

# Boone Mall to the Maxx

New retailer heads to High Country

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T.J. Maxx is coming to Boone Mall.

According to Barry Nicholson, spokesman for H.L. Libby Corp., which bought the mall about two years ago, the off-price retailer has signed a lease and should be open by fall.

The store will open on the west side of the mall, where Sims Furniture is currently located.

Nicholson said Sims' lease will expire toward the end of March, though he was uncertain whether or not the furniture retailer would relocate. Multiple calls to Sims owner Wanda Simison went unreturned, however, the store has underscored the move by sending out a small convoy of cars and trucks around Boone with billboards attached to the roofs bearing the message "Lost Our Lease."

Despite the loss of Sims, mall manager Meredith Golden is excited about fall's new arrival. "T.J. Maxx will be a great addition, bringing something the mall's been lacking," she said.

Nicholson said construction would likely start in early April to prepare for T.J. Maxx's fall opening.

According to company's Web site, T.J. Maxx specializes in selling brand name and designer fashions at up to 60 percent less than department and specialty store prices, as well as giftware, jewelry and children's educational toys and books.

The site notes that more than 95 percent of merchandise is "first quality," with less than 5 percent "slightly irregular" with typically unnoticeable flaws, though all irregular merchandise is identified on price tags. The company's public relations department refers to the buying strategy as "opportunistic buying."

"While other retailers' buyers look for their merchandise four times a year, our buyers travel to market over 40 weeks a year," the Web site reads. "These frequent market trips allow us to buy closer to need ... and be smarter about trends. Also, because we're making deals closer to when we need the merchandise, we're in a good position to negotiate a better price with the vendor."

More than 10,000 pieces of merchandise are delivered to each store every week, the site continues, and the company's expansion plan would see approximately 30 stores opened over the next several years.

Currently, T.J. Maxx operates more than 800 stores in 48 states.

The mall's most recent addition was Mangia Buona, the popular Italian restaurant formerly known as Good Eats, which moved from a location in Valle Crucis.

Though space at the mall is continuing to fill, Nicholson said H.L. Libby continues to search for prospective new tenants. "We continue to evaluate, talk with tenants, and though we've been pleased with the progress so far, we're still not done," he said.