

Wal-Mart unveils Rohnert Park smaller-format store

By Jeff Quackenbush
September 24, 2014



*Valentina Allen is manager of the Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market store set to open in Mountain Shadows Plaza shopping center in east Rohnert Park on Oct. 1.
(credit: Jeff Quackenbush, Business Journal)*

ROHNERT PARK — With the planned Oct. 1 opening looming for the North Bay's fourth smaller-sized Wal-Mart store, the growing staff at the east Rohnert Park location were busily stocking and configuring shelves as the retailer provided a first look Wednesday.

At just over 33,000 square feet and poised to employ 95 initially, the forthcoming Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market in the Mountain Shadows Plaza shopping center on Golf Course Drive is one of hundreds of small-format stores the Arkansas-based retail giant plans to open nationwide.

"There's a demand here that hasn't been met before," said store manager Valentina Allen as she provided the Journal with a brief tour.

The Rohnert Park store is on the smaller side of the "neighborhood market" store design, which typically have 45,000–58,000 square feet. By comparisons, Wal-Mart discount stores employ around 200 and have more than 100,000 square feet of space.

"Supercenter" stores, which have grocery stores in them, can have around 180,000 square feet and employ more than 300. The existing discount store in west Rohnert Park is seeking a city green light to add a grocery component, becoming Sonoma County's first "supercenter." Such stores already in the North Bay are in Napa and Solano counties.

Since the company's first neighborhood markets in 1998, 381 such locations have opened in the U.S., including 48 in California, with one in Vallejo and two in Vacaville.



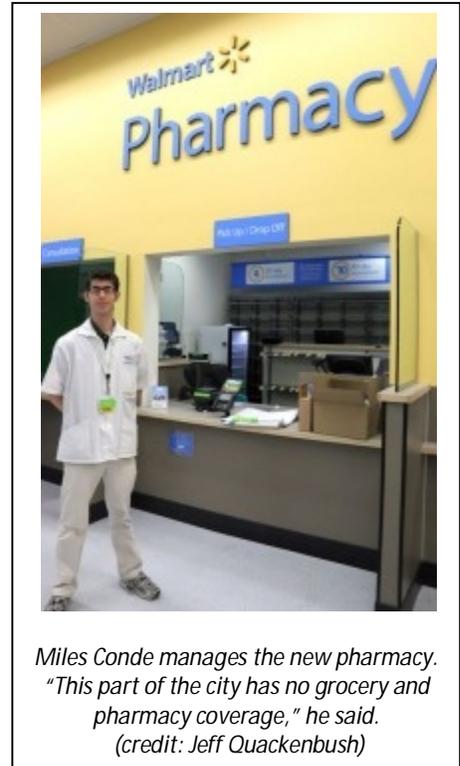
Joy Rhode on Sept. 24 prepares tags in the produce department. She is a 15-year veteran of the company's North Bay stores in Napa, Fairfield and west Rohnert Park. (credit: Jeff Quackenbush)

These stores don't carry electronics, furniture or clothing, but online shoppers can pick certain items up there in a few days via the company's website-to-store free-shipping service.

What neighborhood markets do carry are fresh produce; French and garlic bread as well as rolls baked onsite daily; a deli counter; an aisle of wine, spirits and cold beer; household cleaning products; pet supplies; and pharmacy products, including immunizations and pet treatments.

Ms. Allen is working with Santa Rosa Junior College's medical assistant program to bring in instructors and students every week or so to do free blood-pressure checks and other basic tasks for seniors and others in need.

Retail market analysts have noted Wal-Mart's push toward more compact stores, as comparable sales at the large stores have flattened. In 2011, Wal-Mart started an even smaller, 15,000-square-foot format, called Wal-Mart Express, which blends grocery and pharmacy. Earlier this year, the retailer opened its first 5,000-square-foot convenience store design, called Wal-Mart to Go, and the retailer also operates small outlets on college campuses.



The grand opening for the new Rohnert Park store is set for 7 a.m. Wednesday, before doors open to the public at 8 a.m. The following Saturday the store will be hosting a joint event with other retailers in the shopping center, a venture intended to launch a revitalization of the center.

The new store fills in a space left vacant when the Pacific Market location closed about three years ago, leaving the shopping center without an anchor tenant.