



Retail

Yes, on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Prime Outlets Opens J. Crew and More

From Interstate 10 in Gulfport, Mississippi, it's hard to miss the big yellow buildings boasting top name brands at great savings. Prime Outlets Gulfport, a subsidiary of Prime Retail, opened on the Mississippi Gulf Coast in 1995. The attraction of Prime Outlets Gulfport has continually grown over the years with the addition of new stores – many unique to the area, the expansion of some longtime favorites, and continual renovations. And, in this challenged economy, Prime Outlets is doing better than ever by catering to the “frugal fashionista.”

Already in 2009, Prime Outlets has welcomed three new stores, and it is slated to open more within the year. The national chains American Eagle and J. Crew opened in January and March, respectively.

Pass Christian Soap Company, a local business that distributes its handmade soaps all over the world, opened April 1. Owner Paula Lindsay, a native of Pass Christian, Mississippi who manufactures her soap in the back of the store and sells from the front, said she chose Prime Outlets as the home for her business because the parking lot was always full and there were always crowds of people shopping.

In 2008, Prime Outlets introduced the Disney Store, Ann Taylor Factory Store and Jones New York. Three of their major brands have expanded since 2005 – Polo Ralph Lauren Factory Store, Banana Republic Factory Store, Gap Outlet and COACH Factory.

With the additions and expansions have also come increases in sales. Since 2005, Prime Outlets has experienced continual sales increases. And in 2008, sales increased double digits.

The tremendous success of Prime Outlets Gulfport can be attributed to many factors, including the most obvious – the current economy. Pam Meininger, Senior General Manager of Prime Outlets Gulfport, says their stores always do better when times are tough, because people still want the name brands, but don't want to spend the money. Once they get used to paying lower prices, they often become loyal customers.

She also associates the stores' high sales with the military presence in the area, a strong local base, the heavy traffic from Interstate 10, especially coming from Louisiana, and the other attractions on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Tourists who visit South Mississippi for the beach and casinos also spend time shopping. Meininger says she frequently encounters women who are there shopping while their husbands are gambling.

Prime Outlets is not alone in its good fortune; it is at the heart of a strong, growing retail hub at the intersection of Interstate 10 and Highway 49. Crossroads Shopping Center offers 600,000 square feet of stores including Barnes & Noble, T.J. Maxx, Academy Sports & Outdoors, Pier 1, and Old Navy. And this year, a new Sam's Club and Best Buy shopping center also opened on Highway 49.

Meininger says, “With all of the surrounding retail activity and our continued growth at the outlets, the Mississippi Gulf Coast is becoming a major shopping destination. People who used to travel outside the state are now shopping at home, and outsiders are coming in to take advantage of all that we offer. At Prime Outlets, we will continue to bring in new brands to keep it fresh and offer our customers options they can't find elsewhere, at better prices.”

For more on Prime Outlets Gulfport, visit www.primeoutlets.com/gulfport.



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