



Los Banos Walmart graduates first academy class in Central California

BY VIKAAS SHANKER | JUNE 15, 2017



Walmart executives thought Los Banos was a perfect location to train the management for their Central California stores.

“We tried to pick the location based on geography,” said Chester Gray, Walmart’s regional manager, explaining that the Los Banos store at 1575 W. Pacheco Blvd. also was picked for its potential as a “best in class” store.

The international supermarket chain on Thursday celebrated the first graduating class of its Los Banos Walmart Academy, the first in Central California and third training site in the state, with a graduation and ribbon-cutting ceremony outside the Walmart store and the new 2,500-square-foot academy building next door.

The academy is expected to train up to 90 store associates per week for 22 stores across Central California. The new building has room to expand to 3,000 square feet in the future, adding more rooms to its three classroom structure.

The academy is a new initiative that Gray said helps build a clear and uniform message of the “Walmart Way” as associates are trained. That includes training on leadership, merchandising, operations and customers service in specific roles within the organization.

By the end of this year, Walmart expects to have opened 200 academies across the country.

Graduates of the first class walked across the stage to receive their diplomas, and Walmart presented several checks to local organizations.

One of those checks was a \$50,000 donation to the Merced County Food Bank, expected to help fund repairs to the organization’s trucks.

“The stores support us not only with money, but with volunteers,” said Bill Gibbs, CEO of the food bank.

Checks of \$1,000 also were presented to the Los Banos Police Activities League, the Los Banos Fire Department, and Habitat for Humanity. A \$500 check was given to Kiwanis International Inc.

Mayor Mike Villalta said the Los Banos City Council was happy that the Los Banos store was chosen as a site for the academy. He said the academy will help expose more people to Los Banos, and encourage them to spend money in the city.

Penny Klinoff Baker, a 62-year-old Los Banos resident, walked across the stage with colleagues of all ages after spending two weeks training at the new academy center.

“I think the academy makes the Los Banos store a much better store for the customers,” said Klinoff Baker, a personnel manager at the store. “It makes us a role model store, and we’re very proud.”

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