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New ShopRite to open in Toms River Wednesday

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A new supermarket comes to Toms River's Crossroads Center as an old plaza at the intersection of Routes 37 and 166 is resurrected.

Late last week, the inside of ShopRite on Route 37 in Toms River was teeming with activity, preparing for a long-awaited unveiling.

Workers were filling the shelves with groceries. Frozen foods packed rows of freezer cases.

The new ShopRite, the 29th supermarket from Saker ShopRites Inc., opens Wednesday at 7 a.m. in what is essentially a new shopping center at the intersection of Route 37 and Route 166, just off the Garden State Parkway, a swatch of land that was once the old Dover Mall. A groundbreaking ceremony is being held at 11 a.m. Monday.

ShopRite of Route 37

Location: 2 Route 37 West, Toms River

Owner: Saker ShopRite Inc.

Hours: 6 a.m. to midnight.

Size: 75,000 square feet.

Jobs: More than 300.

Highlights: ShopRite will have a pharmacy, cafe, specialty cigar shop, full-service catering department, Scrunchy's Playhouse, where children can play while parents shop, as well as a floral department, fresh bake shop, seafood and meat departments, freshly-prepared hot foods and entrees, olive bar, cheeses from around the globe and organic products in every department. The store also will have a Dunkin' Donuts and a jewelry store, separate businesses, inside.

It's a transformation of the shopping center, which has a new name to go along with its new look: Crossroads Center. Staples already has opened its new store there. Spirits Unlimited is expected to open sometime in December with Party Fair following at the beginning of 2012.

Now old buildings that were once a part of the Dover Mall are fenced off and await demolition. Most of the remaining land will become a parking lot.

"I am absolutely thrilled," Toms River Mayor Thomas F. Kelaher said.

The story goes back years.

Developer Dan D'Onofrio built a bowling alley on five acres back in the early 1960s. Over 35 years, the Dover Mall grew as D'Onofrio added pieces of land. ShopRite, which was owned by what is now Perlmart Inc., moved from downtown Toms River. Bradlees opened a store there. A two-screen theater was added.

But by the mid 1990s, those businesses had all left. And the look of the center made it difficult to attract prime tenants.

In 2000, the developer decided to remake the shopping center from the ground up, a plan that took years to make its way through the approval process.

D'Onofrio, president of Dan-D Inc., said he is proud of the result.

"We felt in all fairness to the community we wanted to upgrade it for everybody's benefit," he said. "Instead of renovating it, we decided that long range it was better, for us and for the community, for the property to be what it is today."

Saker ShopRite signed on in 2001.

"Our research showed that this was one of the best locations in Ocean County," said Richard Saker, president of Saker ShopRite Inc., a family-owned company. "It is just a phenomenal marketplace. Toms River is a community that we believe right now is underserved."

Its location at the intersection of Routes 37 and 166, as well as its close proximity to Garden State Parkway's exit 82, a gateway to the Seaside Heights area, was a draw.

"This is going to have all the extras and amenities that contemporary supermarkets offer nowadays," said Matthew P. Casey, president of Matthew P. Casey & Associates, a Clark-based retail research firm specializing in supermarkets and pharmacies.

The 75,000-square-foot ShopRite showcases a floral department when you walk through the door with the produce area, which carries over 400 items as well as organic produce, nearby.

There's also a broad selection of national brand and private label groceries as well as a bake shop, fresh meat cut to order, fresh seafood department, and a selection of organic and natural products throughout the store.

Saker ShopRites with the "World Class" concept also have a variety of freshly prepared hot foods, entrees, as well as a Chinese buffet, freshly-baked pizza, fresh sushi, salad bar, olive bar and cheeses from around the globe.

"The whole World Class concept is really kind of inspired by being best in class," Saker said. "So we believe our format really positions us in such a way where we can compete with the best retailers in the world."

The store also will have a cafe, specialty cigar shop, catering department, and a supervised play area for children called Scrunchy's Playhouse.

"We want to have all these things under one roof so the customers have selection and it's part of what we call, one-stop shopping," Saker said.

"Today, you have a customer who's very time struck ... So for us to combine everything under one roof and make it simpler for them and to keep our prices down and bring extreme value is all part of the synergy that makes this a World Class store," he said.

The new ShopRite comes as the supermarket company opens other stores. Recently, Saker ShopRite, which owns supermarkets in Monmouth, Ocean, Middlesex, Somerset and Mercer counties, opened a ShopRite in downtown Somerville.

The company also has plans for a new store on Route 1 in South Brunswick, Saker said. An expansion that doubles the size of the Hamilton Square store is expected to open after Thanksgiving, he added.

Last month, Wakefern Food Corp., the cooperative made up of ShopRite owner and operators, said sales had reached a record \$12.8 billion for the fiscal year ending Oct. 1, 2011, an increase of 8.5 percent increase.

ShopRite's power is in its low prices and promotions, which touch every category in the store, said retail analyst Burt Flickinger III.

It fits in with today's economy. People are seeing their home values and retirement incomes decline while bills, from utilities to heating oil, rise, he said.

They can't save on their rent payment or when they pull up to the gasoline pump.

"The only place they can save day to day, week to week, is at the grocery store," Flickinger said.

A family of five that shops at ShopRite can save more than \$2,000 a year, he added.