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## Crowds flock to opening of Wal-Mart Supercenter

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At a time when retailers are bracing for cutbacks from consumers spooked by a rocky economy, Wal-Mart showed off the power of its brand at the opening of its Modesto supercenter Wednesday.

At 6:45 a.m., people started lining up to get into the supercenter at 3848 McHenry Ave. By the time the doors opened at 8 a.m., hundreds of shoppers were waiting in a line that stretched south along the front of the store.

The parking lot filled quickly, forcing drivers to continually circle the North Point Landing shopping center. Vehicles also spilled out onto adjacent Coralwood Road, where they were parked on both sides of the street for several blocks.

The opening of the nearly 100,000- square-foot store, the first supercenter in Stanislaus County, attracted bargain hunters, longtime Wal-Mart fans and those who were just curious about what the world's largest retailer had to offer.

"I've been waiting for it to open. I've been wanting it," said Renee Fereira of Salida. "I used to go to Stockton all the time, but with gas prices, this is a lot easier."

A longtime Wal-Mart shopper, Fereira said she was looking forward to finding lots of bargains in the supercenter's large grocery department. "They take food stamps, so that really helps."

About 38,000 square feet is stocked with groceries, bakery goods, deli items, frozen foods, dairy products, fresh produce, meat, beer and wine. The store also carries clothing and accessories, health and beauty aids, jewelry, home furnishings, hunting and fishing items, household goods, linens, electronics and more.

Shopper Federico Manzo of Riverbank was waiting for his chance to look around the electronics department. In the market for a camcorder, Manzo also planned to scout the store for bargains on other items.

*Story continues below video.*



"I heard about a month ago they were opening soon. I looked for it whenever we drove by," said Manzo, who was accompanied by his family. "I'm definitely going to look around. They have good prices on everything."



Hundreds of shoppers were waiting in line when the Wal-Mart Supercenter opened at 8 a.m. - Modesto Bee - Bart Ah You

Wal-Mart hired 370 people out of 6,000 applicants to staff the Modesto store.

The hirings come at a time when the county's unemployment rate has climbed to 10.5 percent. But Wal-Mart critics complain that the company doesn't pay a living wage or provide adequate health care benefits.

Melinda Gonzalez, a supervisor in the store's home furnishings department, feels "blessed" to be working again because Wal-Mart provided her with the pay and benefits she needed.

"I had been out of work since February," Gonzalez said between helping and greeting customers. "I was looking everywhere, knocking on doors, and gas was \$4.80 a gallon. It was really difficult."

One day Gonzalez noticed the Wal-Mart hiring center at the store was open. "I left my résumé, and they called me back in 15 minutes and asked me to come in for an interview."

The store fills two adjoining spaces that once were occupied by SavMax and Rite Aid, but have been vacant for years. The new owners of the shopping center took it over two years ago, renovating the complex and pursuing Wal-Mart for its new anchor tenant.

The result of those efforts was clear Wednesday by the crush of traffic in and around the center.

While some merchants in the center were concerned about the lack of parking, they were hopeful more spaces would become available after the grand opening and the new store's first weekend.

The prospect that the increased traffic generated by Wal-Mart would bring other center tenants more business had many of them smiling Wednesday.

"We stay pretty busy," said Versailles Salon & Spa owner John Koury. "But we are excited. We are expecting it to help our business."

And anything that helps right now is good, he said.

Like Wal-Mart, Thuy Nguyen and husband Don Tran opened their UPS Store at the center Wednesday. A one-stop shop for shipping, postal and business services, they saw lots of opportunities to help shoppers package and ship items as well as copy, fax, notarize and mail documents.

At Fuddruckers World's Greatest Hamburgers restaurant, associate manager Whitney K. Martin said it's been busy there since Wal-Mart starting hiring. "A lot of their employees come here to eat."

Martin said she hopes parking eases enough for the spaces closest to the restaurant, which is at the opposite end of the center from Wal-Mart, to be available for Fuddruckers' patrons.

"We think people will want to park farther up the parking lot, closer to Wal-Mart." Then she added, "The owner picked this location because Wal-Mart was coming here."

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