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John T. Grelick / The Detroit News

While waiting in line, Debbie Long calls her sister to tell her about the crowds who flocked to the grand opening of Meijer in Warren.

Meijer opens Warren store in aggressive expansion plan

Dorothy Bourdet / The Detroit News

Advertisement

WARREN -- Even without big giveaways, the grand opening of a new Meijer in Warren drew a crowd that stretched the length of the 207,000-square-foot building on Mound Road.

Heidi Anthony got in line at midnight to be first in the door for little more than cheers and a hearty invitation to shop when the store opened at 7 a.m. But the 41-year-old Warren resident said even without the freebies, the low prices were worth the wait.

And that's just what Meijer wants to hear.

As part of an aggressive expansion, the western Michigan company is opening new stores in fast-growing communities as well as in aging and inner-ring suburbs like Warren, a move analysts say that will bolster the company's market share against big-box grocers and retailers. The company plans to open a new store next year in Allen Park and expand the company 6 percent a year for the next 15 years.

Retail analyst Kenneth Dalto said the privately owned Meijer can't afford to lose market

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~~share against mammoth competitors like Wal-Mart, Target, Costco and Sam's Club.~~
 Opening stores in underserved markets will help ensure the company's stability, he said.

"It's a defensive market share position," said Dalto, founder of Kenneth J. Dalto & Associates. "They have to add stores."

The Warren store -- the company's 176th -- is set snugly in the Heritage Village development.

"It made sense to put a store here where we did see reinvigorated growth," said Meijer spokeswoman Stacie Behler. "It just was a logical choice to continue our growth here."

Warren Councilman Keith Sadowski said the new store fills a need for grocers in this city of about 135,000.

Meijer's growth plan includes adding about 224 stores in Michigan and other states by 2020. The company's Metro Detroit stores include locations in Fraser, Madison Heights, Livonia, Royal Oak, Taylor and Southgate.

Could some of the new stores find their way into the Detroit market that many grocers have fled?

"We don't have any specific plans right now" for stores in Detroit, Behler said. "What I can say is when we're looking for property, we're looking everywhere."

The company is at a "crossroad of our future focus," Behler said, as it changes its stores, widening aisles, creating a more open feel in the store by lowering shelves and improving lighting, moving pharmacies to the front, posting signs to help people navigate and cutting prices by 10 percent to 50 percent on 5,000 products every week.

Those discounts lured Teresa Novakowski early Tuesday to shop for Christmas presents with her sister-in-law Terry Novakowski.

With a sharply discounted foosball table -- \$29.99, down from \$99.99 -- and toothpaste in the cart, Teresa Novakowski said she was surprised it took the Michigan-based chain so long to open a store in the city.

"With Warren being so big, you'd think they'd have one by now," she said. "I think it will do good for the city."

The new Meijer store in Allen Park is expected to be near the same size as the Warren store. Meijer has opened five stores this year, including the Warren store, and plans to open six or seven more next year, including stores in Lenox Township and DeWitt.

The Warren store also boasts the first of 20 E85 fuel pumps the company plans to open at its sites in southeastern Michigan by the end of the year, as part of a partnership with General Motors Corp. and CleanFUEL USA, a Texas company that makes fuel dispensing equipment.



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John T. Greilick / The Detroit News

Meijer's 176th store drew a crowd that stretched the length of the 207,000-square-foot building on Mound Road on its first day. See full image

Meijer's story

1934 -- 50-year-old barber Hendrik Meijer opens Meijer's Grocery in Greenville, Mich.

1948 -- First Grand Rapids Meijer store opens.

1960s -- Meijer grows to 26 stores, with more than 4,000 employees.

2006 -- Meijer has 176 stores in Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan and Ohio.

Source: Meijer.com