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## Idaho company targets Westover Hills for new development

San Antonio Business Journal - by [Tricia Lynn Silva](#)

One of the city's largest employment hubs has garnered the attention of a Boise-based development firm making its move into San Antonio.

**DBSI Development** has announced plans to create a new mixed-use community on the city's far West Side. The project, christened Escala, will span 80 acres of land along the northwest corner of Military Drive and State Highway 151, in the Westover Hills community.

DBSI will serve as the property manager and master developer for Escala, according to Al Blaine, regional development manager for DBSI. He is located in Dallas.

Escala is DBSI's first project in San Antonio.

At present, what DBSI envisions for the acreage is a master-planned project that would include a mix of office, hotel and retail venues, Blaine says. Some multifamily projects could potentially be brought into the mix as well.

DBSI could develop some portions of the Escala tract itself, Blaine adds. The firm would also entertain selling off sites to other developers.

Costs for the project were not disclosed.

All told, Escala could encompass anywhere from 650,000 to 1 million square feet of development, Blaine says.

Over the next six months, DBSI will begin putting in the roads and other infrastructure for Escala. During this time, the firm will also work to get a handle on how to best develop the site, Blaine says.

To that end, DBSI has hired San Antonio firm REATA Real Estate Services LP to market Escala. Heading up that assignment are David Ballard, an associate broker in the office and industrial division of REATA; and REATA principal Thomas Tyng.

"It's like putting a puzzle together," says Blaine of Escala. "You have all the pieces, but you just might have to take the scissors out and make them fit another way.

"Every developer initially has their own idea," Blaine continues. "After a while, the market will tell you if

you're right or wrong."

### **Coming together**

Presently, the market seems to be interested in what DBSI is seeking to accomplish here.

According to Ballard, Escala has already garnered the attention of two hotel developers -- one looking to build a mid-priced brand, and one with an interest in bringing a high-end name to the site.

With almost 30,000 people currently working in Westover Hills -- many of them at corporate campuses for firms like **JP Morgan Chase**, **Wachovia Bank** and **QVC** -- a mid-priced hotel brand would be attractive to business travelers making their way to the Alamo City.

Meanwhile, a high-end hotel could feed off of nearby tourist attractions like **SeaWorld San Antonio**.

Westover Hills is already home to the Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort and Spa. The success of that venue points to the demand for this kind of product in the area, Ballard adds.

The corporate profile of Westover Hills also makes it attractive for multifamily housing, says Ballard, who adds that a couple of apartment developers have begun "kicking the tires" at Escala as well.

As for office users for the project, both Ballard and Blaine say that Escala could be prime for bringing in some more of the corporate-campus type users that have already made their way to Westover Hills. Some multi-tenant office buildings could also be part of the master plan, Ballard adds.

It is retail, however, that could be one of the most important pieces of the Escala puzzle. While retail development has continued to spring up along both loops 410 and 1604 in this sector of the city, there is presently nothing in between for the several thousand employees in Westover Hills, Ballard says.

"A lifestyle center would be a good fit," says Ballard, adding that such a center could bring in the mid-range retailers and restaurants that are presently in demand in this master-planned community.

Local developer Charles Martin "Marty" Wender is a principal in San Antonio real estate firm Wender & Hall LLP. He is also the man who spearheaded the Westover Hills development.

While retail development has been missing in this community to date, its time has now come, says Wender, who has plans of his own to create a lifestyle center on land just in front of the Hyatt Resort.

The job growth in Westover Hills is, of course, a factor fueling the retail demand. Another driver, says Wender, is schools.

"If you draw a two-mile circle around, say Military and (Hwy.) 151, you come across seven schools," he says. "Tell me another area in town where you could draw in a two-mile area and bring in seven schools. You're going to see a lot more retail and mixed-use (development)."

### **Investing in growth**

DBSI is targeting more than one site in the San Antonio area.

Blaine says his firm has also begun some pre-planning work for a 61.2 acre tract of land at the northeast corner of Interstate Highway 10 East and Loop 1604 on the far East Side.

And more projects could be on the way, says Blaine, who points out that until earlier this year, DBSI had run all of its projects out of its Boise headquarters.

But with almost 50 percent of the assets the firm is managing located in the Lone Star State, the decision was made to open a regional office in Dallas.

And as DBSI looks for new opportunities in Texas, San Antonio will indeed be one of its target markets.

Says Blaine: "We are looking very hard in the San Antonio area."

### **Escala**

**What:** A new mixed-use project

**Where:** Located on 80 acres in the master-planned community of Westover Hills

**Who:** The developer is Boise-based DBSI Development; locally based REATA Real Estate Services LP is marketing the project

**What's up:** Plans call for a mix of retail, office, hotel and possibly multifamily development

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