



Area grocery scene sees big changes

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PEORIA — Tuesday's opening of the new Hy-Vee grocery at Sheridan Village is the second of three multimillion-dollar grocery store investments Peoria will see this summer.

With the recent completion of the complete renovation of Schnucks on North University Street and a soon-to-open The Fresh Market store at Westlake Shopping Center, Peorians will have an expanded choice of stores emphasizing freshness.

That doesn't even take into account stores such as Kroger that are scattered throughout the area and small, independent groceries managing to hang on in central Illinois.

Schnucks recently completed a "wall-to-wall, ceiling-to-floor" renovation of its 87,000-square-foot Peoria store, which opened in 1999, said spokesman Paul Simon.

"It is a great remodel. It is like a new store throughout and it is one of our finest stores," Simon said.

While he declined to say how much Schnucks invested in the store, Simon said more than \$1 million worth of construction work went to Peoria area subcontractors.

The remodel, he said, was not in response to particular competition, such as Hy-Vee; rather, it was just time.

"We try and remodel our stores every 10 years or so. In the case of the Peoria store, it was 11 years since it opened, so it was due for a remodel," Simon said.

He acknowledged Schnucks is paying close attention to the Hy-Vee opening and perhaps gearing some recent specials around that event. "But we also do specials around the completion of our remodels. We believe our customers will stay loyal to us," he said.

The Fresh Market hasn't set an official opening date for its 25,000-square-foot store under construction at Westlake, in the former site of Circuit City.

The store, which will employ about 90 people, will open in late summer, said spokesman Jordan Worrall.

Work will start soon on renovating the parking lot and landscaping of the Westlake lot around The Fresh Market, said Les Cohen, one of the owners of Westlake and president of Cohen Development Co.

Cohen said 17,000 square feet of space at the end of the section where The Fresh Market is being built will be sold separately. He anticipates that space, referred to as an "end cap," will be expanded to 25,000 square feet to accommodate possible tenants.

While he could not identify the "nationally known" tenants interested in the space, Cohen said those tenants will, if they decide to locate in Peoria, "bring a similar kind of sizzle" as The Fresh Market.

Already Cohen was able to bring a national tenant that is growing in stature to Westlake to replace a tenant that went out of business.

Five Guys Burgers and Fries, an up-and-coming franchise featuring what the restaurant's name says, will open in the fall, Cohen said. Five Guys will replace Beef O'Brady's, which closed recently.

Cohen referred to Five Guys Burgers and Fries as "an East Coast phenom and absolutely outstanding in their class. He quoted one newspaper as saying the franchise is "a phenomenon that wins 'Best Burger' in nearly every market it enters."

The Arlington-Va.-based chain claims on its website, www.fiveguys.com, that there are "250,000 possible ways to order a burger" at Five Guys.

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