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Enter changes I-85 ramps get landscaping makeover

By Arielle Kass
Staff Writer

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Photo: Jenna Findlan
Hector Perez positions a tree inside a hole next to the on-ramp at Steve Reynolds Boulevard and Interstate 85 South.



Staff Photo: Su Anderson
Trees and bushes, including these Knock-Out roses, now fill what was empty space at the I-85 on-ramp at the Indian Trail Lilburn Road exit. The landscaping is part of a \$750,000 project funded by the Gwinnett Village CID, and which was begun on the interchanges in March.

LAWRENCEVILLE - Already, Interstate 85's neatly manicured interchanges at Beaver Run and Indian Trail Lilburn roads look more like suburban front lawns than highway on-ramps.

Soon, more flowers, bushes and trees will be added to the first several exits off I-85 as two community improvement districts continue plans to beautify the area.

Trees are being planted on the ramps at Steve Reynolds Boulevard and grading will begin on Pleasant Hill Road after the Georgia Department of Transportation has finished building a retaining wall as part of the Ga. Highway 316 project.

Gwinnett Place CID director Joe Allen said he expects the landscaping to be finished by the beginning of November, so the area's new look can wow shoppers headed to the Gwinnett Place Mall for the holidays.

"We want to show people they've entered into a very special place, a place where people care about the look," Allen said. "We hope it will re-energize the area."

Allen said he has heard a number of positive comments about landscaped interchanges here and elsewhere and thinks the greenery might entice some drivers to get off the highway and take a look around.

Chuck Warbington, the Gwinnett Village CID's director, said work on Jimmy Carter Boulevard's interchange with I-85 will begin in the coming weeks.

The plants and flowers have already made a difference, he said.

"Not a day goes by without somebody saying how incredible it is that we're beginning to change the area," he said. "Things are happening here."

Warbington said upward of 300,000 cars travel that stretch of I-85 each day and that as a gateway into the county, it must make an impression on motorists. Allen said he cannot overstate the impact such plantings have on people who take a look at the CIDs.

"It's the little things that are hopefully coming together to add up to big changes," Allen said. "There's a lot of energy, a lot of excitement, a lot of opportunity here at Gwinnett Place."