

Chain you've 'never heard of' growing in South Jersey; What to know about Grocery Outlet?



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VINELAND — A California-based food market chain that boasts of a special approach for purchasing goods plans to open a store in the heart of Vineland, its deepest move so far into South Jersey.

Grocery Outlet, with more than 430 locations nationally, is the spotlighted incoming tenant for Park Place Plaza at West Park Avenue and North Delsea Drive.

What is Grocery Outlet?

Eric DeFrancisco, general manager for the company on the East Coast, told city official that consumers will find what they would find in a traditional supermarket. Fresh meats and produce as much as possible will be from the area the store is in, too.

How those items end up on shelves is one thing setting apart Grocery Outlet in the food market industry, he said.

“Opportunistic buying,” DeFrancisco said, is the key. “And so, we are an outlet for many manufacturers that produce too much or get canceled by other, larger retailers. And those manufacturers now need to find a new home for that product.



A family heads Tuesday into the Grocery Outlet food market in the Millside Plaza shopping center off Route 130 in Delran Township. PHOTO Fe. 14, 2023. Carol Comegno

“And so, we have a very, very sophisticated buying model that enables us to fill the grocery store with the necessities that are needed, they are used to seeing,” he said. “Predominantly, all name brand products.”

Where will new Grocery Outlet be?

The stores also are under independent, local management that the corporation selects, DeFrancisco said.

“Usually, a husband and wife as a team that lives in and around the community and runs that grocery store,” DeFrancisco said. “And they are the employer. They just run it under the Grocery Outlet banner.”

The city Planning Board on Feb. 8 approved a demolition and construction plan for the plaza. Grocery Outlet will take up more than two-thirds of a 25,291-square-foot building.

DeFrancesco said the operator for the store will not be selected for a while and may come from staff at other stores. A construction timeline is not public, yet.

Jason Abrams, whose development company owns the center, said the food market will make it more attractive to potential tenants.

“I’ve been leasing the shopping center myself for 10 years,” Abrams said. “It’s been a big problem. And getting a tenant the quality of Grocery Outlet will absolutely stabilize this project and get the ball rolling for what you are (asking).”

Where are other Grocery Outlets?

The chain started as an Army Navy Surplus store in the middle-1940s, evolving its business into foods. It has stores now in Maryland, Pennsylvania, where it also has a distribution center, as well as several sites in New Jersey.

DeFrancisco said a Grocery Outlet opened this month in Hazlet in Monmouth County. Delran Township in Burlington County and Philadelphia also have stores.



Grocery Outlet’s East Coast General Manager, Eric DeFrancisco (right), testifies Wednesday night about the food market chain’s interest in opening a store at Park Place Plaza in Vineland. The Planning Board approved a construction proposal from the center’s owner at its Feb 8, 2023 meeting. Attorney Damien Del Duca (left) represented the center owner. PHOTO: Feb 8, 2023 Joseph P. Smith.

DeFrancisco said the Vineland store is proposed at 17,136 square feet, falling in size toward the smaller end for chain sites. But the area’s population density and economics are attractive and one reason for the chain’s interest, he said.

“And then, we’re starting to get some (regional) brand synergy,” he told city planners. “Most of you have probably never heard of ‘Grocery Outlet’ before.”

Joe Smith is a N.E. Philly native transplanted to South Jersey more than 30 years ago, keeping an eye now on government in South Jersey. He is a former editor and

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