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BUSINESSES GET TOEHOLD IN RURAL AREA

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ORMOND BEACH -- Far from any incorporated municipality, at the edge of the huge Bulow Creek State Park, commercial development is picking up the pace at Halifax Plantation.

The newest business is a 7-11 convenience store that Independent Development Co. of Kissimmee is building at the southeast corner of Old Dixie Highway and Roscommon Boulevard.

The store, which will give people on the east side of Interstate 95 a place to buy gas and other "grab 'n go" products, is across Roscommon from a SunTrust Bank.

The two businesses are part of Halifax Plantation Village, of which the centerpiece is a Publix grocery store with an attached strip shopping center.

The strip center, developed by Faison Orlando (now Trammell Crow Co.) has 11,000 square feet of space, but so far has just a dry cleaner and hair salon.

Angela Melton, a Trammell Crow spokeswoman, said another business is expected to be announced in two to three weeks.

The 7-11 will be a standard-size store with 3,248 square feet of space. It's expected to open in August.

The 7-11 company has been aggressive in building new stores in the area, even in some areas where there isn't a big population base, such as a store at LPGA and Williamson boulevards in Daytona Beach.

"We're very aggressive in store development all over the country," company spokeswoman Margaret Chabris said. "But we're building the most stores in Florida."

The Dallas-based company expects to build 1,000 new stores worldwide this year, with 200 in the United States. Currently it has about 18,600 stores worldwide.

While some people might wonder about putting businesses in an area that doesn't seem to have a huge population, the strategy should work, said Daryl Carter, a spokesman for **Maury Carter & Associates**, an Orlando real estate firm.

The area, which has five residential developments, should grow quickly, Carter said. "If (businesses such as Publix) can get a toehold in that market, they may be able to keep other competitors out. In the long run that will work for them."

Carter & Associates has 52 acres of land at the Old Dixie and I-95 interchange, just west of Roscommon, Carter said. "We have some people interested, but nothing definite."

The only other businesses in the area are the Exit 90 Texaco Plaza and Best Western Plantation Inn, both on the west side of I-95. The residential developments are Halifax Plantation, Plantation Bay and Fairchild Oaks subdivisions, and Plantation Oaks and Bulow Creek manufactured home parks.