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Big Lots Will Open Stores at Two Large Vacant Locations

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THE LEDGER

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LAKELAND | A large discount retailer is filling up two spots long ago left empty.

Big Lots will open a store on Oct. 7 at 4233 S. Florida Ave. in the Palm Center Plaza where a Kash n' Karry used to be and another location will open Nov. 3. in the space left vacant by Circuit City at 4212 98 North in the Village Plaza. The second opening is a relocation of the Big Lots at 931 E. Memorial Blvd in the Town Center, which started liquidating on Sunday.



RICK RUNION / THE LEDGER

A new Big Lots is under construction at the former Kash 'n' Karry on South Florida Avenue at Palm Center Plaza in Lakeland.

"We're looking forward to the opening," said Ed Eickhoff, vice president of development at Ramco-Gershenson Properties Trust, which is based in Farmington Hills, Michigan and primarily deals in the ownership and management of shopping centers. "I think that Big Lots is a good add to the trade area."

It's not yet clear when the Big Lots on Memorial Boulevard will close because it depends on how long it takes to sell merchandise at an extra 20 percent discount,

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said Scott Townes, a district manager. The store's new building has enough space to carry the company's full line of furniture and will be in a good spot near Lakeland Square Mall, he said.

Townes said filling these big, empty spots on both sides of Lakeland should be a boost for the areas as people come in to buy products at a 20 percent discount off of competitor's prices and spend more time in the shopping plazas. Forty people were hired to work at the store in Palm Center Plaza. Many employees from the Town Center location will move to Village Plaza with the addition of some new employees.

Large retail areas left vacant by the closings of stores like Circuit City and Linens 'n Things are increasingly being filled by discount retailers, said Tim Becker, director of the Kelley A. Bergstrom Center for Real Estate Studies at the University of Florida.

"It's certainly good news for those centers because you hate to have what we call a dark space in a center," Becker said. "It looks bad and drives people away."

Discount retailers like Big Lots or Dollar General are expanding as more and more people continue to stretch their dollars, said Steven Kirn, executive director of the Miller Center for Retailing Education and Research at the University of Florida.

"People are increasingly shopping across categories of stores," Kirn said. "You're as likely to see a Mercedes in the parking lot of a Nordstorm as you are in the parking lot of a Dollar Tree."

Two other Big Lots locations in Polk County are in Winter Haven and Auburndale.

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