

Former Gladstone bowling alley site becomes home to new Walgreen's

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San Francisco developer Tom Rocca enjoys views of the Clackamas River from a parcel in Gladstone, where he is building a new Walgreen's Drug Store. The \$8 million project, located just off SE McLoughlin Blvd., near the John McLoughlin Bridge, is scheduled to open next summer.

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GLADSTONE -- It's been years now since bowlers cruised into the parking lot of Gladstone Lanes, harboring dreams of making tonight the night they would roll that perfect game.

While the alley was demolished two years ago, the land on which it sat continues to give up its secrets as a small army of graders and earth-movers readies it for its next incarnation -- a **Walgreens** pharmacy and related retail uses.

That much was clear this week as developer Tom Rocca toured the 4-acre site just north of the historic John McLoughlin Bridge. After passing two small mountains of gravel and a few heaps of recyclable concrete, he stopped near a fence separating the site from traffic coursing along nearby Oregon 99E.

On the ground, poking from a pile of soil, sat seven dusty Brunswick bowling balls. Culled from various parts of the property, they provided mute

testament to decades gone by.

"We're not really sure how they got out here," said Rocca, principal with San Francisco-based **Seven Hills Properties**. "Maybe someone just couldn't bowl straight."

By this time next year, bowling will be a distant memory here. In its place, a 14,800-square-foot Walgreens will be ready to open.

An unusually wet spring delayed work on the site, but with blue-sky working conditions ahead, Rocca expects crews to start going vertical with steel framing by September.

"We've had our eye on this intersection for at least four years now," said Rocca, who has developed Walgreens stores throughout northern California and western Oregon and Washington. "It's perfect for what we were looking for."

In addition to representing one of the area's few new commercial projects, the \$8 million development means other things.

For one, Rocca's company and Walgreens are dedicating one of the property's four parcels, the one closest to the Clackamas River, to the city of Gladstone. The city plans to eventually build a bicycle path, mirroring the bike path on the other side of the river.

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For another, the project signals a willingness on the part of developers and investors to again start pumping cash into area projects.

"Retail activity in general is picking up throughout the metro region," said Jeff Borlaug, brokerage director for [Norris, Beggs & Simpson](#), which is not involved in the Gladstone project. "Most of us are optimistic that we're now coming out of this."

And for Gladstone, the project means the arrival of a strongly branded and well-positioned company into a market where, until now, it's lacked significant representation.



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Rocca, a partner with Seven Hills Properties, has developed sites for Walgreen's Drug Stores throughout western Oregon and Washington and northern California. He hopes his latest project, in Gladstone, will spur further retail and commercial activity in the area.

"It's definitely something we are going to benefit from," Mayor Wade Byers said. "It should also spur some much-needed additional activity and development."

Byers, who has spent most of his life in [Gladstone](#), recalls when the bowling alley was built in the late 1950s. Like other longtime residents, he has vivid memories of the floods of 1964 and 1996, both of which sent several inches of Clackamas River water surging into the facility.

"They had to replace all of the flooring," he said. "It was just devastating."

The grading and related site work now underway is designed to prevent future flooding. While a total of 1,500 yards of soil and other material will eventually be removed, the depression in the middle of the site will be replaced with a front-to-back slope.

That will effectively move the property's floodwater "storage" area closer to the river, Rocca said, leaving the rest of the site well above the 100-year floodplain.

Job creation linked to the project should provide another welcome asset. More than two dozen subcontractors, engineers and design technicians are working in the construction phase; they'll be followed by the 23 to 28 employees who staff a typical Walgreens.

Which is not to say that every last soul in Gladstone is overjoyed by the new project.

Adam Reed, 27, grew up in town. He loved the bowling alley, especially Friday Night Cosmic Bowling, where blaring music nearly drowned out the sounds of strikes and spares.

"Now if I want to bowl, I've got to drive all the way to Milwaukie," he said. "And Walgreens? Just means more traffic."

As for the rest of the project, leasing negotiations are underway with potential tenants, Rocca said. They include coffee shops and national fast-food outlets.

"Once it's up and running," he said, "I think this will be a real benefit for the community."

-- [Dana Tims](#)

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