

# Citadel Outlets to Power Up Massive Signs

## The four electronic billboards along I-5 in City of Commerce are part of a \$52-million remodeling of the Assyrian-themed mall.

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Commuters inching along Interstate 5 on their way to work Friday morning will find a new diversion in the City of Commerce: four massive electronic signs in front of Citadel Outlets.

The owners of the landmark Assyrian-themed outlet center will power up the signs tonight as part of a \$52-million remodeling and expansion. The 30-foot-tall signs, which are similar to large-screen television monitors, will be seen by more than 230,000 drivers a day, according to the California Department of Transportation.

The double-sided signs are spread over about half a mile of frontage at the former tire factory and will be capped with nearly two-story-tall images of mythical winged bulls with human heads known as lamassi.

The spacing of the signs will allow transmission of sequential messages in a nod to the popular Burma Shave ads that lined American highways in the mid-20th century, said Steven L. Craig, president of **Craig Realty Group**, the mall's owner.

"We're looking to tell a story of the fashion behind the wall" of the Citadel, Craig said. "We had to have a medium that would be able to show it."

The signs will project high-definition images and messages daily from 5 a.m. to midnight, starting with a "freeway fashion show" displaying apparel and accessories from the outlet center's retailers.

If the signs create a dangerous distraction, such as cycling through messages so fast that drivers are impelled to take their eyes off the road, Caltrans will request changes, agency spokeswoman Deborah Harris said.

Large-scale electronic signs are popular in the retail business, said George Whalin, president of Retail Management Consultants in San Marcos, Calif. There would be a lot more of the big screens if most communities didn't prohibit them through sign ordinances, he said.

The City of Commerce, however, is delighted with the signs, which are "more high-tech than anything in Las Vegas or Times Square," City Administrator Tom Sykes said.

The signs "seemed like a good idea to highlight what was going on behind the wall," Sykes said.

Newport Beach-based Craig Realty bought the mall from Trammell Crow Co. in 2003 for \$53 million and announced plans to expand it to better compete with factory outlet centers in Cabazon, Camarillo and Lake Elsinore that draw millions of shoppers from all over the Southland.

The addition of about 125,000 square feet will be completed in October, and 150,000 more square feet will be added by 2007, bringing the mall's total store space to 410,000 square feet, more than double its original size. New tenants opening this month include Puma, Casual Male and Samsonite.

In the late 1920s, Samson Tire & Rubber Co. modeled its City of Commerce plant after a 7th century B.C. Assyrian palace in a bid for a Samson and Delilah motif. The architects designed the wall in the style of Babylonian King Sargon II's palace.

When the plant opened in 1930, it was the largest tire manufacturing facility on the West Coast. The former tire factory, which closed in 1978, stands on Telegraph Road, which was a major artery before I-5 was completed.

"It still looks like a tire factory to me," Whalin said.

"Anything they can do to draw attention to it is probably a good thing."