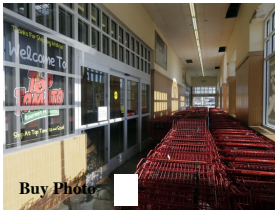


# Top Tomato in Freehold Twp. closes suddenly



**Devin Loring, @DevinLoring**

7:30 a.m. EST January 30, 2016



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(Photo: TANYA BREEN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER)

FREEHOLD TOWNSHIP - Would-be customers, bundled up against below-freezing wind and cold, trudged to the doors of Freehold's Top Tomato (<http://toptomatosuperstore.com/>) last week – and they all returned to their cars without going in.

“They closed on (Sunday, Jan. 17), and my wife was there on that Saturday trying to get an idea of what to make for dinner,” said Kevin Foley of Freehold Township. “The owner was there shaking hands with people, thanking them for coming in.”

His wife learned from someone inside the store that it would be closing, Foley said.

“The store was 30,000 square feet, and it was too big for us,” said Anthony Sciandra, who is an owner of the supermarket with his family.



**ASBURY PARK PRESS**

Top Tomato stands up to supermarket rivals

(<http://www.app.com/story/money/business/main-street/2015/10/16/top-tomato-sciandra/73217302/>).

## A smaller space

Top Tomato operates four locations in Staten Island, as well as a location in Brick.

A partner and manager at the Brick location said that store remains owned by the family, but is under new management.

“That (Freehold) store was too big for them,” said Matthew Casey (<http://www.mpcaseyassociates.com/>), a supermarket analyst based in Clark. “They’re an extremely successful chain, but all their other locations are a lot smaller.”

Top Tomato’s other locations are only around 10,000 square feet, Sciandra said.

Although he’s not familiar with the cost of rent of the Freehold location, Casey said he didn’t “think it was cheap.”

“In this case, they tried to be more of a supermarket. But, I think Top Tomato, in their strong stores in Staten Island, tend to be more of a deli with some supermarket goods where occupancy costs are much cheaper,” Casey said.

On Facebook, Top Tomato (<https://www.facebook.com/toptomatosuperstore/>) posted the following message to a shopper inquiring why the store closed:

“Unfortunately, due to circumstances with our landlord that could not be resolved and were out of our control, we were forced to close our Freehold sister store. We are actively looking for a new space to serve the customers of Monmouth County and hope to have something to announce in the coming months.”



**ASBURY PARK PRESS**

Barnegat Acme almost ready to open its doors

(<http://www.app.com/story/money/business/main-street/2016/01/28/barnegat-acme-opening/78816044/>).

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Anthony Sciandra of Holmdel, owner, and his brother Stephen Sciandra of Toms River, store manager, stand inside the Top Tomato Super Store in Freehold Township on Oct. 14, 2015. (Photo: Tanya Breen/staff photographer)

### Store closings

It's not the first Top Tomato to close in this area. A Top Tomato in Atlantic Highlands opened in August 2014 and closed four months later. In October, Sciandra told the Asbury Park Press that the town was too quiet to keep up with the volume needed to sustain a grocery with fresh produce.

In 2011, Top Tomato closed its Holmdel location with a note on the door that read "Top Tomato will be closed until further notice."

The Asbury Park Press reported that storefront was 37,000 square feet, with a Top Tomato executive again explaining the store was much bigger than other Top Tomato locations.

Competition amongst supermarket chains was also fierce in Freehold Township, Sciandra said.

"We were there for seven years and we had to compete with big box stores and it's very hard for us to do that," he said.

There are a multitude of grocers in the Freehold area, including a Walmart Supercenter, Sam's Club, ShopRite, Wegmans, and Stop & Shop.

"The competition in that area is intense," Casey said.



Anthony Sciandra of Holmdel, owner, and Joseph Milazzo of Staten Island, store manager, ice fresh wild salmon from Alaska at the Top Tomato Super Store in Freehold Township on Oct. 14, 2015. (Photo: Tanya Breen/staff photographer)



[ASBURY PARK PRESS](#)

['Dramatic' changes coming to Monmouth Mall](#)

[\(http://www.app.com/story/news/local/eatontown-asbury-park/eatontown/2016/01/28/dramatic-changes-coming-monmouth-mall/79462276/\)](http://www.app.com/story/news/local/eatontown-asbury-park/eatontown/2016/01/28/dramatic-changes-coming-monmouth-mall/79462276/)

## Retirement

Another reason for the closure of the store, which opened just over five years ago? Owner Salvatore Sciandra is looking to retire, Anthony Sciandra said.

That was the explanation Foley's wife heard on her shopping trip, Foley said.

"I live near (CentraState), and the convenient place to go was Stop & Shop," Foley said. "But I like Top Tomato because (they have) a lot of specialties that you just don't find in other stores."

Sciandra said if a "good deal opens up ... with a smaller footprint," the company would consider operating another Freehold location.

Foley doesn't want to see an established supermarket chain move into the now vacant storefront.

"(Top Tomato) turned out their own raviolis – you can get ravioli any place, but I don't think it was the quality that Top Tomato did," Foley said. "Hopefully, someone will see an opportunity and put another store like it in there."

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