

## First Central Valley Walmart Academy Finds Home in Dinuba

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On a Tuesday morning last month, the Dinuba Walmart became home to the Valley's first Walmart Academy. This grand opening marked the 167th operating academy in the county, and to celebrate, the store's graduating class took the stage.

As he looked out at the 57 eager students, Chad Donath, Walmart Regional VP of operations for Central California said, "This team was selected because you are the best of the best. You are shaping what the future of this organization looks like."

Walmart Academy is a \$2.7 billion commitment that enables front-line supervisors, department and assistant managers to gain core retail skills through a series of interactive courses. Once selected for the program, employees receive 2-6 weeks of training that includes both classroom-taught skills and hands-on work in store.

Donath explained during an interview that the goal of this program is to give its graduates the skills to move forward in the company.

"The academy makes the development of talent become much shorter. The business is changing quickly, and facilities like this bring people together as an opportunity to discuss one consistent way to do things."

During a pre-certification audit for the store — meant to determine whether the location should be considered for an academy — the Dinuba Walmart received a high score, moving it up the line for

location acceptance. Flash-forward to the certification audit, and Dinuba was ranked among the top five of all stores in the country.

Because of this score, Dinuba will be the central training facility for the Central Valley, where it will host training for 30 stores in the area. Donath expects this location will have between 1,800-2,000 graduates in the next year. "This team strives for excellence every single day," he said.

During the graduation ceremony, Alex Flores, a Walmart employee of more than two decades, was highlighted as one of the many graduates to find success in the store. As he previously told his manager, his job has allowed him to realize stability — both financially and in personal relationships with family. "The Academy is the best thing Walmart has done in 25 years," he said.

Walmart seeks to distribute that success in the community as well. During the ceremony, the store presented multiple donations to various local institutions, including the Dinuba Unified School District and the Dinuba Police Department. The most outstanding: \$73,313 for the Community Food Bank in Fresno.

"Thank you for being a great partner to the city," said Mayor of Dinuba Scott Harness.

Since the academy program began in 2016, more than 52,000 associates have graduated nationwide. By the end of 2017, Walmart intends to add an additional 100 academies to the 200 already in existence. "Academies like this lead us into the future," said Hector Benavides, Dinuba store manager. "It's all about seeing people be successful."

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