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Walmart market opens doors in Rocklin

Customers give kudos to new grocery-only store

By: Jon Brines, Placer Herald correspondent

For the first time since 2006 there is a supermarket on Pacific Street in Rocklin at the site of the former Albertsons store, which many believe has been the poster child for blight in the city.

Walmart Stores Inc. opened its grocery-only Walmart Neighborhood Market Sept. 18 in the 53,000-square-foot location.

Rocklin resident Frank Duart, 95, broke in a new shopping cart scooter when he stopped by the store's full-service deli for meat carving.

"When it is sliced a certain thickness, you don't have no trouble grabbing it," Duart explained. "Then it makes the sandwich right. If you eat it fresh, it tastes good."

Roseville resident and new store employee Alexis Lucas did the slicing. She transferred from the 10,000-square-foot smaller store in Granite Bay. "I really like working for the company," Lucas said. "I want to do the full-service deli and get more experience. It's more interaction with customers."

The store employs 95 people — most from the surrounding area, according to Store Manager Steve Tapp, who came from a Utah store.

"To be in a Neighborhood Market with a new format meant we're the grocery side of the chain where people can run in, grab what they need and go home and cook dinner," Tapp said. "The checkouts are nice and easy, so it is real quick and convenient."

Walmart still plans to open the bigger supercenter on Sierra College Boulevard and Interstate 80, now under construction.

"In the supercenters they carry the full market — a lot of things that we don't," he said.

If you need something not carried in the store, Walmart has a site-to-store option on its website that will ship any ordered item to the Neighborhood Market in Rocklin for free.

And there is also Kmart in the same shopping center. Tapp said there is a partnership at that location.

"We're the convenient store," he explained. "If they're looking for specialty stuff, then Kmart. There are a lot of things they sell that we don't and a lot of things we sell that they don't."

That arrangement works out well, especially for the city. Rocklin Economic Growth Manager Karen Garner said the city is pleased to have the infill project.

“Walmart is filling a great need for our downtown residents who have not had a full-service grocery store for many years,” Garner said. “Walmart and the neighborhood market store manager, Steve Tapp, have already shown what a great community partner they are with their donation of \$8,000 to local community groups.”

Moving into downtown helped Rocklin resident and student Porsha Williams, who lives across the street. She’s raising two young children and has a tough time getting to a discount supermarket to save money. Now she can push the stroller over to Walmart and Kmart.

“I don’t have a car, so it’s generally better to come here,” Williams said.

Duart hopes all the customer traffic will help the visibility for other neighboring stores.

“It helps the other stores,” he said. “It helps Kmart. It helps any store that comes in here now, with the trade of Walmart.”

It’s still unclear what impact the new store will have on the closest unionized supermarkets, Safeway on Granite Drive near Rocklin Road and Bel Air on Sunset Boulevard at Stanford Ranch Road.

Walmart’s Granite Bay location has seen pro-union picketers outside its doors. Tapp defended Walmart’s policies toward its employees that have come under fire in recent years.

“We’re pro-associate,” he said. “So whatever they need, they can come to a member of management.”

Other workers include stockers, bakers, people who handle maintenance and manage in-ventory, as well as new cashiers like Amir Azar, who needed work.

“I’m so happy to work for Walmart,” Azar said. “It’s a great store and great employees. I needed the job.”

Rocklin’s Walmart Neighborhood Market is at 5609 Pacific St. and is open 6 a.m. to midnight.

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