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Tearing down a mall

*Wrecking crew
is at North Hills*

By SAMANTHA THOMPSON SMITH
STAFF WRITER

RALEIGH — Forty years of memories start coming down today.

The long-awaited wrecking crew this morning will begin the two-month process of demolishing the exterior of North Hills Mall, one of the South's oldest shopping malls.

It's a bittersweet demolition. Once the mall is down in June, construction begins on a \$200 million mixed-use complex with a Target, a 14-screen movie theater, an open-air main street with restaurants and boutiques, condominium buildings and offices.

"It's been fun working on the plan, but now it's time to execute it," said John Kane, whose company, Kane Realty, is redeveloping North Hills. "We're ready to breathe some new life into it."

Even Kane has memories of shopping at the mall as a teenager. When North Hills opened as a strip center at Six Forks and Laster Mill roads in 1963, it was considered Raleigh's boondocks.

When it was expanded and enclosed into a mall in 1967, shoppers came from all over for a look. The mall was the only one between Washington and Atlanta. It had one of the only escalators around. And it was the South's only two-story mall with air conditioning.

Winn-Dixie, Woolworth and Roses were among the anchors over the years.

There are difficult memories, too. Four people were killed on Memorial Day in 1972 by a gunman who shot 11 people before killing himself.

And then there were the bleak days in the past few years, when longtime merchants threw in the towel, tired of redevelopment promises from previous owners, and left for better shopping cen-