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New department store plots an upscale course

By JOYCE SMITH

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Consumers are cutting back. So retailers are, too.

Then there's **Von Maur**. The upscale department store chain is entering the market in November with a 142,000-square-foot, two-level store in Overland Park.

The company, which is based in Davenport, Iowa, is carefully expanding in the Midwest, backed by a variety of goods at different price points and a 136-year history of customer service that it says will make the stores a success, even in today's tough climate.

"We offer good, better and best products, so everyone can find something," said Danielle Evon, manager of the Overland Park store, the chain's 24th. "We have watches from a \$55 Fossil to a \$1,700 Michele."

The store in **Corbin Park** at 6701 West 135th St. also will offer such cost-saving perks as a women's shoe clearance room with new merchandise stocked weekly, an interest-free credit card, flexible return policy, free gift wrapping and shipping, and free basic alterations.

But the family-owned Von Maur is all about the luxury experience, too.

The freestanding building — in a Spanish colonial revived design — will have seating throughout, including a lounge area with a pianist. Dressing rooms, especially in the women's clothing areas, are oversized with three mirrors and chandeliers, and wide aisles to accommodate strollers.

The departments are accessories; men's, women's and children's clothing; cosmetics, gifts; jewelry; lingerie; and shoes.

Designer brands include the cutting edge and the traditional — Ed Hardy, William Rast, Diesel, Ralph Lauren, Tommy Bahama, Burberry, Coach, Kate Spade and Ellen Tracy.

The company has hired 120 people and hopes to have at least 155 by the soft opening in early November to help train staff before the grand opening. It hopes to eventually have a staff of 200.

The Nov. 8 grand opening will include free gifts from Von Maur and its vendors, raffles for \$1,000 shopping sprees, a jazz trio, and magicians and clowns.



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Although Evon declined to give the chain's revenue, she did smile broadly when she said that "we're very pleased" with sales.

Cormac Co. of Omaha, Neb., the developer of Corbin Park, also announced this week that it had closed on \$107.4 million in construction financing for all phases of the 1.1 million-square-foot center at 135th and Metcalf Avenue.

Backwoods, a chain selling technical equipment and apparel for backpacking, camping, hiking, fly fishing, climbing and other outdoor recreational pursuits, has already opened a 10,000-square-foot, freestanding store in the center. The company was founded in Wichita in 1973 and has had a store in Kansas City since the mid-1970s.

Lifetime Fitness, a \$25 million, 110,000-square-foot gym, opened in the center in 2006

Other Corbin Park stores will include **Jared the Galleria of Jewelry**, **Men's Wearhouse**, **AT&T** and **Verizon**.