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Malls are morphing into one-stop shops

As retail spending has gradually shifted to the Internet, enclosed shopping centers best known for department stores, teen apparel chains and shoe shops are increasingly adding services people typically find closer to home.

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"I figured instead of waiting for the people to come to me, I'd go to the people," says barber Percy Souder Jr., who opened his fourth shop, Edge-Up, at a 260-square-foot kiosk in Westfield Culver City mall three months ago. It quickly became Souder's busiest shop. Above, Souder gives a haircut and shave to customer Jovan Blandsaid. (Mel Melcon, Los Angeles Times / October 21, 2011)

ALSO



A beauty makeover for a big-box retailer

By Andrea Chang, Los Angeles Times
November 12, 2011

Going to the Westside Pavilion mall is a Friday afternoon ritual for Jenny Ouchi and her 8-year-old son, Will. But shopping isn't usually on the agenda.

Ouchi drops Will off at Music Stars & Masters on the second floor, where he takes private piano lessons. During the half-hour session, Ouchi, 38, runs errands in the Los Angeles shopping center, such as getting her nails done or mailing a letter at the in-mall post office.

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"It's definitely a timesaver," said Ouchi, a part-time pediatrician who lives on the Westside. "The more things I can do in one trip, the better."

Malls are looking more and more like Main Street.

With retail spending gradually shifting to the Internet, the enclosed shopping centers best known for department stores, teen apparel chains and shoe shops are increasingly adding the kinds of services people usually find closer to home.

So instead of all-day spending sprees, consumers are showing up to drop off prescriptions, get their teeth whitened, have keys made or work out at the gym.

Westside Pavilion, for instance, offers child development classes, shoe and jewelry repair, a hair salon and a massage shop. A branch of National University, a private nonprofit college, is slated to open soon. Music Stars & Masters recently expanded, opening a second location in the mall last month for birthday parties and group lessons.

That's just the beginning. Visit any Southern California shopping center and there's a dizzying array of new businesses: day-care and tutoring centers, cooking schools, grocery stores, florists, Ticketmaster branches and shops offering eyelash extensions, car detailing, handbag repair, career counseling and pet adoptions. There are even dialysis centers and dental offices.

National chains once mostly found in stand-alone big-box locations, such as Target and Costco stores, also are moving in.

"Nontraditional tenants in a retail property is really the wave of the future," said Michael Niemira, chief economist at the International Council of Shopping Centers. "We've hit the saturation point of retail."

Non-retail and non-restaurant businesses make up about 17% of leasable regional mall space, but that number is expected to grow quickly and could reach 25% within a decade, he said.

The rise of the hybrid shopping center was sped up by the retail industry's troubles during the recession, as malls around the country looked for unconventional tenants to fill shuttered storefronts, often by offering reduced rents and other favorable lease terms. The growth of online shopping has also caused many retailers to downsize or close underperforming bricks-and-mortar locations, opening up spaces for newcomers.

The changes rankle some merchants, such as Sara Dovan, co-owner of Traffic, a high-end clothing boutique at the Beverly Center. The Los Angeles mall is one of the few in the area to resist adding general-purpose services and stores, which Dovan said were "not appropriate at all" for upscale centers.

"I pray to God they will never open those shops in the Beverly Center. I'm totally against it," she said. "It starts to feel like bazaar shopping, not luxury shopping."

Although malls may be less exclusive these days, the mixed offerings have been a boon to busy consumers and have led to impulse purchases as well.

Diane Henry, 62, recently had an hour to get ready for a fundraising event and drove to Westfield Culver City to get her eyebrows threaded at Shapes Brow Bar and buy a shawl from Macy's. At the department store's checkout counter, Henry noticed a jewelry display and mused that a new pair of earrings would go well with her outfit that night.

"Now I'm doing something I wasn't necessarily planning on, and that's how they get you," said Henry,



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a real estate agent from Baldwin Hills. Her one disappointment? "I wish they had a car wash. I would have been set."

Service-oriented shop owners, meanwhile, get to harness malls' built-in foot traffic. Many say they're seeing business soar and don't need to advertise because their locations alone are enough to attract customers.

After years co-owning three L.A.-area barbershops, all in stand-alone street locations, barber Percy Souder Jr. became frustrated by the long periods of downtime between clients. So when it came time to open a fourth shop, he chose a 260-square-foot kiosk in Westfield Culver City. Edge-Up barbershop, sandwiched between a Best Buy, Lady Foot Locker and teeth-whitening station in the middle of the mall, opened three months ago and quickly became Souder's busiest shop. He recently signed a lease for another mall space, at Westfield West Covina.

"I figured instead of waiting for the people to come to me, I'd go to the people," Souder said as he snipped a client's hair in view of passing shoppers. "I've stolen many a client from his barber, and that's not because I'm so much better than everyone else, but because I'm convenient."

LaJuan Davis, 52, was picking up job applications at the mall recently when he came across Edge-Up. The sight of the electric-green kiosk piqued his curiosity, and he circled back to take a second look. But the downtown L.A. resident was initially skeptical about getting his hair cut in public.

"You don't want to take your Benz to a Volkswagen" repair shop, he said dubiously, before deciding to give the barbershop a chance. Fifteen minutes later, a freshly shorn Davis emerged. "Fantastic," he said. "I'm very satisfied."

Mall executives say although they've become more open to atypical tenants, they're careful to make sure the balance of offerings is right.

"If our shoppers identify with a tattoo parlor, chances are, we'll either pursue one or an entrepreneur will come to us," said Randy Brant, executive vice president of real estate at mall operator Macerich, which owns Westside Pavilion and Santa Monica Place. That said, "we have to be fashion first — any regional mall that has lost its fashion sense is dead."

They've had to draw the line in some cases.

"We get calls every day to do medical marijuana facilities," said Larry Green, senior vice president of development for Westfield. "We haven't gone there yet."

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Offbeat Destinations »



Bizarre and unusual places around the world. Above, Cancun Underwater Museum.

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LAcityVWZ at 11:16 PM November 12, 2011

edge up has a great concept. however, as they became more popular, they became increasingly disorganized. you walk up, sign in, and the receptionist tells you there is 1 other person ahead of you for a particular barber and that it would be about a 30 minute wait. okay I waited. 2 hours later, 1 guy, 2 kids had gone before me for this particular barber I had requested. Thinking FINALLY that it was my turn when the 2nd kid hopped off the seat, the barber looks at me right in the eyes, knowing that I have been patiently waiting, and signals to his homeboy sitting RIGHT NEXT to me to hop in the seat. I was LIVID. This has been the 3rd time I have come here to get a haircut and each time this happens to me. I walked out of the mall. I will NEVER go there again.
Great concept needs better customer service/appreciation or this place will lose more and more good paying customer looking for a decent haircut

itsmetherealyou at 3:48 PM November 12, 2011

Tacky. The article says that malls can't lose their sense of fashion? What sense of fashion? I guess it has fashion if you think forever 21's sweatshop made, stolen designs are awesome. Also, you have to love the man at the mall looking for JOB applications that says, "you don't take your bens to a volkswagon." I am so sure he has either. *sarcasm*
Malls are so last century.

JosephLCooke at 3:14 PM November 12, 2011

A good trend.
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