

# A Center on the Sidelines

## Revitalized Glen Burnie Still Must Vie With Newer Malls

By KRISTINE ANTONELLI  
Special to The Washington Post

The town known for big hair has gotten a new do.

State, county and private investors have spent about \$46 million over the past two decades trying to give downtown Glen Burnie, a once-bustling shopping district in northern Anne Arundel County, a makeover.

Glen Burnie Town Center officially opened a year ago on a 5½-acre site next to Arundel Center North, at Ritchie Highway and Baltimore-Annapolis Boulevard. With a Food Lion, a movie theater, an ice skating rink and a collection of small shops and eateries, Glen Burnie Town Center is the most complete of the county's three designated Smart Growth areas, which are designed to pump new life into older neighborhoods and control suburban sprawl.

But the town center still struggles to compete with newer, flashier and car-friendlier shopping malls—first Harundale, then Marley Station and now Arundel Mills, a 1.6 million-square-foot outlet center just a few miles east on Route 100.

Arundel Mills hasn't been particularly good for Glen Burnie. Already, two stores and a restaurant have closed at the town center, according to its developer, Larry Mekulski of KLN Realty. Plans for a chain drugstore and a hotel and conference center have fallen through. Business at the

Food Lion has been slow but is beginning to pick up.

When Arundel Mills was first proposed, county officials worried about its effect on surrounding shopping areas—even as they drooled over the prospect of 3,000 new jobs and millions in additional tax revenue.

Bill Badger, president of the Anne Arundel Economic Development Corp. and a major booster of Arundel Mills, acknowledges that the mall cost Glen Burnie the \$17 million LaFontaine Bleu hotel-conference project.

"Now the owner is looking at property around the Mills area," Badger said. "And that is very disappointing."

Despite these setbacks, shop owners at the town center say they are not discouraged. Empty spaces will be rented, Mekulski says, and although the seven-screen movie theater shut down for a week in March, it quickly reopened under new management.

To compete with Muvico Theaters' massive Egyptian 24 at Arundel Mills, the management is offering slightly lower prices while still showing first-run movies. The multiplex also is planning summer activities for children.

Paved with red bricks and lighted with old-fashioned street lamps, Glen Burnie Town Center offers small-town pleasures rather than the crowds and more commercial flavor of a large-scale mall.

Shoppers can grab a sandwich

or pizza at Maria D's Sub Shop, pick up a gift at Handmade With Love and do a little skating with the kids at the ice rink. This summer, the rink, which opened in November with fanfare presided over by County Executive Janet S. Owens (D), will serve as a concert stage for live performances.

"This is a good location," said Patricia Penney, who works at Handmade With Love, a gift shop that her sister owns. "It is just going to take some time for people to catch on and realize that we are here."

Lower rents—\$17 a square foot at the town center, compared with up to \$60 at a mall—make the town center attractive to small business owners, Mekulski said.

In its heyday, Glen Burnie was every bit as vital a place to shop as any mall. Fathers took their sons for dollar haircuts at Serio's Barbershop. Farmers bought feed and other supplies at the feed store, where children could amuse themselves with the chickens and ducks kept inside. Women could shop for dresses at Bonnie Mar and pick up groceries at A & P, Food Fair and Acme on Crain Highway.

But the opening of Harundale Mall on Ritchie Highway on Oct. 1, 1958, changed shopping in Glen Burnie forever. Anchored by a department store called Hochschild Kohn, it was the first enclosed shopping center on the

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BY MARVIN JOSEPH—THE WASHINGTON POST

The refurbished Glen Burnie Town Center competes with Harundale, Marley Station and Arundel Mills malls.

# Town Center Faces Tough Competition

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East Coast.

"It became the big thing then to shop under one roof," said Barbara Moeller, president of the Glen Burnie Improvement Association.

Harundale Mall replaced downtown Glen Burnie as the focal point of the community, then found itself displaced by Marley Station Mall in 1986. Now Arundel Mills is the bright, shiny newcomer to the retail scene, though it doesn't offer much in the way of mom-and-pop shops.

"Arundel Mills is almost like a tourist attraction," said Patricia A. Barland, the county's town center coordinator. "Glen Burnie Town Center is the heart of the community, with small-service type of retail and family entertainment."

Malachy Kavanagh, a spokesman for the International Council of Shopping Centers, doesn't think Arundel Mills is competing for town center shoppers. It appeals mostly to shop-till-you-drop day-trippers and out-of-town tourists, Kavanagh said.

"In certain categories, there will be competition," Kavanagh said. "With movie theaters, newer ones with stadium seating can be tremendous competition." But a small

downtown shopping district offers "destination" shops such as cleaners, grocery stores and banks where locals can run their everyday errands.

The key to revitalizing Glen Burnie, said Alison Tavik, who is involved in the town center development, is bringing events and entertainment such as summer concerts to the center to draw people in.

"We can open this up to all kinds of performances, plays and art shows," said Tavik, who serves on a committee booking a variety of performers. "There are high school jazz bands, dance schools, barber-shop quartets that can perform here." Developers and the county are working on plans to revamp the corner of Crain Highway and Baltimore-Annapolis Boulevard and rebuild a burned-out restaurant. They also hope to attract a chain restaurant such as Outback Steakhouse or Applebee's that will make it convenient for people to go to dinner and a movie.

"The area is definitely better off than it was" before the town center opened, said Gene E. Floyd, the county's former urban renewal coordinator. "It's not the Taj Mahal, but it is not the decrepit town it used to be in the '60s, either."