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Marshalls' arrival signals new wave of retail expansion

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Handout U.S. retailer Marshalls, which will open in the city next year, sells clothing, footwear and home fashions.

Another big-name retailer is coming to the Polo Park area, and two more may be close behind.

Marshalls, the U.S. discount retailer, which entered the Canadian market about 19 months ago, is opening a 28,000-square-foot store in the Polo North development under construction on the former Winnipeg Arena site next to the Polo Park mall.

Michael Stronger, a commercial leasing agent with Shindico Realty Inc., told a commercial real estate forum in Winnipeg Wednesday the Marshalls store will open next spring.

Marshalls is one of three large retail tenants who will set up shop on the main floor of the three-storey, 210,000-square-foot complex, Stronger said in an interview. Western Financial Group will be the anchor tenant, leasing all of the second and third floors, as well as 4,000 square feet of space on the main floor.

"We're in deep negotiations with two other high-profile national retailers for the balance of the main floor," which is about 50,000 square feet, he said.

He said the other two are also fashion-oriented. One would also be a newcomer to the Winnipeg market, while the other already has a presence here.

Stronger refused to say if they are Canadian or American chains, or reveal any more information until leasing deals are finalized.

Marshalls is one of a number of retailers that have been rumoured for several years to be looking at the Winnipeg market. Others include J.C. Penny, Kohl's, J. Crew, Nordstrom, H & M and Dick's Sporting Goods.

The Marshalls chain is owned by TJX Companies Inc., one of the leading U.S. off-price retailers of apparel and home fashions. TJX also owns T.J. Maxx, Winners, HomeSense and Stylesense.

Marshalls Canada spokeswoman Tamara Robbins-Griffith said the Polo North store will open in April and will be the chain's first outlet outside of Ontario, where it has 14 stores.

"We're thrilled to be bringing the Marshalls experience to Winnipeg and continuing our expansion in Canada," Robbins-Griffith said, adding the company's goal is to open between 90 and 100 stores in Canada during the next 10 years.

She said Winnipeg is an ideal market for Marshalls because a lot of Manitobans who have shopped in the United States are familiar with the chain.

"And I know the people of Manitoba love great brands and great value," she said, adding Winners and HomeSense have both done well here.

Although Winners and Marshalls both specialize in off-price apparel and home fashions, they're not the same.

She said Marshalls has a larger selection of footwear, men's wear and children's wear, as well as a special section for teenage girls called The Cube.

"So it feels like a different shopping experience."

Robbins-Griffith wouldn't speculate on whether Marshalls plans to open more stores in Winnipeg. However, Stronger said, shoppers can almost bet on it.

"Retailers at this level don't come to Winnipeg to do one store," he said. "We would expect to see them open more locations."

Stronger told the real estate forum, which was organized by the Building Owners and Managers Association of Manitoba, that Canada's retail sector is undergoing its biggest change since U.S. giant Walmart entered the country nearly 20 years ago.

He said a wave of new retailers from the United States and Europe have entered the Canadian market in the last few years.

"It seems that every few days there is another announcement," he said. "And the winner is the

