

# New Minnesota Mega-Mall To Test Consumer Vigor

## Can Project Pull The Tens Of Millions Of Visitors It Needs To Prosper?

By Reuter

In Bloomington, Minn.

For folks who like to shop till they drop, traditional malls offer little challenge. At the gigantic Mall of America set to open Monday in this Minneapolis suburb, even shopping fanatics may drop like flies.

Small wonder — the Mall of America is a very large wonder.

The developers of the world's second-largest mall — after Canada's

### Development

humongous, decade-old West Edmonton Mall — admit they don't expect anybody to make it through the entire complex in a single day.

Its nearly 300 stores, spread out over 4.2 million square feet, make it easily the largest mall in the U.S.

Anchor stores include retail giants Nordstrom, Bloomingdale's, Macy's and Sears, all of them ringing a full-scale theme park called Knott's Camp Snoopy.

Camp Snoopy, with its Peanuts comic strip theme, has 23 rides and will be the world's largest indoor theme park. It will be operated by Knott's Berry Farm Inc. of Buena Park, Calif.

Everything about the complex is big — from the \$625 million construction budget, to its 10,000 permanent jobs, 14 movie screens and more than 40 places to eat.

Some say the mall is too big.

Twin Cities media have been laden for months with reports of consultants and other retail experts predicting the monstrous project will flop for lack of shoppers.

Meanwhile, local merchants are preparing for the onslaught on their retailing turf by remodeling their stores and offering free parking downtown.



The Mall Of America will include performance and exhibition space, a theme park and movie theaters, as well as nearly 300 stores.

Melvin Simon & Associates developed the Bloomington mall in conjunction with Edmonton-based Triple Five Corp., which also designed the highly successful West Edmonton Mall.

Canada's mega-mall has 823 stores spread over 5.2 million square feet. While Edmonton boasts the world's largest indoor lake and a fleet of four submarines that is larger than the Royal Canadian Navy's, developers expect the Mall of America to draw twice as many customers.

The Minnesota developers estimate that by 1996 their mall will need — and have — well over 40 million visitors a year, more people than flock to California's Disneyland.

The mega-mall's mega-claims have created a few skeptics, especially as the retailing industry struggles in the current economic climate.

But mall officials defend their projections.

"It's free to come into the Mall of America; Disneyland charges \$30 ad-

mission," mall spokeswoman Monica McGlinch said.

"Besides, people come to a mall more than once a year. When we say 40 million, I could come to the mall 40 million times," she said.

In any event, Mall of America officials estimate that as many as a third of their shoppers will be tourists, many motoring up from Kansas City and Chicago, roughly 400 miles away. The mall is conveniently located near the Minneapolis airport.

The mall's promotional videos explain that once the on-site hotel and aquarium are completed next year, people can take a complete vacation without ever heading outdoors — no small enticement in a cold-weather state where the town of International Falls touts itself as "the nation's icebox."

Indeed, if the Mall of America does not succeed, it will not be from lack of things to do there.

From any of the four three-level "streets" along which the shops sit, one can see and hear the roller coaster wind its way through Camp Snoopy and over the real trees growing under a giant skylight.

There is a two-level miniature golf course, a Lego area where kids can build their own plastic block creations (and then buy a Lego kit, if they want) and a store where customers can't buy anything but pay admission to go in and watch 30 model trains make their way along 3,000 feet of track.

One of the restaurants is owned by the Gatlin Brothers country music stars, who will perform there regularly.

It can all be a bit overwhelming, a fact the mall's developers realize.

"The first time they come, we expect people to plan a whole day," said spokesman Dan Lien. "After that, they will probably take it easy a little bit."