

16 WORK & DO BUSINESS HERE: RETAIL



RETAIL SECTOR 'ON THE FRONT FOOT'

OFTEN DESCRIBED AS THE "HEARTBEAT" OF THE CAIRNS ECONOMY, THE RETAIL SECTOR IS REAPING THE BENEFITS OF A RESURGENT TOURISM SECTOR AND APPEARS ON COURSE FOR LONG-TERM GROWTH, WRITES HAYDEN SMITH.

Much is happening in Cairns' retail sector, often described as the "heartbeat" of the economy.

In a sign of confidence, two of the city's major shopping precincts - DFO Cairns and Smithfield Shopping Centre - have invested in multimillion-dollar overhauls.

Bought by Sentinel Property Group for about \$40 million in 2016, DFO Cairns is a retail success story.

The once languishing Mulgrave Rd centre is now almost at full occupancy, with many traders enjoying bumper sales throughout 2017.

The shopping hub is in the process of developing a state-of-the-art new "outdoor dining precinct", due to be finished early next year.

Sentinel managing director Warren Ebert told the Cairns Post recently that "retailing is not dead".

"It's changing, and you have to evolve

and stay on the front foot to succeed," he said.

"The retail market is not easy but you can be successful if you have a clear strategy, a commitment to doing all the little things right, a willingness to work hard and a focus on innovation."

A number of retailers have also expanded their operations at DFO Cairns over the past year, including Lorna Jane and World Gym.

To the city's north, Smithfield Shopping Centre - which recently celebrated the launch of an Event Cinemas complex - is also soon to be home to a new dining precinct.

Charmaine Saunders, who is the director of locally-based indigenous fashion business Mairle Australia, has also enjoyed early success since entering the retail sector.

In mid-2016 she opened a new

shopfront at Cairns Central, after launching an online business the previous year.

"It's been very good, and now we're perfectly positioned to capture our target market," she said.

"Cairns Central is now more than just a place for people to go shopping - it's a real meeting point.

IN A SIGN OF CONFIDENCE OF CITY'S MAJOR SHOPPING PRECINCTS ... HAVE IN MULTIMILLION-DOLLAR OVERHAULS.

"We know the shopping centre will always be one of the CBD's magnets."

It seems a large portion of the city's retail sector is reaping the benefits of a resurgent tourism sector, which appears on course for long-term growth.