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## **Welcome to the Neighborhood: Walmart supermarket in Pleasanton opens to cheers, some jeers**

By **Jeremy Thomas**

PLEASANTON -- After years of planning and a delayed approval by the City Council, Walmart's Neighborhood Market opened Wednesday to excited shoppers and a small, but vocal, group of detractors who held their own welcoming ceremony.

The 33,160-square-foot full-service supermarket -- in the former Nob Hill Foods building on Santa Rita Road near Las Positas Boulevard -- is Walmart's third in the Bay Area. It joins others in San Jose and San Ramon. About 70 would-be shoppers lined up early, waiting patiently for the doors to open at 7:30 a.m. They joined a crowd of workers and local dignitaries inside for a ribbon-cutting ceremony that included representatives of the City Council, the chamber of commerce, Police Chief Dave Spiller and Livermore-Pleasanton Fire Chief Jim Miguel.

According to Walmart, the company hired 85 employees to man the store, which will provide an anchor for the Meadow Plaza shopping center and an affordable grocery option for local residents.

"Revitalizing this formerly vacant space is a multimillion dollar investment," said Delia Garcia, a Walmart spokeswoman. "We're creating jobs, helping customers save money, supporting local businesses and helping stimulate business growth in this shopping center."

Shopper Vicael Goyer, of Pleasanton, who left with a cart full of groceries and school supplies, said she came out for the festivities and figures she saved about \$50 on her purchases.

"They gave the community jobs and revived the shopping center -- it looked terrible before." Goyer said. "I still will shop at Safeway too, but when I have a bigger shopping list, I'll come here because they have cheaper prices."

Not everyone was thrilled about the neighborhood's newest arrival. About a dozen protesters gathered across the parking lot with signs reading "Pay A Living Wage" and "Walmart is Bad For Business," drawing honks of support from passing motorists.

Former Pleasanton City Councilman Matt Sullivan, who opposed the store while on the council, said it will have a "detrimental impact" on the local economy and small businesses.

"We have a glut of grocery stores already," he said. "It's Walmart's model to control the market and oust the competitors out of business ... It's not something that I'm going to support."

John Roe, a Dublin Safeway employee and a member of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 5 -- a union representing thousands of area grocery workers -- said Walmart's anti-union stance would mean lower pay and less benefits for all supermarket employees.

"This will have a negative effect not only in Pleasanton but on the five grocery stores within a stone's throw," Roe said. "This is the opposite of a grocery desert; this is a saturated market."

The protesters capped their "Welcome to Pleasanton" rally with a march to the storefront, which didn't appear to dampen the enthusiasm of the shoppers or Walmart officials.

"The anti-Walmart folks don't speak for the customers who are here to get their shopping done," Garcia said.

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