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Bob Shallit: 'Tribute' building honors Heller and Thiebaud

bshallit@sacbee.com

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It's a tribute unlike any other in greater Sacramento.

In an architectural homage to their fathers, two Sacramento development partners are moving ahead on an innovative building at 20th Street and Capitol Avenue.

Michael Heller, the ambitious midtown developer, intends the four-story "Tribute" building to honor his late father, Michael Heller Sr., who died last year, and to enable his project partner, art dealer Paul Thiebaud, to recognize his father, acclaimed artist Wayne Thiebaud.

The office-and-retail project's most striking feature is a 50-foot-high, three-sided mosaic-tile art piece being designed by the elder Thiebaud.

The mosaic's imagery will be the Sacramento River Delta, similar to many of Thiebaud's famous paintings, Heller says.

The rest of the building will be a Rubik's Cube-like collection of glass panels in four shades – clear, white, light blue and dark blue – selected from Thiebaud's palette.

The building's inspiration, Heller says, is the Sacramento Municipal Utility District headquarters that his father helped build in the 1950s and where the senior Thiebaud contributed a mosaic tile wall that's still visible from Highway 50.

"That's one of the great pieces of architecture in town," Heller says of the SMUD complex at 6201 S St.

The new project, which recently received approvals from the city's design and planning commission, could start construction next year and be completed in 2010, Heller says.

The building's architecture is deceptively simple but extraordinarily detailed, says designer Brian Crilly of Lionakis, the Tribute building's architecture firm.

Throw in the Thiebaud art, and it becomes "the kind of (project) that's supposed to happen

in Chicago, not Sacramento," Crilly says.

Hard-hat area

Neighbors have been waiting for years for something – anything – to happen at the southeast corner of Meadowview Road and Freeport Boulevard in South Sac.

The wait is over.

Initial construction, including sidewalks and sewers, recently began at the site across from a Home Depot-anchored shopping center.

By spring, work should be well under way on two buildings – a Rite Aid pharmacy and a new, expanded location for the Mueller Pet Medical Center.

A third building – a Fresh & Easy grocery store – also could go in next year, if its British parent company opts to proceed with a Northern California expansion.

The construction start is a relief to Eric Rasmusson, a land-use consultant who handled the application process for the primary property owner, John Saca.

Rasmusson got involved nearly a decade ago – when the anchor tenant was to be a Les Schwab tire center. Over the years, Schwab – and lots of other potential tenants – committed to the site, then backed out.

Now, he says, tenants are locked in and the center is as "done as any project gets without customers walking in and out."

Also pleased is Sacramento City Councilwoman Bonnie Pannell, who opposed the site's earlier plans for a gas station and a fast-food eatery.

A Fresh & Easy store is the real coup, she says. "It's a neighborhood-serving grocery ... which is perfect for the area."

Reach Bob Shallit at (916) 321-1049. Back columns: www.sacbee.com/shallit.

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The midtown building will feature a Wayne Thiebaud mosaic.