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HALIFAX

MOTTO

E Mari Merces
(From the Sea, Wealth)

POPULATION

372,858 (metro)

POPULATION CHANGE, 2001-2006

3.8%

STATUS

Capital of Nova Scotia; largest urban centre east of Quebec City

As the largest city in the region, Halifax has long been a first stop for many retailers looking to dip a toe in the Atlantic Canadian market. While places like Moncton have focused on attracting the retail tourist, Halifax draws shoppers not only from its own larger population, but from other parts of the province. The city was perhaps a bit slow to embrace the power centres, but the success of Bayers Lake Industrial Park proved Halifax had a lot to offer retailers. Other strong economic indicators like high employment, the presence of a high number of degree-granting institutions and increasing average incomes have meant good things for the city in recent years.

And, of course, now that the issue of Sunday shopping has been laid to rest, it's a whole new ballgame, says Fred Morley with the Greater Halifax Partnership: "Allowing for Sunday shopping has certainly changed the shopping patterns of people here. I think the numbers show it's not just the same amount of retail spread over seven days instead of six days; we've seen a bit of a jump."

Retailers and developers are responding and two major retail/commercial developments, Bedford Commons and Dartmouth Crossing, are under way.

"Dartmouth Crossing has been a real shot in the arm for retail development in Halifax," Morley said. "It's just about

the biggest retail development in the last few years east of Calgary. It's got national-scale development and square footage of retail space in the millions of square feet, so it's pretty significant stuff."

Coming to the city was a natural next step, says Glenn Munro, Managing Partner for Eastern Canada for North American Group, the site's developer: "Halifax is very under-stored. If you take a look at square footage per capita numbers of medium-sized cities across the country, Halifax is the lowest number of square feet per capita. I think people are paying more attention to what's going on. They're hearing about it, whether it be our project or whether it be the sales numbers coming out of some of the new retailers."

Companies that have never considered stores in Eastern Canada are signing up to fill the new spaces, and it's not just the traditional small-market retailers, either. The hundreds of shoppers that lined up for the May 2008 opening of Vancouver-based Lululemon's Halifax location showed Halifaxians were eager for new shopping experiences.

"I think (retailers) are recognizing there's money here," said MacFarlane. "The downtown vacancy rate has halved in the past 24 months. I mean, we're below four per cent. In commercial real estate, anything under five is pretty much zero. Retail just follows that." ■