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Mast plans '06 opening

Eclectic store will set up shop in old White Store building on Gay Street

**By HAYES HICKMAN, hickman@knews.com
May 26, 2005**

North Carolina-based Mast General Stores, the first retailer to secure a tax increment financing deal with the city since downtown's south Gay Street was designated as a redevelopment area, announced an August 2006 opening Wednesday.

Representatives for the eclectic stores in North and South Carolina said the Knoxville branch is expected to be their largest yet.

Mast Store President John Cooper admitted his surprise at the crowd gathered outside the former White Store site for the announcement, as he passed around company-logo ball caps to celebrate the event.

"I thought maybe 50 would cover it," Cooper said. "This is the biggest party we've ever had."

Knoxville Mayor Bill Haslam, who himself was the first to sport one of the hats, called the plans a significant step toward recasting Gay Street as a major retail district.

"We truly think Mast General will be a regional draw," the mayor said. "My guess is whatever you've estimated your business is going to be here, you're going to break it."

Claire McGuire, Mast's chief financial officer, said those initial estimates are \$3 million-\$4 million in revenues within the first 12 months of operation.

Cooper

SAUL YOUNG
SENTINEL

A construction worker walks through the empty interior of a historic building at 402 S. Gay St. on Wednesday that will become home to Mast General Store, a retail chain that sells old-time goods. The company looks for vintage buildings in downtowns for its stores.

Mast General Store

- Henry Taylor opens store in 1883
- Taylor sells half-interest to W.W. Mast in 1897
- Store known as Taylor and Mast General Store until 1913
- Mast purchases remaining half of store, which becomes Mast General Store
- Mast family sells store to Atlanta doctor in 1973
- The Valle Crucis, N.C., store was closed in 1977
- Reopened in 1980 by John and Faye Cooper
- Locations in Valle Crucis, Hendersonville, Asheville, Boone and Waynesville, N.C., and Greenville, S.C.
- Mercantile items include jams, jellies, maple syrup, stoneground cornmeal, rocking chairs, work boots, hiking boots
- Vendors include Carhartt, Northern Isles, Columbia, Pendleton, Moose Creek, Patagonia, The North Face, Birkenstock, Chaco, Aladdin lamps, Burt's Bees, Mary



