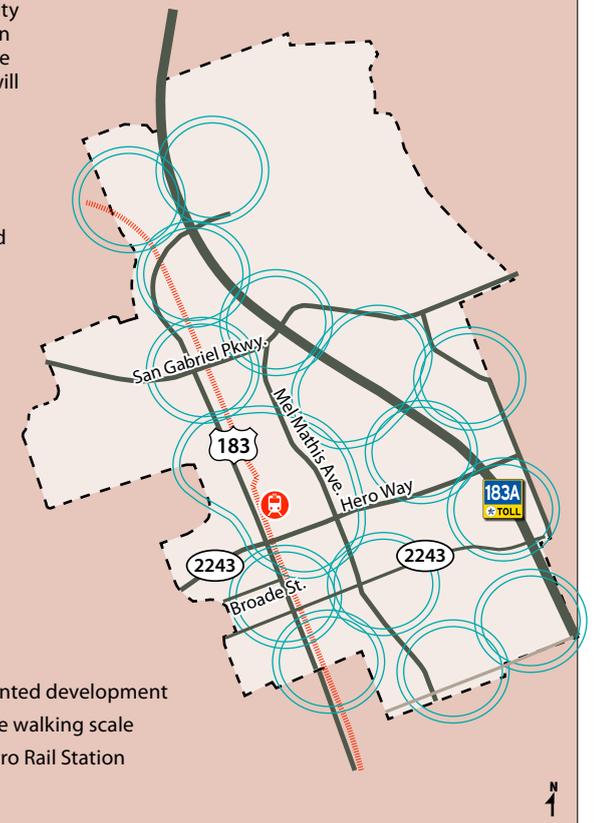
- Five subdivisions: Grand Mesa, The Boulders, The Fairways, The Highlands, Caprock
- Total acreage: 5,000 acres
Left to develop: 3,500 acres
- 13,000 total homes from \$200,000 to \$1 million
- Lots range from 60-foot wide to 5 acres
- Neighborhoods will be annexed into City of Leander city limits in the future
- Limestone from local quarry used in amenities of subdivisions

Future developments

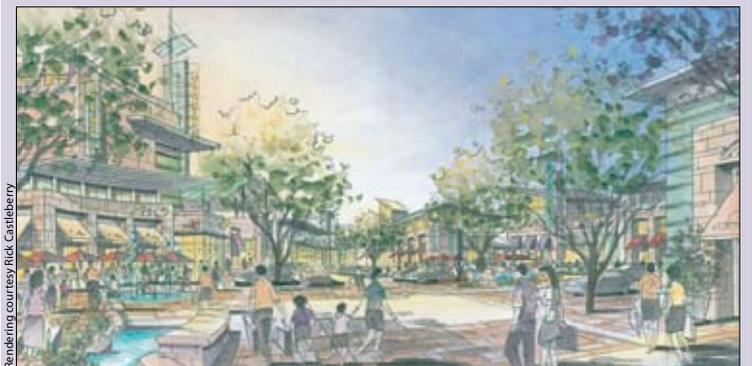
Transit-oriented development

- Austin Community College closed on property near the rail station and will begin a campus master planning process in the coming months
- Capital Metro's Red Line opened in March in the TOD
- Buildings will have zoning flexibility to accommodate changes in market demand
- Total acreage: 2,300 acres
- Estimated population: 30,000

- Transit-oriented development
- 5-10 minute walking scale
- Capital Metro Rail Station
- Railroad



The Vision of Leander



The Vision of Leander will include retail, office, commercial and residential development to create an urban feel at the corner of Crystal Falls Parkway and Toll 183A.

- All businesses will be built with green resources (building materials, cooling systems and materials that capture electricity)
- 75 acres with potential for additional acreage; infrastructure to begin in next few months
- The development will have mixed-use zoning for commercial, office, retail and residential



with partners Doug Devine and Tucker Lewis. Castleberry owns 69 acres along the intersection and has another 6 acres under contract with additional acreage in the works.

Depending on market conditions, Castleberry hopes to start building infrastructure by the end of the year for phase one, which will include pad sites for restaurants, banks, drug stores and other retail along Toll 183A and Crystal Falls Parkway.

Phase one is just the beginning of a larger, more diverse project.

"We're trying to develop a live, work and play atmosphere with mixed-use commercial, retail,

office and with some dense residential community," Castleberry said. "There is a lot of potential for this corner and with good planning it can be developed well."

Transit-oriented development

The City of Leander's plan to have a 2,300-acre transit-oriented development between US 183 and Toll 183A is still in the works, despite tough economic times.

"The economy has really had an impact. Realistically, it will probably be 2012 before we see any vertical build," said Pix Howell, Leander's urban design officer. "We're going to position ourselves for growth and we're

going to be ready for it when the economy turns."

Some of the transportation aspects of the TOD are falling into place, with Capital Metro's Red Line commuter rail opening in March and the beginning of the Toll 183A expansion in March.

The TOD will have an estimated population of 30,000 at build-out and feature single-family and multifamily residential units, commercial and retail.

"There has to be a mix of those elements in all parts of the plan," Howell said.

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