

Lafler.

Around 45 stores were ready for customers on opening day, including more than 20 women's apparel shops, catering to the mall's target market.

A newspaper article written just days before the mall's grand opening memorializes the words of its developer, Leonard Farber. "I think Cloverleaf represents the most advanced kind of thinking in design and balance of merchandise presently existing in the Richmond market," said Farber, adding that the mall took a "scientific approach to leasing" so tenants complemented each other.

Cloverleaf was the 24th shopping center Farber had developed, and it was his first in Virginia. Lafler remembers the developer had a precise formula for what made a mall successful, such as installing carpeting to cushion women's legs so they could shop longer and hiding water fountains, so mall visitors would be more likely to buy a drink in the food court. "There was never a clock in our malls," said Lafler. "He wanted them to lose themselves in shopping."

Farber passed away last year.

In its heyday, the mall wasn't just a place to shop. It was suburbia's version of a downtown. Family and friends met there for lunch. Teens cruised the common areas on weekend nights. Movie-goers enjoyed the latest flick. For two decades, Cloverleaf more than held its own against nearby Chesterfield Towne Center, Regency Square and other indoor malls that came after it.

But that all changed in the 1990s. Cloverleaf's best customers, women, began staying away from the mall, fearful of the youth who were beginning to congregate there. "People started seeing kids with huge baggy pants and chains hanging off their belts, and people were intimidated, and they would say there were gangs," recalled Lafler.

Then in 1996, the rumors seemed to prove true when two clerks from the All For One store were found stabbed to death during an apparent robbery inside the mall. The murders are still unsolved.

Around the same time, Chesterfield Towne Center was undergoing a major renovation, and residential development was moving west. Shoppers began frequenting Chesterfield Towne Center, feeling it was safer and closer to their homes.

Cloverleaf's anchors, JCPenney and Sears, saw the trend and chose not to renew their leases. Their departure cemented Cloverleaf's fate. Without the draw of the mall's two main anchors, other national retailers also moved westward.

Over the last decade, the mall began leasing to mostly mom and pop establishments, drawing a more urban crowd. Tax revenues dried up, prompting the county to purchase the mall in 2004 in hopes of reinventing what's considered to be a major gateway to Chesterfield.

Little now remains of Cloverleaf's glory except the shell of its concrete building, an empty parking lot and the memories of long-time county residents who can recall when Cloverleaf was still green with cash and community-spirit.

The Chesterfield Observer recently asked readers to send in their favorite memories of Cloverleaf Mall. Here's what they had to say:

Joyce Orlando Fenner, Brandermill:

I joined my husband here in southside Richmond way back in the late spring of 1974. Now that I think about it, he bought my engagement and wedding rings at Cloverleaf Mall. We were newlyweds, getting used to each other and Richmond and annexation and such oddities (to us) as 2 a.m. Waffle House post-disco breakfasts and people say-



Photo courtesy of the Chesterfield Historical Society

ing 99 cent rather than 99 cents, Blue Laws and brown bag practices and state-run liquor stores. Bob worked at Philip Morris then and now. I worked at Joseph R. Harris for a few months. It was a ladies' apparel store. It was genteel enough that we saleswomen could wear the new fashion at the time, the pantsuit, but our behinds had to be at least halfway hidden by the jacket! Cloverleaf Mall had so many things in its favor. It was indoors so Willow Lawn was forever out on a rainy day once Cloverleaf was built. The mall was prettily decorated for the appropriate season. There were places to get food and ice cream. You could go to the movies. You could gaze at fluffy cuties through the pet shop window. There was a bookstore to explore. There were benches to rest on and simply people watch. You could smoke there - for years after every other mall forbid smoking. We had a place to visit that cost nothing. Cloverleaf Mall was a cheap date's dream-come-true. Sometimes, we would see a whole family enjoying the mall together. Couples would saunter through the corridors hand-in-hand. It was sad to see the surrounding area go slowly downhill. Cloverleaf Mall changed a great deal, but it hung on for a long, long time. She was a pretty lady in her time! I do worry what will become of her.

Dawn Seay, Midlothian:

Born in 1971, I was just a kid when Cloverleaf Mall opened. It was nothing like I had ever seen. I remember being excited when I saw the orange drink swirling around in the fountain at the Orange Bowl. I loved hanging out on the "J's" in front of the Jeans West store. But my favorite part of the mall was the giant marble "den" in the middle of the mall. I could never just walk past this monstrosity. I had to go down in there and run around. Up and down the stairs, in and out of the big pit. No trip to the mall was complete without

playing in the pit. That was the most alluring feature of the mall, and I'll never forget it.

Evelyn Beadles, Chesterfield:

I remember when the mall opened. I was 16, and I drove my mother and myself to the grand opening. We each received an umbrella that looked a lot like the one on the sign out front. Soon after the opening I got my first job at Thalhimers. I have a lot of good memories of that first job where the customer is always greeted and waited on.

Jennifer Inman, Brandermill:

My memories of Cloverleaf Mall include my first date to the movie theater, many Friday nights and Saturdays shopping with girlfriends and enjoying that first bit of freedom to go shopping with friends.

Joe Covolo, Midlothian:

I have fond memories of Cloverleaf Mall, which go back over a quarter century. While living in Sussex County, before moving to Midlothian in 1982, our rare visits to the area and especially Cloverleaf Mall were always the high point of the trip. Shortly after we got here, I remember taking my daughter, Stephanie, then 8, to see "Star Wars" one Friday night, and we sat through it twice. And, in her early teenage years I spent many a Friday or Saturday evening at the mall, escorting her and a buddy or two (at a distance) as they made their rounds of the shops, stores and food outlets all the way from Sears on one end to JCPenney on the other. Favorites for me were the two bookstores and the pipe shop. My best memory of Cloverleaf Mall is Christmas 1984, when I played Santa Claus there at the main entrance. At the time I was "between positions" and temporary work as a Santa was all I could get at that time of year. Thanks to the mall it was truly a joyous Christmas season for me because the interaction with the little tikes was ever so uplifting. The items and toys they wanted, the questions they asked, the answers they gave, all brightened my day, every day. And another bright spot was a group of four ladies just off their shift at some

Past and present - Business was booming in 1976 when this photograph (left) of Cloverleaf Mall's entrance was taken. Today, the food court and storefronts (above) stand mostly empty, abandoned when shoppers moved on to other malls like Chesterfield Towne Center. The image of the parasol further down the page is from a paperweight that was given out to shoppers at the mall's grand opening in 1972.

plant down in Hopewell who sat with Santa for a group picture. They were great, and all four could have been related to Flo, the "kiss my grits" waitress in TV's "Mel's Diner." Had hearts of gold they did. Really hated to see the mall start to shut down, but shut down it did. The building still stands, and whenever I drive past I have a flashback or two, and it leaves me with a smile on my face and a warm spot in my heart. It was a great time and great memories

Rob Pettus, Moseley:

My most significant memory was the gas price war during the mall grand opening between JCPenney and Sears. I recall the price was 29.9 cents.

Marlo Cutts Ferguson, Chesterfield:

Each Sunday, my family would meet and have lunch at the Piccadilly. Our family included not only our immediate members but grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles. We became part of the Piccadilly family and came to know the employees on a first name basis. We shared birthdays, graduations, proms and other milestones together. This Sunday lunch ritual lasted over 15 years! After lunch, my grandfather, Roland Belcher, would give each grandchild \$1. We thought we had hit the jackpot! We would race to People's Drugstore and McCrory's. Back then, \$1 actually purchased something grand. My brother, Clay Cutts, would spend his \$1 on a bag of baseball cards at McCrory's. We came to know the Sunday cashier very well, and she was quite fond of Clay. As we became teenagers, my grandfather would take us granddaughters (4 in all) clothes shopping each Sunday after lunch. Our favorite store was Brooks, and the employees came to know my grandfather on a first name basis and greeted us like royalty as we entered the store. As a teenager, it was quite exciting. Each time I drive past Cloverleaf Mall, I cling to the wonderful memories that will be with me forever. I don't notice the decline that has taken place over the years but choose to remember how it was and always will be to me.

