

GROCERY BOUNTY

BY WHITNEY JOSEPH



Shoppers in Port St. Lucie can now buy their groceries at the new Fresh Market in Tradition after the store officially opened its doors on Sept. 13.

MARISOLS PHOTOGRAPHY

Fresh Market comes to PSL; ALDI entry unclear

The rapid pace of growth here is evident in places other than on congested highways and long lines for Sunday brunch. It is also reflected in the variety and expansion of new and existing businesses in the community. Case in point? Grocery stores. Residents need them — and city officials are thinking about them.

"In the past couple of years our options have expanded greatly," St. Lucie County Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Terissa Aronson said. "As we grow and diversify, we will meet the criteria for many niche markets, and they will come. I'm sure if you polled the residents, they all would want their Trader Joe's. But I would like to see no more food deserts in St. Lucie County."

Smart economic development is vital for the success of any community, especially one as intricately laid out as Port St. Lucie. While it may lack a main street, Port St. Lucie is the seventh-largest city, area-wise, in Florida, at 120 square miles. The city is acutely aware those in the grocery game must be

able to provide enough provisions for its population, year-round, to keep everyone satiated and satisfied. That includes during emergencies — especially during our dreaded hurricane season.

"I hope residents take advantage of the niche products and personal services of smaller locally owned markets," said Aronson. "Small business has a place in all economies, and I never like to see them pushed out." But those small markets have a big new competitor. On Sept. 13, Fresh Market opened a brand-new store in Tradition.

"The city is thrilled to welcome Fresh Market to our community," Port St. Lucie Mayor Shannon Martin said. "As we grow, it is important that PSL has a diverse selection of retail options and this new grocery store adds to the choices for our residents.

"I was equally happy when Sprouts opened in St. Lucie West. Having a variety of grocery store options isn't just about convenience. It's about promoting healthy competition >>

and ensuring that every family can access the products and services that best suit their needs and values.”

FRESH OPTION

Located at 10272 SW Meeting St., the new 23,424-square-foot Fresh Market is Port St. Lucie’s first, but the 47th in the Sunshine State. Other Fresh Market locations on the Treasure and Space coasts include Stuart, Vero Beach, Jupiter and Melbourne. The Port St. Lucie store is open seven days a week, from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m.

“We are thrilled to bring the Fresh Market experience to the vibrant community of Port St. Lucie,” said Fresh Market CEO



RUSTY DURHAM

Fresh Market is among the latest to join the growing number of food stores in Port St. Lucie, one of its 47 locations in Florida.

Jason Potter in a prepared statement. “Our team has worked diligently to create a welcoming environment where guests can find the freshest ingredients, exceptional service and unique offerings.”

Fresh Market customers may shop online, for curbside pickup or home delivery, through its website or mobile app. There will be regular specials and promotions, both to celebrate the store’s opening and as part of its ongoing sales strategy.

The Treasure Coast Food Bank will be partnering with Port St. Lucie’s Fresh Market, as it does with the chain’s other >>



MARISOLS PHOTOGRAPHY

No sweet tooth in Port St. Lucie will walk away from the new Fresh Market in Tradition dissatisfied, as its bakery display case is filled with daily treats.



MARISOLS PHOTOGRAPHY

Rather than have a traditional ribbon cutting ceremony, local law enforcement officials, city officials and community leaders joined Fresh Market in a bread baking and — slicing — on Sept. 13 to welcome the store to the Port St. Lucie community.

Port St. Lucie

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RUSTY DURHAM PHOTOS

Aldi Food Market, the German grocery chain, recently purchased several Winn-Dixie grocery stores while also keeping its Aldi stores in operation.

locations, to help feed the hungry. At its opening, the Port St. Lucie store presented the food bank with a \$2,000 check, the first of its weekly donations to help those in the area dealing with hunger.

ALDI IN THE WINGS?

In August, the German supermarket chain, ALDI, announced via press release it was purchasing several Winn-Dixie stores, including the one in Port St. Lucie, "as part of a larger divestiture of Southeastern Grocers to various entities. The acquisition continues the growth of ALDI, expanding its ability to serve the region with great products at the lowest possible prices."

Port St. Lucie's Winn-Dixie is located in the Shoppes of Victoria Square, at 281 SW Port St. Lucie Blvd. Hannah Pospeschil is its fresh manager. A native Floridian who grew up in Tampa, she said the Port St. Lucie Winn-Dixie is one of the region's busiest. While she deferred to her store manager to address the ins and outs of the pending merger, she said >>



Many shoppers say they like the Aldi model, which promotes discount prices as part of its regular inventory.

few details have been released thus far and no real changes have taken place since the acquisition.

“They haven’t disclosed all of the locations that have been bought by ALDI,” said Pospeschil. “It’s supposed to be official some time in 2024. The other Winn-Dixies are in Fort Pierce and Jensen Beach, but this one in PSL is really busy.”

Pospeschil said her customers seem pleased with the store, its merchandise, its services and its staff. She said she’s happy, too, and is excited about learning new things. “I’m going on six years; I’m a fresh manager and oversee all the fresh departments,” she said. “I plan on staying here — we just don’t know what’s happening yet.”

The corporate offices have shared some details about the acquisition. According to the senior director of communications and community for Southeastern Grocers, Meredith Hurley, ALDI only plans to incorporate some of the iconic southern Winn-Dixie supermarkets into its trademark German model.

“We understand that ALDI does not intend to convert all of our stores,” explained Hurley. “ALDI’s current plan is >>



RUSTY DURHAM

Port St. Lucie’s one Winn-Dixie store has merged with Aldi, but it is undecided if its name and sales model will change or remain the same.

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Publix has the most recognizable grocery stores in South Florida; it's ubiquitous throughout the Treasure Coast. The selection of produce at Publix is bountiful, fresh and local, whether shoppers are looking for organic or non-organic items.

to continue operating Winn-Dixie and Harveys Supermarket stores with the same level of care and focus on quality and service, as they also evaluate which locations will convert to the ALDI format to better support the neighborhoods they will now serve."

BIG ACQUISITION

In addition to acquiring several Winn-Dixie stores, ALDI also bought numerous Harvey Supermarkets, which is an American chain with stores in Georgia and Florida. Accord-

ing to a statement from ADLI CEO Jason Hart, ALDI "plans to add 120 new stores nationwide this year to reach a total of more than 2,400 stores by year end."

ALDI's total acquisition includes the purchase of nearly 400 stores across Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana and Mississippi, "when many retailers are shutting down due to tough economic conditions," stressed Hart.

Southeastern Grocers, which has been a part of the supermarket landscape in the Southeast for most of the last century, expressed optimism about the merger. "ALDI shares >>



RUSTY DURHAM PHOTOS

Like so many other grocery stores today, most Publix markets have pharmacies inside their stores to provide services for their customers.



RUSTY DURHAM PHOTOS

Almost all big box stores, like Walmart, these days carry groceries, including meats, dairy, frozen and dry goods and produce, with some even offering organic options, along with just about anything else one could imagine.

our vision to provide exceptional quality, service and value — and this unique opportunity will evolve our business to benefit our customers, associates and neighbors,” stated Southeastern Grocers President and CEO Anthony Hucker in a press release.

ALDI publicity added it’s “one of America’s fastest-growing retailers” and serves millions of customers a month across the U.S., thanks to a “disciplined approach” focused on simplicity and efficiency that stresses “great customer service.”

The Chamber’s Aronson said that ALDI would be “a great addition to our market. Its model is vastly different than Winn-Dixie’s so we will have to see” if things change after the merger.

Currently, Port St. Lucie shoppers can load their carts in Sprouts, Publix, Walmart, Sam’s Club, BJ’s Wholesale Club, Winn-Dixie, the new Fresh Market or the smaller, independent markets throughout the city. That cornucopia is bound to grow at the same dizzying pace as our community. ❖

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