

South Lake Avenue Coming To Life

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PASADENA - Slowly but surely, South Lake Avenue is getting some new neighbors.

A little over a month ago, Pacific Sales, a high-end appliance store at 440 S. Lake Ave., moved into a long vacant former Strouds building. And at the corner of Del Mar Boulevard and South Lake, Pampa Furniture has moved into what once was a Shoe Pavilion.

It was an injection of business into a district in need of some foot traffic - where vacant storefronts have spotted the local landscape during a now year-and-a-half-long recession.

"It's a day-and-night difference," said Gina Tleel, executive director of the South Lake Avenue Business Association. "That space had been empty for several years and outdated in many ways."

Tleel said the 23,000-square-foot former Strouds building had been vacant for at least five years. It had a tenant - a pharmacy - that was leasing it, but never moved in, city officials said.

The outlook for filling the site wasn't great until Pacific Sales - an offshoot of Best Buy - came along, offering a high-end mix of appliances and home electronics that was a good fit for the area, Tleel said.

"In this economy, and this retail market, who can afford a space like that? Pacific Sales came by... and it was a perfect match," she said.

Pacific Sales corporate officials could not be reached for comment.

Furniture opened in July. Cham Korean Bistro opened in August. A new residential complex, Granite Park, is also still in development, said Eric Duyshart, Pasadena's economic development director. Business leaders hope that together, the new neighbors will help create a buzz on the avenue.

But the district still has its share of retail vacancies, including space at Shops on South Lake.

It's an issue plaguing many neighborhood shopping areas in the San Gabriel Valley and Whittier.

Over the last six to nine months, Whittier Community Development Director Jeff Collier has seen an increase in available space in the Uptown area. And with the increase has come the phone calls from brokers seeking city help to market space that has been vacant for three and four months, Collier has said.

But every little bit of filled space helps.

"It's important," Duyshart said of Pacific Sales on South Lake. "We do have a few vacancies there. This is a larger space that now provide some additional activity on the east side of the street."