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Ed Bogacki -

The Westgate Mall's renovation project to add two stores is nearing completion.

"We're working feverishly," said Ed Bogacki, project manager for Eidco Construction, and the progress on the mall's west end. Bogacki said the renovation will be substantially completed by March 31. He said the interior will be completed to a point where both stores — Big Lots and Dunham's Sports — will be able to start stocking shelves and setting up displays. Getting the stores ready is expected to take four to five weeks. Bogacki said he believes the stores plan to be ready to open in early May.

Construction effort will continue on the facade of both stores and the stucco finish. Work on framing and glass and the main entry will continue for both spaces until the third week of April, Bogacki said. The final phase will be on the north side of the building as loading docks are added for both stores and parking rearranged. With road weight restrictions, that work may be completed in May.

Bogacki said the project has gone smoothly and on a tight schedule to get everything done on time after basically gutting the former Kmart. The warm weather was a benefit and put them ahead at least a little but was minimal as they still had a few cold days and utilized heating elements on the ground. Although he said they may not have gotten as much done on the exterior as they have at this time. Bogacki said if it has been a typical Minnesota winter, they would have had to enclose the space to work.

“We got lucky with the weather,” he said. “We didn’t expect it to be 70. ... I think we are probably about where we thought we’d be.”

About 30 to 50 trades workers have been employed on the project in a 65,000-square-foot space. The space will basically be divided into two for the stores.

“The city has been very helpful in helping us get through the permit process,” Bogacki said, adding mall management as well noting they provided information and general assistance. Alan Retkinski and Alex Schleider, who formed Westgate Mall Realty Group, purchased the mall for \$6.8 million from DDR Corp. Two stores, Big Lots and Dunham’s Sports plan to open in space formerly occupied by Steve & Barry’s and Kmart.