

Retail Openings

March 25, 2011

The businessmen behind the five Ashley Furniture Home Stores that closed late last year are opening **Chloe's Furniture** in four of those five vacated spots. The new chain will offer a wider range of furniture, manufacturers and price points than the Ashley stores offered. The stores at 6401 Town Center Blvd. in Raleigh, 9257 U.S. 70 Business in Clayton, and in Goldsboro and Fayetteville open this week.

PieBird, a shop for savory and sweet pies in the works for more than a year, will open at 618 N. Person St. in Raleigh on Tuesday.

Also in Raleigh, **The Meat House** butcher shop will open at 5045 Falls of Neuse Road on March 31.

The **Olde Raleigh American & Chinese Buffet** that took over the former Hideaway Barbecue space at 2210 Capital Blvd. In Raleigh is open.

Sandwich chain **Which Wich** is also expanding to a location in Brier Creek, which will open early this summer, in addition to a location in North Hills.

In Smithfield a new **farmers market** will start April 8 beside Town Hall on Market Street. It will operate 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. each Friday through October.

At **Northgate Mall in Durham**, **Express Yourself** will open in mid-April near Hibbett Sports, selling handcrafted jewelry and accessories; **Endivo** salon opened in the old Laila's Salon; and fashion retailer **Glamour Setters** is open next to Pretzel Twister.

O2 Fitness is experimenting with express gyms. Unlike a traditional O2 gym, the express gyms - at 7510 Ramble Way in Raleigh and 14460 New Falls of Neuse Road in Wakefield Commons - are smaller, with reduced rates and 24-hour access.

Retail News

March 23, 2011

State regulators on Tuesday gave **Duke Energy** the go-ahead to offer customers **free home charging stations for plug-in electric cars**. Charlotte-based Duke plans to distribute about 150 of the pods to customers who buy or the Chevy Volt, Nissan Leaf and other electric cars soon to be released to the mass market. The charging stations have a retail value of \$1,500 to \$2,000. Raleigh-based Progress Energy plans to offer a similar program but details have not been finalized. In another potential perk for plug-in car owners, state lawmakers are considering legislation that would allow them to drive in high-occupancy vehicle lanes regardless of how many people are inside. Duke and Progress plan to offer the free charging stations through auto dealers that sell or lease electric cars. The plug-in cars will be available in limited quantities this year.

March 25, 2011

The **Dunkin' Donuts/Baskin-Robbins** at 3209 S. Wilmington St. in Raleigh has reopened after a major renovation.

Jobs/Economy/Housing

March 22, 2011

The N.C. Department of Transportation says it has won the agreement it needed to secure **\$461 million in federal grants that will put faster, more frequent and more reliable passenger trains on the tracks between Charlotte and Raleigh**. Gene Conti, the state transportation secretary, said DOT will start seeking bids over the next two weeks for contracts to lay tracks, build bridges and buy trains. The construction is expected to create 4,800 jobs over the next two years and cut the train time from Raleigh to Charlotte below three hours, including seven stops on the way.

March 25, 2011

Garner is preparing Monday to announce the coming of an employer who promises to bring lots of jobs to the town. The announcement, said to involve a \$12 million facility with more than 250 jobs at an average salary of \$50,000, is scheduled for 11 a.m. Monday, town council chambers, Building B, 900 7th Avenue, Garner.

The state's **unemployment rate** dropped 9.7 percent for February, a slight decline from 9.8 percent in January. The new rate, released by the N.C. Employment Security Commission today, reflected a non-farm job increase of 17,400 and is markedly down from the 11.4 percent unemployment rate of February 2010. "We are showing signs of slow but steady progress, with job gains in February and over-the-year," said ESC Chairman Lynn Holmes. "Here at the ESC we remain committed to assisting out-of-work citizens with training and services to get them through these hard times and back to work."

The **U.S. economy grew** a little faster at the end of 2010 than the government had previously estimated, boosted by more inventory building and business investment in plants and equipment. The economy, as measured by the gross domestic product, grew at an annual rate of 3.1 percent in the October-December quarter, the Commerce Department reported Friday. That represents an upward revision from last month's 2.8 percent estimate for the same period. The quarterly expansion was the best since the start of last year and was driven by 4 percent growth in consumer spending, the strongest gains in four years. Consumer spending is closely watched because it accounts for 70 percent of economic activity.