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Shopping patterns, they are a-changing

By KEVIN COURTNEY
Register Staff Writer

2005 was a year of the retail haves and the have nots, with half of Napa's shopping centers reporting strong sales increases, while the other half had declines.

Sales soared 26 percent at Bel Aire Plaza -- in the process of being made over with popular chain stores -- while the new "Lifestyle" Safeway boosted center sales at the Trancas and Jefferson center by 58 percent.

With several hot new retailers, including Calvin Klein and Banana Republic, Napa Premium Outlets had the best year in its history, with sales up 11 percent.

Citywide, sales at major retail zones were up a modest 1.5 percent, according to city business license sales reports. This was less than the Bay Area's Consumer Price Index, which was up 1.96 percent in 2005, according to the Association of Bay Area Governments.

Downtown was among the high performers, with a 5.5 percent sales gain despite the closure of First Street at Napa Creek for most of the year.

"I think that speaks to the diversity and strength of the dining experience downtown," said Craig Smith, executive director of the Napa Downtown Association. Nearly half of downtown's 45 restaurants are now rated by the prestigious Zagat guide, he said.

While downtown's restaurants are thriving, retail is another story, Smith said. "Our numbers look good despite

a retail scene that's still improving," he said.

The raging success of Bel Aire Plaza and the new Trancas Safeway may have taken sales away from competing centers.

On Trancas, Northwood center -- which has an Albertsons -- was down almost 24 percent. Silverado Plaza at Trancas and Soscol Avenue, with Nob Hill Market, was down nearly 5 percent.

South Napa Marketplace dropped 3.7 percent. Last year was the first full year that its Target had to share local customers with the new Bel Aire Target.

River Park Center took a major hit when it lost its anchor tenant, Vallerga's market, in February, 2005. Sales were down last year by 19 percent.

Downtown was the city's biggest retail and dining zone, with sales of \$183.8 million. Sales have risen 50 percent since 1996.

South Napa Marketplace, with its major national tenants, is second in sales with \$165 million. Soscol Avenue's Auto Row is third, with sales of \$143 million, up 5.6 percent.

Bel Aire Plaza, which lost its Ralph's supermarket last week, is poised for substantially greater sales in the decade ahead, said Craig Semmelmeier, the

Shopping Location	2005 sales in millions	Change from 2004
Safeway Center — Trancas	\$48	+58%
Bel Aire Plaza	\$87.7	+25.6%
Napa Premium Outlets	\$57.3	+11.2%
Grapeyard Center	\$21.1	+6.2%
Auto Row — Soscol	\$143.1	+5.6%
Downtown Napa	\$183.8	+5.5%
Wal-Mart	\$55.1	+5%
Oxbow District	\$42.5	-1%
South Napa Marketplace	\$164.7	-3.7%
Silverado Plaza	\$29.2	-4.8%
Albertsons — California Blvd.	\$28.4	-7.1%
River Park Center	\$24	-19.2%
Albertsons — Northwood	\$20.3	-23.6%

Source: City of Napa
KELLY DOREN/REGISTER

center's leasing agent. Bel Aire's 2005 sales were \$87.7 million.

Semmelmeier would not confirm that Whole Foods, the national natural foods chain, is lining up to take over the Ralph's space, but said a successful major tenant could boost center sales by millions of dollars.

Bel Aire Plaza is in the process of filling smaller spaces at the north end of the center, with a Keva Juice opening this week and Child's Delight, a toy store, and Barber's Q, a restaurant, scheduled to come in later in the year, he said.

The Safeway center at Trancas and Jefferson did \$8 million more in sales last year than in 2003, when an older, smaller Safeway was in operation.

Safeway's Lifestyle format, with artful layouts, subdued lighting and expanded produce, deli and floral sections, is racking up substantial sales increases nationally, said company spokesman Jennifer Webber. By year's end, more than 700 of the nearly 1,800 Safeways in the U.S. and Canada will have the Lifestyle format, she said.