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By Richard Massey

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SPRINGDALE — The partners who plan to build a Macadoodles liquor franchise in Springdale broke ground Friday, shrugging off an unsettled legal challenge to the store's permit.

At Friday's ceremony, developers of the franchise said earth work could be under way at the 48th Street and Elm Springs Road site as early as this weekend. And if good weather holds through the fall and winter, they anticipate completion by early February.

Tyler Austin of TLJ Properties in Rogers said he and his partners will move forward with construction of the retail outlet, which could trigger development west of Interstate 540.

"We're confident, and we're ready to start moving dirt," Austin said.

The state Alcoholic Beverage Control Board issued the license in July, but in August, the Arkansas Beverage Retailers Association filed suit, asking a Pulaski County circuit judge to overturn the board's decision. A court hearing has not been set in the case, said Michael Langley, director of Alcoholic Beverage Control.

"We don't feel like there's any merit to the suit," said Larry Williams, one of Austin's business partners.

The day the permit was approved, the alcohol board listened to hours of testimony, most in support of Macadoodles.

Plans include a 15,000-square-foot building that will have a wine market and cellar, discount outlet, beer store and pickup delivery depot. Austin and his partners also plan to sell gasoline at an eight-pump fuel station.

Triple Oaks construction of Bentonville will build the store.

Mayor Doug Sprouse, who from the beginning supported Austin's attempt to locate in Springdale, spoke briefly at Friday's ceremony.

"This is an important groundbreaking for Springdale," said Sprouse. "This is a 'get' we needed."

Sprouse expects the land around 48th Street and Elm Springs Road to develop into a commercial hub now that Macadoodles has arrived, he said.

Once it's open, the Macadoodles store will compete with eight outlets owned and operated by Jim Phillips, president of the Springdale Liquor Association. Phillips' flagship store, County Line Liquors on U.S. 71 Business, is billed as the state's largest.

Last Chance Liquors, one of the association's stores, is across I-540 from the future site of Macadoodles.

Mindful of the controversy surrounding the permit process and the pending lawsuit, Planning and Community Development Director Patsy Christie noted that from a construction standpoint, there's nothing unique about the Macadoodles project.

"This is no different than any other construction," she said. "This is routine retail."

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