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H&M readies first local stores, plans for more

By Amy Martinez
Seattle Times business reporter

For years, price-minded fashionistas in the Seattle area could only watch as trendy retailer H&M expanded across the U.S. But that's about to change as H&M prepares for three area openings this year, with more stores likely.

"I don't think we'll stop with three," New York-based spokeswoman Lisa Sandberg said Tuesday while visiting Seattle. "There's definitely room for expansion."

As previously announced, H&M will open at Westfield Shoppingtown Southcenter, University Village and downtown Seattle. The store in Southcenter mall opens in the summer, followed by the others this fall.

Although Sandberg said it's too soon to say where the retailer might put additional stores, real-estate analysts speculate that it will end up somewhere on the Eastside.

"They'll open enough stores to cover their advertising and make it worth their while, and see how it goes from there," said Krista Haverly, a real-estate broker who specializes in retail for CB Richard Ellis.

Based in Sweden, H&M has been called the fashion world's equivalent of Ikea because it sells trendy-yet-inexpensive clothes under its own labels. Prices start at \$6 for T-shirts, \$30 for jeans and \$40 for blazers.

H&M (formally Hennes & Mauritz) made its U.S. debut in 2000 in New York and will have 148 stores nationwide after an opening this week in Glendale, Calif.

Locally, H&M will occupy 25,000 square feet at Southcenter, 19,000 square feet at University Village and 16,000 square feet at downtown's 520 Pike Tower.

Details are still being worked out, but Sandberg said H&M has decided to make the Southcenter location a "full-concept" store, meaning it will sell clothing and accessories for women, men, teens and children.

The other two probably will focus on a few segments, such as teens (both genders) and women.

Merchandisers in New York will supply the Seattle-area stores so that shoppers locally will be exposed to the same trends as those in, say, Southern California and Northern Virginia.

"Usually, 85 percent of what we offer in any store is the same," Sandberg said. "We have a global vision of who our core customer is."

Elizabeth Best, a broker specializing in retail properties with Seattle Pacific Realty in Seattle, said H&M will compete with Banana Republic, Express and Forever 21.

"It's a treasure hunt for the person with discretionary income, and a fashion savior for the person who's budget-crunched," Best



NATALIE BEHRING / BLOOMBERG NEWS

A woman tries on sunglasses at a newly opened H&M store in Shanghai, China, earlier this month. Three area stores will open soon and more look likely, particularly for the Eastside.

said.

H&M will open a store in Vancouver, B.C., on May 22.

Jennifer Reyes, who works downtown, has shopped at H&M while visiting relatives in San Francisco.

"It's not Nordstrom-quality, but it's not cheap, either," Reyes said. "I'm just worried about going nuts the first week they're open."

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