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Apartment investor/developer Jack Fiorella admits that retail development isn't his game. Yet he's poised to hit a home run at what promises to be one of the busiest retail intersections in Hoover.

Fiorella last year tore down his Galleria Fun Country carpet golf-game arcade, sprawled on a hillside on Alabama Highway 150 across from the Riverchase Galleria. In its place, he is investing \$2.5 million in a 10,300-square-foot retail center that already has signed Jason's Deli, a Starbucks location and an AT&T Wireless store.

Moreover, Fiorella sold two acres behind the retail center to a businessman planning a multi-story hotel, which likely will begin construction next March. Negotiations are under way between a major chain and the businessman, who Fiorella declines to name until a brand is secured.

But the kicker is that the new exit/entrance road to the Interstate 459 flyover, which bisects the Galleria and the new Patton Creek retail complex, merges into Highway 150 at Fiorella's front door.

"The combination of the flyover, the traffic light and the business generated in the area from other retailers has created an incredible intersection," Fiorella says. "It's a great environment for any retailer."

Work began on the project in October, with expectations of completion in spring. The contractor is Bradford Building Co. of Birmingham, and the architect is Oswell and Nitishin of Atlanta. Financing was arranged through Tom Genetti at First Commercial Bank. Leasing and project development coordination is being handled by Gary Pharo of The Shopping Center Group. Some 2,000 square feet remain to be leased.

"Gary and Tom were invaluable in our efforts to transform that property," Fiorella says.

To be sure, it was a huge task. Galleria Fun Country not only had to be disassembled, but the hill it was on had to be leveled.

"A lot of debris had to be hauled off," Fiorella says. "We took the site down 24 feet."

The entire project, from land purchase to building the retail center to site work, totaled about \$6 million, Fiorella says.

Pulling off big deals is nothing new to Fiorella, owner of Equity Resources Inc., a developer and investor in apartment complexes.

For 2001, he closed the nation's largest multi-family property purchase, paying \$47.7 million for a 532-unit Orlando apartment community.

He started 2003 with the January purchase of two apartment complexes in Atlanta and Naples, Fla., totaling \$60 million. He and partner Mark Marlowe created Equity Residential Inc. to sell upscale garden homes through their building company, Equity Development.

"This transaction is off the beaten path for me," Fiorella says of his new retail development. But success nonetheless seems to follow everything he does.

As for his foray into the miniature golf industry, Fiorella and some partners built what originally was called Riverchase Golf and Games in 1992. He bought out most of his partners and became the majority owner of the property.

"We decided the retail value of the property had grown to the point it was more valuable as a retail development," Fiorella says.

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