

Bass Pro's EP store going to be even bigger than planned

EAST PEORIA —

To mark the only Bass Pro Shops opening in the world next year, area dignitaries and outdoor enthusiasts converged Thursday on the site of the future home of the mega outdoor store.

“What a day,” said Mayor Dave Mingus to a crowd of about 250 people gathered for a groundbreaking ceremony under a tent on property formerly known as the CILCO ash pond, north of the Murray Baker Bridge. “We didn’t know for sure if this was ever going to come.”

Flanked by sprays of autumn-hued flowers and stuffed turkeys, raccoons, a bobcat and fox, a small sampling of wildlife representative of the area, Mingus said luring Bass Pro to East Peoria would not have been possible without the efforts of many throughout the region.

“The regional support we have received concerning Bass Pro Shops and our 2010 project are greatly appreciated,” Mingus told the crowd. “One of the many reasons East Peoria has the ability to accomplish great feats is because of the unity between all our governmental entities. We all band together.

“Having a Bass Pro come to your town is not an easy venture. It takes a lot of work and a lot of due diligence. Because of each of you, we’re standing here today and we owe you that gratitude.”

Bass Pro officials revealed a surprise Thursday. The store, originally planned to be 145,000 square feet, will be larger, closer to 150,000 square feet.

It will offer outdoor enthusiasts shopping space equivalent to the size of 3½ football fields filled with the area’s largest selection of equipment and clothing for such activities as hunting, fishing, hiking, backpacking, etc. A restaurant and aquarium-themed 12-lane professional bowling facility, entitled Uncle Buck’s Fish Bowl & Grill, are planned, as is a laser arcade for both children and adults, with old mining elements.

“It’s going to look like you’re bowling under the ocean,” said Bass Pro Shops spokeswoman Katie Mitchell.

Bass Pro Shops is scheduled to open in the fall of 2011. The store will produce about 200 full-time jobs during construction and another 300 full-time jobs when completed.

About 70 percent of the store’s foundation is completed. Construction crews will then begin the underslab plumbing and electrical work. Within the next 30 days, the building will start to go vertical — the steel structure of the building will be erected in the first part of December.

“The old-fashioned values and the unique experience provided by each Bass Pro facility characterizes our American culture and the American dream we all cherish,” said Mingus. “Bass Pro teaches us there’s a need to get away, a need to have fun through recreation and enjoyment of our national resources that a lot of time we take for granted.”

East Peoria’s Bass Pro is centrally located between Chicago and St. Louis, Mo., and Des Moines, Iowa, and Cincinnati, Ohio. The store is expected to be a tourism magnet for the area — an average of 3 million people a year flock to a single store, with more than 100 million people

visiting the stores annually.

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