

Wegmans continues southern migration

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Wegmans Food Markets, Inc. is growing. The Rochester-based chain already boasts annual sales of \$3.02 billion and continues to remodel, expand, and - in some cases - replace its stores around New York State (including in the Syracuse area). However, the store also is expanding south into Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and as of next year, Virginia. Its first Maryland store is scheduled for a 2005 opening.

The expansion started in 1993, when the food chain opened its first store outside of the Empire State in Erie, Pa. There are now 10 stores in the Keystone State.

Meanwhile, Wegmans will open its fourth New Jersey store this November in Woodbridge. Wegmans also has stores in Bridgewater, Manalapan, and Princeton, N.J.

In February, Wegmans is scheduled to open a store at 45131 Columbia Place in Sterling, Va., a short hop from Dulles International Airport. The 130,000-square-foot store sits on the site of a former Wal-Mart. Wegmans has signed a long-term lease, but declined to release additional financial information per company policy.

Toward the end of next year - between September and December Wegmans will open a 125,000-square-foot store in Fairfax, Va., at the junction of Route 29 and Monument Drive. Similar to the Sterling location, Wegmans signed a long-term lease and will have a standalone location.

In 2005, Wegmans will venture to Hunt Valley, Md., located just outside of Baltimore, where it plans to open a 130,000-square-foot store that will be the anchor of a newly redeveloped mall, the Hunt Valley Towne Center. Wegmans announced the project in April, after plans for a store in Timonium, Md., fell through.

"This is a very recent trend," says Jo Natale, Wegmans' consumerservices manager. "We started growing in the MidAtlantic region in New Jersey and were very successful there."

On April 27, Wegmans opened its first Philadelphia-area store - a 120,000-square-foot store in Downingtown, Pa. The store employs 450 people, includes a Market Cafe with seating for 250, an authentic French pastry shop, a wood-fired brick oven, kosher deli, pharmacy, photo lab, and many of the other amenities offered at its Syracuse-area locations.

"These are places with sites that meet our needs," Natale says. "They're good locations... in rapidly growing areas."

Wegmans has nine Syracuse-area locations, including its 123,500 square-foot store in DeWitt. That store, called Wegmans DeWitt and located at 6789 East Genesee St., was so prominent that it garnered a full-page article in The York Times upon its opening. There are now 52 Wegmans in New York State.

Despite the recent expansion, Wegmans has not targeted other locations.

"We're always looking for new sites," Natale says.

Wegmans was first born in 1915, when Walter E. Wegman worked in his parents' grocery store and his brother, John, sold fresh produce from a pushcart. The next year, John Wegman opened the Rochester Fruit and Vegetable Company, and was joined by Walter one year later. In 1930, Wegmans opened a 20,000-square-foot "showplace" store in Rochester on Clinton Avenue, featuring cafeteria seating for 300. Wegmans became incorporated the next year.

Wegmans first came to the Syracuse area in 1968, when it opened a store on John Glenn Boulevard in Clay. It expanded to Buffalo in 1977.