

Life, etc.

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area mode

High-end shoppers say North Raleigh has a lot of style

By KAREN GUZMAN
STAFF WRITER

There's a boom in North Raleigh, and we're not talking housing or traffic.

This one is sashaying into town with a stylish swagger. Cutting-edge boutiques, salons and spas are becoming almost as numerous as subdivisions north of the Beltline.

Some say the area's eclectic mix of styles and services is turning it into the Triangle's fashion mecca.

"The inner beltline will always have a steady customer base, but ... the growth potential is in North Raleigh," says Mike Robbins, general manager of Triangle Town Center, home of elegant Adrienne Vittadini, where Saks Fifth Avenue and top-line sporting outfitter Orvis are set to

launch this fall.

There's scarcely a major commercial road in North Raleigh not dotted with funky shops and palaces of pampering. Chic clothing, hip highlights and skin-saving technologies are keeping pace with the area's growing populace — and its discriminating desires.

Cravings, a maternity boutique in the trendy Falls Village shopping center, illustrates above-the-beltline allure. Owner Kim Seymour says she opened in the center way up Falls of the Neuse Road two years ago because the location is ideal.

"There were a lot of young families moving within a 5-mile radius of the store," Seymour says. "The response has been be-

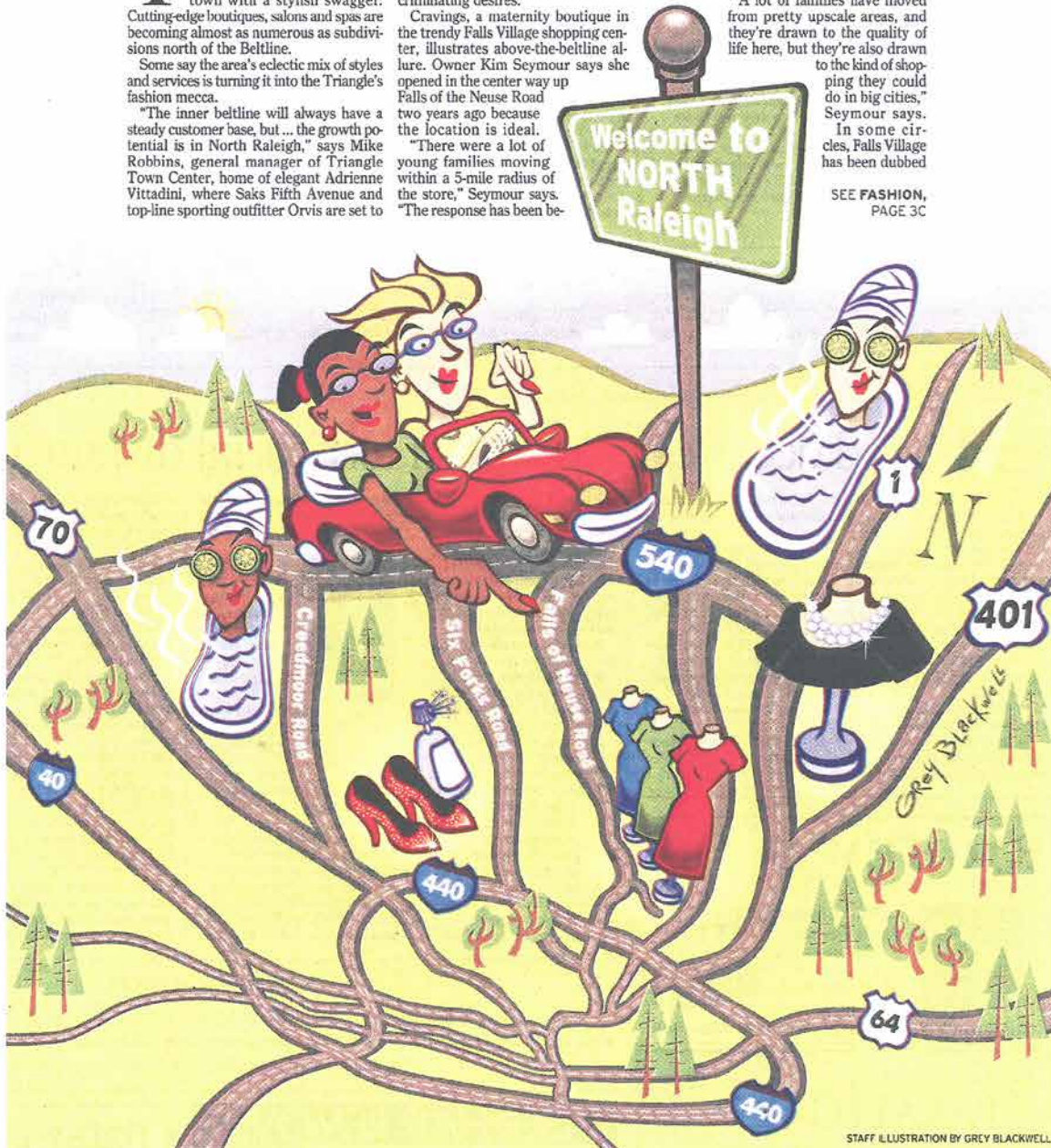
yond what I could have imagined."

Seymour wanted a site near similar shops and enticing lunch spots, with easy access to major highways and an affluent, family-oriented populace. In North Raleigh, she got it all, plus the bonus of an evolved style sensibility.

"A lot of families have moved from pretty upscale areas, and they're drawn to the quality of life here, but they're also drawn to the kind of shopping they could do in big cities," Seymour says.

In some circles, Falls Village has been dubbed

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the "Cameron Village of North Raleigh." Indeed, a number of Cameron businesses are launching second shops in Falls Village, as well as other North Raleigh locations.

In March, North Market Drive became home to Nowell's, the family-owned Raleigh clothing store that made its home in Cameron Village for 50 years.

"This has become more of a central Raleigh location than what we had. When we started out, that was the center of Raleigh," says owner LuBet Nowell.

But Pat Boyle, a spokeswoman for Cameron Village, is quick to point out that the original outdoor mall is doing just fine.

Cameron's retail mix of fashion, home and dining makes it successful, and the Village has a 97 percent occupancy rate, Boyle says.

"I think we're the leader with the fashion edge store. We have Soho, Uniquities, Beanie + Cecil, that speaks to the fashion-forward need."

Gina Bell, a self-described "fashion hound," agrees. She shops Cameron's Wardrobe boutique for its edgy, of-the-moment looks.

But she is also devoted to Le Montage. Located off North Mar-

ket Drive — an emerging fashion boulevard — Le Montage carries designer duds hand-selected by owner Traci Tharrington.

An account executive for radio station WQOK-FM, Bell mingles with the hip-hop business crowd in L.A. and New York and says she receives many compliments on her "super fly" outfits.

"When I go on trips with all my friends, they say, 'Where did you get that?' They want to come to Raleigh to shop," she says.

Tharrington opened Le Montage in 1982, with a "casual to couture" mission.

Most of her original clients were transplants familiar with the designer lines she carries. Since then, Le Montage has caught on with a wide array of high-fashion customers.

"The things I wear constantly, year after year, all come from Le Montage," says Terry Allen, of Apex. "[Tharrington] offers a selection that you can't get at the mall, and the sort of things you don't see everybody else with on."

North Raleigh businesses helped yield gross retail sales of almost \$690 million in Raleigh during September 2003, according to the state Department of Revenue.

There are no records that break down the totals to reflect the clothing and spa sector sales alone. But numbers aren't necessary to prove the growing style quotient.

Location, location

Location is what drew plastic surgeon Michael Law to Raven Ridge near Wake Med North. Law's wife, Kile, helps run the couple's Blue Water Spa there.

Michael Law grew up in Raleigh and practiced in Beverly Hills. Then he and Kile decided to move to North Raleigh to raise their family, she says.

Most clients are locals, but some are Beverly Hills celebs who fly into Raleigh to continue seeing Law, Kile Law says. "We have some very recognizable faces coming in here," she says. She declined to name names.

While celebrities appreciate the privacy, it's a rare mix of elements that makes North Raleigh a high-end retail haven.

Amber O'Neal has lived in the area most of her life. She says she sees no reason to stray beyond its shops.

"They don't all carry the same things, and it gives a nice selection. Very rarely do I go to the mall anymore," says O'Neal, 31. "I stick to the North Raleigh area. They're close to where I work and where I live."

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