

Thornton face-lift effort successful

City enters 15th year of redevelopment work that has brought jobs to older core district

By Mike Patty

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THORNTON — Now in its 15th year, the Thornton Development Authority reports success in its efforts to remake the older core part of the city.

The just-released 1996 annual report says the core area gained 27 businesses with a net increase of 607 employees last year.

To date, the authority has invested about \$25.3 million in public improvements, resulting in more than \$227 million in private investment and created more than 3,500 jobs.

"It has really been gratifying," said Gary Gaglia, economic development manager. "We have seen some major redevelopment

changes down in that area the past three years. It is doing what it is intended to do, take the old and make it into the new."

The city established the authority in 1981 to undertake urban renewal in an area of about 1,000 acres of undeveloped or underdeveloped properties. The area is generally bounded by 84th and 104th avenues and Washington and Huron streets.

The authority issues bonds to finance projects, which then stimulate private investment. The resulting increased property tax revenues from projects are used to repay the bonds.

"At first we used it to do a lot of infrastructure work such as the interchange at Interstate 25 and Thornton Parkway, the Grant Street improvements and other projects that opened up undevelopable land and made it developable," Gaglia said. "Now we are more involved in redeveloping older properties that have fallen

into disrepair."

One of the TDA's 1996 projects was conversion of the North Valley Shopping Center at 84th Avenue and I-25 into an office tech center.

One company, TelTech, has leased more than 100,000 square feet of space in the North Valley Center and expects to eventually employ 1,200 people there. Gaglia said two other tenants are looking at leasing 75,000 square feet in the North Valley Center.

"What was once a real white elephant has been turned into what is becoming a very nice office center," Gaglia said. "Across the highway last April, Ultimate Electronics opened up their facility where there had been an old drive-in movie theater. For years that site had been underused and now it is open, operating and employing 270 people."

Other projects include American Furniture, Columbia Health Care, Mediplex Rehab, Thornton Town Center and Home Depot.