



BUSINESS

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2nd Walmart to open in Livonia for business this week

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Walmart opens a new supercenter in Livonia on Wednesday that increases the heat for competitors Meijer and Costco.

The Bentonville, Ark.-based retailer has steadily grown in Michigan since opening its Mt. Pleasant site in 1989. It has 87 stores in the state including 75 supercenters, which combine groceries and general merchandise, and is opening or remodeling stores at the rate of three a year.

By contrast, Grand Rapids-based Meijer has 101 stores in Michigan and all are supercenters. Since 2006, Meijer has built 15 new stores in the state and invested \$350 million, said Frank J. Guglielmi, Meijer spokesman. Meijer, which also has stores in four other states, said it welcomes Walmart's growth in Michigan.

"Generally, we open four to six stores per year. The focus is on slow, steady growth," Guglielmi said. "Competition makes everybody better, and we successfully compete with a variety of national retailers throughout the Midwest on a daily basis."

Kenneth Dalto, a Farmington Hills-based retail consultant, said that the top three players in the state for the supercenter concept now are Walmart, Costco and Meijer. He noted that since Kmart's 2002 bankruptcy, when it closed hundreds of stores nationwide, it has not been a major competitor for the supercenters. It operates 1,327 stores nationally including 35 supercenters and continues to close stores. It operates supercenters in Madison Heights, Sterling Heights and Roseville.



The Walmart opens on Wednesday in Livonia as part of the transformation of the Livonia Mall into the Livonia Marketplace. (PHOTOS BY KATHLEEN GALLIGAN/DETROIT FREE PRESS)

"Walmart would probably be the king if it had put more stores here," Dalto said. "They were getting a lot of resistance from communities and that slowed their growth plans in Michigan."

In recent years, Walmart faced battles nationwide when attempting to get approvals to open stores, including protests in Charlevoix, Rochester Hills and Independence Township. There also was an active group trying to stop the opening of the Walmart at Plymouth and Middlebelt roads in Livonia, which opened in 2007. The store is open just 18 hours instead of 24 in deference to resident concerns.

Walmart workers do not belong to unions."In five years, they could be completely dominant. There is still space for Costco and Meijer because I don't see affluent buyers going to Walmart," Dalto said.

Costco has 11 stores in Michigan, including two in Livonia. Meijer operates one store in Livonia.

The new Walmart store still has about 30 jobs to fill from cashiers to managers.

The store, at 29574 Seven Mile Road, is part of the transformation of the Livonia Mall into the Livonia Marketplace. It has already hired 350 employees from 7,000 applicants, said store manager Mohamad Atwi.

"I'm very proud to have 90% of my employee base brand-new employees," Atwi said. The 196,000-square-foot store opens at 8 a.m. It will operate from 6 a.m. to midnight seven days a week.

Contact GRETA GUEST: 313-223-4192 or gguest@freepress.com Applications for Walmart jobs can be filled out at in-store hiring kiosks or online at www.walmartstores.com.