

## Developer Would Turn Mall into School

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Something new and unique could occupy Five Points Mall, and possibly in just six months' time.

Plans are in the works to bring a veterans-only college to the mall. That is according to Charles Everhardt, a real estate developer for Lockwood Development, a development firm based in Omaha, Nebraska.

Everhardt, along with Randall Miller of Randall Miller & Associates, a local civil engineering firm, presented to the Marion City Council Tuesday night their plans to turn Five Points Mall into a college for veterans.

Miller spoke to the council first, explaining the overall scope of the plan. Lockwood Development is in the works to purchase Five Points Mall with plans to not only offer schooling for veterans but to also offer housing, inside the mall, for veterans.

"We're going to try to do something at the Five Points Mall that is completely out of the norm, but right in line with what we should be doing with veterans ... He (Everhardt) is doing something very near and dear to us. ... It's never been tried before in the United States."

According to Miller, the mall would be divided. The front of part (east side) will remain a retail center. Miller said they will bring in new retailers. But Everhardt said Five Points will no longer be considered a mall once the project is completed.

The west side of the mall is where the college will be located. It will be completely separate from the retail center, according to Everhardt, with its own entrance. Shoppers at the retail center will not be able to enter the veterans' college and will be closed to the public, the developer said.

The college will have its own security, food and dining services as well as small apartments for the veteran students who are approved.

Everhardt said schooling will be vocational-based, offering skills such as hospitality training, wellness programs and film training.

"(We will offer) courses your typical college doesn't offer," he said.

According to Lockwood's website, Everhardt has "successfully closed billions of dollars of real estate over his 30 year career" which includes four hotels in Alabama including a Homewood Suites, a Hilton Garden Inn, and two Hampton Inn hotels.

Everhardt said he aims to have about 100 students, marketing in Indiana to begin with. He told the City Council he estimates that the entire investment, not including cost of purchase, will be between \$10 and \$15 million, generating 50-100 jobs.

If all goes according to plan, Everhardt said the project could be completed in six months.

Everhardt and Miller approached the City Council seeking its support and the Council overwhelmingly supported the innovative idea for the Marion mall.

"With your help, we can put Marion back on the map," Council member Steve Henderson said.

Early on in the meeting, Miller said that the project, if successful, could become pilot program, serving as an example for future ones.

Council President Brad Luzadder also gave his support, commending Everhardt and Miller for the efforts to support veterans.

"We have a facility that is not being used," he said. "I think this is a great idea."

Council member Alan Miller was critical of Everhardt's approach, though he did not oppose the idea. When asked by Council member Miller if he had reached out to neighboring entities and current tenants to the mall about how the project would be received, the developer said he had not had any conversations with them.

"We didn't want to let the cat out of the bag until we spoke with you first," Everhardt said.

"We didn't go into the neighborhood to see what exactly anyone's feelings were ..."

"I guess I would disagree with you letting the cat out of the bag," Miller said. "Are Applebee's and Roses going to find out about this for the first time tomorrow when they read the newspaper?"

"Yes," replied Everhardt.

Miller said he would have liked Everhardt to have gotten feedback from the current tenants of the mall prior to approaching the council.

The Chronicle-Tribune will have more on the Five Points Mall project later this week, including community reaction.