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Garden of Gods Corridor Blooms

by Kristin Bearnarth

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The Garden of the Gods Road in Colorado Springs will soon be in full bloom as developers plan to break ground on an unprecedented number of projects along the high-tech corridor this summer and fall. The area's high-tech roots were planted in 1957, when Charles Kaman opened Kaman Nuclear at 1500 Garden of the Gods Road. Kaman's original building remains - plus plenty of additions. It is now home to Kaman Instrumentation and ITT Systems and Sciences, which last year bought Kaman Sciences. In the early 1960s, Hewlett-Packard Co. built a plant next door. United Technologies Corp. moved into the area in the 1980s, then Symbios, Vitesse and Empak followed in the 1990s, along with a lot of smaller employers. But it was MCI Communications Corp. that provided the biggest growth spurt for the area. MCI bought IBM's building at the western end of Garden of the Gods Road in 1991, then spent \$114 million expanding the site to accommodate 3,000 software engineers. Besides creating numerous jobs, MCI's presence has accomplished two things. MCI engineers have bought houses in Mountain Shadows, Pinon Valley, Rockrimmon, Peregrine and other northwestern Colorado Springs neighborhoods, spurring demand for restaurants, shops and other retail projects. And MCI itself has replaced Kaman as the anchor for the area. "You've got critical mass of key high-tech employers that act like a magnet," said Steve Bach of Bach Commercial Brokerage Co., which will be leasing more than 250,000 square feet of Garden of the Gods space. "The market is rapidly maturing." About a year ago Kaman sold 30 acres near its original site, at the northwest corner of Garden of the Gods and Centennial Boulevard to John Gatto's Crestone Development of Colorado Springs, which will develop 14 acres and sell the rest to another developer. One draw the high-tech corridor has is that there are no neighborhoods that abut the properties along the road, leaving little room for residents to object to development. Also, much of the area is within sight of Pikes Peak and the Garden of the Gods and has easy access to Interstate 25. The list of projects planned along the corridor represents a blossoming of the area: @ Centennial Technology Center: First Industrial Realty Trust is planning to build three buildings totaling 158,000 sf on 14 acres along Centennial Boulevard, north of Garden of the Gods Road. Construction on the office/warehouse project, which is awaiting city approval, is expected to begin later this month, said Greg Downs of First Industrial. @ WindWard Corner: Crestone Development of Colorado Inc. has begun site preparation on its 14-acre parcel. The development will include a 7-Eleven store, a Vista bank and a 95-room Towneplace Suites by Marriott. Gatto also is planning to add two retail buildings and a restaurant. @ Centennial Commons: Developer Mike Duitch is building a 26,000-sf business center on Centennial Boulevard across the street from the Centennial Technology Center. It will include a 5,500-sf site for the Marigold Café and Bakery, which will move from 4935 Centennial Blvd. this fall.

@ Elite Technology Campus: Developer Elite Properties of America Inc. is building a 40,000-sf office building on the 6.5-acre site at 4310 Arrows West Drive. An unidentified tenant has leased 15,000 sf, Bach said. Elite plans to break ground in September on a separate 30,000-sf office building for the campus, he said. @ Garden Gateway Plaza: DPC Development Co. plans to build three office buildings on a 13-acre site at the southwest corner of Centennial and Garden of the Gods. Construction on the first two are scheduled to begin this summer. @ Centennial Professional Center: Developer Labrador Associates plans to break ground in October on a development off the corner of Chesam Circle and Garden of the Gods. The development is slated to include a 30,000-sf office building on the southwest corner and four 1-story office buildings of about 3,000 sf each at the northwest corner. @ Mountain Shadows Business Park: Connell Construction Co. of Dallas plans to break ground in July on two office buildings on seven acres north of 30th Street and Garden of the Gods. Connell hasn't yet closed the deal, but the project has city approval. Despite all of the planned projects, developers don't seem worried about leasing them up because of the extremely low office and industrial vacancy rates in the area. Many of the projects have started pre-leasing, Bach said. "It's going to be a race to finish first," Downs said. "But I think there are enough users out there that we can get them leased up."

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