

# Courant.com

## As Mall Sales Drop During Recession, Westfield Trumbull Receives \$25M In Renovations

By KENNETH R. GOSSELIN

July 28, 2009

Shopping malls throughout the country are having a tough time as recession-weary consumers hold tight to their wallets.

But one major mall operator in Connecticut isn't waiting for sales to rebound, sinking \$25 million into renovations at one of its three malls in the state.

Westfield Group is launching a major makeover of the Westfield Trumbull mall that will include new facades; new common areas, some with porcelain glass tile flooring; a new food court; the addition of new tenants to offer a broader range of shopping choices from value to luxury; and new play spaces aimed at families.

"Westfield is a long-term owner that invests and reinvests in its shopping centers through economic cycles," said Lee Sterling, a Westfield spokeswoman.

June's retail sales report disappointed, as the industry posted a 4.9 percent sales decline, compared with a 1.9 percent increase a year ago, according to an analysis by Thomson Reuters.

The deep recession, mounting job losses and rising credit card rates have consumers focusing on the essentials such as groceries, rather than luxury items.

Some malls are taking a big hit as the recession drags on. According to real estate research investment firm Green Street Advisors, U.S. malls posted a 6.5 percent decline in same-store sales for the 12 months ended March 31.

General Growth Properties, which owns more than 200 U.S. malls, including the Shoppes at Buckland Hills in Manchester and Brass City Center in Waterbury, filed for bankruptcy in April because it could not refinance debt that was coming due.

Even in these tough times for malls, Sterling said that Australia-based Westfield is in the position to make "the capital investment and improve the shopping experience for our customers." The renovations are expected to be completed by the end of 2010.

Sales per square feet, a key measure of mall profitability, slipped to \$385 in 2008 at Westfield Trumbull from \$401 in 2007, according to Green Street Advisors.

That is still well above the \$250 or less that indicates a mall is in trouble. The U.S. average is \$381, the firm said.

Sterling said that Westfield has invested more than \$200 million in its three malls in Connecticut in the past five years. In addition to Trumbull, Westfield has malls in Meriden and Milford.

Copyright © 2009, [The Hartford Courant](#)

**Lee Sterling** / Regional Marketing Director - Northeast  
1201 Boston Post Road / Milford, CT 06460  
T 203.301.2253 / C 203.631.7513 / F 203.876.2037 / lsterling@us.westfield.com