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Freehold Walmart finds growth adding grocery aisles

By David P. Willis | Staff Writer

The Walmart here unveiled its expanded store on Wednesday, including a new area with a full assortment of grocery items and meats.

The expansion adds approximately 35,000 square feet to the store, which opened in 2006.

The store on West Main Street (Route 537) now joins other stores in Neptune and Lacey that are so-called supercenters.

An similar expansion project is now underway at Walmart in Howell, with completion expected in about a year. An expansion at the Walmart store in Brick is expected to start sometime in the first quarter of 2012 and take about 18 months to complete.

It is part of a campaign by parent Wal-Mart Stores Inc. to convert its traditional stores to supercenters, said Matthew P. Casey, president of Matthew P. Casey & Associates, a Clark-based retail research firm specializing in supermarkets and pharmacies.

"They want every store to be a supercenter now because the food side really drives sales," Casey said.

About 40 to 45 percent of total sales are in food, a figure that jumps to 60 percent when pharmacy, consumable and health and beauty products are added, he said.

"By having that half of the store (grocery), that drives more customers into the store more often," Casey said.

The projects in Brick and Howell will bring a full line of fresh produce and grocery to the stores, much like it now has in Freehold Township.

"We didn't have fresh meat. We didn't have fresh produce," said Dana Bartolino, marketing manager for eight Walmart stores in Central Jersey following Wednesday grand opening ceremony. "We didn't have fresh dairy, bakery, deli, all of those things. Now we're a full-service store on the entire grocery side."

Kathy DiLiddo, who visits her daughter in Freehold Township, was happy to see the store's organic selections. "I love their prices," DiLiddo said. "Now it's a superstore so I really love it."

Freehold Township resident Evelyn Cromer liked the changes. "I used to come here for my clothes and stuff. Now it just makes it one big store," she said.

Changes were made to the store's overall layout as well. For instance, items in specific categories, such as health and beauty, and pet supplies, were clustered.

The expanded Walmart also added about 80 jobs, bringing the number of jobs at the store up to about 300.