Randy Sanchez, Senior General Manager of Coronado Center, called “The Mayor of Coronado Center,” took attendees down memory lane in his “History of Coronado Center” at the June 18 meeting of the North I-25 Business Association. Sanchez detailed stores that have come and gone from Coronado since it opened in 1964. The development arm of Sears Roebuck & Co. built the original, open-air mall. Local developer Dale Bellamah owned the land.

“Although Winrock opened two years earlier, Coronado was always bigger,” said Sanchez.

In 1974, developer Ernest Hahn bought Coronado and enclosed it. Mervyn’s and Sears were anchor stores. In the mid 1970’s Broadway and Goldwater’s came in.

1982 saw the addition of Sanger Harris, and in 1989, JC Penny’s relocated to Coronado, giving the Center five large department store anchors.

1992 brought the addition of the Food Court. “It’s a mini-anchor in itself,” said Sanchez. “With 10,000 office workers in the Uptown area looking for a quick and inexpensive place for lunch, the Food Court is a popular place to eat and get carry out,” he said.

Coronado caused a stir in the Mall industry in 1990 by adding bathrooms in the center of the Mall. Previously, customers had to use restrooms at anchor stores. It was heresy to use prime retail space “at the 50-yard line” for non-revenue purposes. “We brought in Mr. Whipple (of ‘please don’t squeeze the Charmin’ fame) for the grand opening,” said Sanchez. They won a first place Mall industry award for the unusual move.

Sanchez joined the mall in 1992 when Hightman Retail bought the property. 1995 brought a cosmetic remodel that lightened up the dark mall.

In 2003, General Growth Properties (GGP) bought Coronado. GGP is the second largest shopping center developer in the world. At the time they owned 220 properties, and have since shed about 100 to focus their investments on the best of them. The purchase was appealing to GGP because the lease on the 120,000 square foot Mervyn’s building was ready to expire.

The owners planned to create a “lifestyle center” at the Mall, with half of it being single-story and open air, and the other half being double-story and enclosed. The Albuquerque City Council denied the move, requiring that the new area be multi-use, to include offices and only 10% as retail. Although GGP sued the City, they lost.

During this time, occupancy dropped to 80%, but looking at the bright side, Sanchez said, “We ended up with space to lease and re-merchandise.”

“2007 was a banner year, and then came 2008,” said Sanchez. Mervyn’s closed; Macy’s bought Foley’s; the old Broadway store was vacant. There we tough times.

However, 2010 brought Kohl’s to the old Mervyn’s space. Target, which owned the Broadway space and held for six years, sold it to GGP. Gordman’s and Dick’s Sporting Goods moved in soon after.

In 2014, Coronado completed a major renovation in time for its 50th anniversary. Sanchez wouldn’t reveal the project budget, merely saying it was “a lot of money.” In January 2014, Coronado was a construction zone and sales were down 4%. With the renovation complete in September 2014, ”sales began to climb and ended the year 8% up, although not quite back to 2007 levels,” Sanchez said.

The growth continues, with the construction of Longhorn Steakhouse on an outparcel.

“This year ABQ Uptown will be 10 years old, and Cottonwood will be 20,” said Sanchez.

During Q & A time:

Q: Will Sears ever update its façade?

A: Perhaps within a year

Q: What was the renovation budget?

A: 10’s of millions.

Q: How many people work at Coronado

A: 3,000; can go up to 4,500 during holiday season

Q: Why are some large retailers not moving here (e.g. Nordstroms)

A: A population of 1 million is considered a basic requirement by many majors.

Q: Tell us about the mall walkers

A: 2,000 people are registered as mall walkers. Coronado opens for them at 6:00 am Monday-Saturday.

Q: Why was Bonefish Restaurant sited where it was?

A: That’s where Coronado had available space; the location gives Bonefish great exposure to Louisiana Blvd and Uptown traffic.

Q: What is being done to encourage pedestrian traffic and reduce vehicular congestion among Coronado, ABQ Uptown, and Winrock?

A: Some of money Winrock is receiving from the City of Albuquerque is earmarked for pedestrian-friendly and congestion reduction initiatives. The Uptown Progress Team is looking at such initiatives and we can expect advances within five years. A shuttle system from Winrock and around America’s Parkway is likely.

Q: What stores would Sanchez like to see come to Coronado?

A: Zara’s, a Spanish department store chain

In closing, Sanchez reminisced about hanging out at the Mall as a teen “checking out chicks.” “Who would have thought I’d end up being ‘Mayor of Coronado,’” he said.