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Food markets sprouting in North Jersey

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The former A&P store on Valley Road in Wayne, vacant since November, has landed a new tenant, the company that operates the Ramsey Farm produce store and market in Ramsey.

The new store, the Wayne Natural Food Market, is leasing the 36,000-square-foot A&P space and is expected to open within four to six months, according to the owner, Kui Young Chang. The store, which will specialize in organic produce, is one of three produce-focused markets scheduled to open this year in North Jersey.

Chang also is preparing to open the East Rutherford Farmers' Market in an 11,700-square-foot space formerly occupied by a Rite-Aid drugstore at 580 Paterson Ave. A former 12,000-square-foot auto-parts store on Central Avenue in Passaic has been leased to Central Fresh Market.

The markets, typically one-third to one-half the size of a typical supermarket, are seen as a response both to the A&P bankruptcy last year, as well as changes in the way North Jersey consumers shop for fresh food.

"The A&P and Pathmark closings have created these gaps in neighborhoods where these medium to midsize food markets, some of them ethnic, have been able to come into the neighborhoods," said Chuck Lanyard, president of the retail real estate brokerage firm The Goldstein Group, which brokered the deals for the Wayne, East Rutherford and Passaic markets. "They've very wisely diversified their inventory to be broad-based for the neighborhood and they're doing quite well," said Lanyard. His firm also brokered deals to put new produce markets in Nutley and Newark.

"These farmer markets are becoming more and more popular," said Matthew Casey of Matthew P. Casey & Associates, a New Jersey-based real estate analysis firm specializing in supermarket properties. That is partly due to an excess of space that landlords are eager to rent, Casey said, and partly due to shifting consumer trends, where shoppers may get their non-perishables from big supermarket chains, warehouse stores or online, and want a convenient local option for fresh foods.

"These farmer markets understand they can't sell groceries as cheap as the big boys," Casey said, "so what they try to do is sell the perishables and try to compete with quality and hope the customer will shop in their store, and fill the rest of their shopping order with the big boys."

The Wayne market, Chang said, also will have an on-site bakery and a full-service seafood department that will cut fish to order, and steam shellfish for customers.

The Wayne A&P closed after the A&P supermarket conglomerate filed for bankruptcy last summer and sold or rejected the leases of its A&P, Pathmark, SuperFresh, Food Basics, Waldbaums and Food Emporium stores.

The Wayne store is located in a 102,000-square-foot community shopping center at the corner of Valley Road and Preakness Avenue. The owner of the property, Urstadt Biddle, a real estate investment trust based in Connecticut, has submitted plans to remodel the facade of the store, and is preparing to replace the existing concrete facade with a more elegant brick storefront.



COURTESY ILLUSTRATION

Artist rendering of the Wayne Natural Food Market

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