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Modesto's 2nd Wal-Mart enjoys good first year

By **Nanette Austin**
naustin@modbee.com

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A year after Modesto's Wal-Mart Supercenter opened its doors, the parking lot is busier than ever and the giant store has had to hire more help.

"We're really pleased at the response," said Paul Shumate, store manager. Wal-Mart hired 370 employees as it opened and has hired 75 more over the past year, he said.

The Wal-Mart Supercenter has donated more than \$40,000 to the community in the past year, Wal-Mart spokeswoman Amelia Neufeld said. "This was mostly a dead area. We took over two stores that had been empty before. Now there are five new stores (in the center)," Neufeld said.

Although the 100,000-square-foot store ranks as tiny in the Wal-Mart Supercenter world, Shumate said the feedback he's had is that customers like its smaller size. "We listen to our customers," he said.

Customers were plentiful Sunday.

"It's the convenience. It's close to home," said Jackie Thompson of Modesto. "You can buy socks, milk and a screwdriver and be on your way," she said, chuckling, as she loaded bags into her car.

Heather Erhard said an ad for a toy brought her to Wal-Mart. "I like to shop more local stores," but the price was too good to pass up, the Riverbank resident said.

"Oh, my gosh. You go in and you think, 'I'm just going to get this or that.' ... You wind up getting so many things," said Tonya Francis of Modesto. She and son Sebastian Mauzy, 9, were grocery shopping.

One shopper who was packing two overflowing carts full of bags into her small trunk refused to give her name, saying only that she works for a rival grocery store. "We have five children," she said before jumping into her car.

Sophan "Tim" Men, chief haircutter at Clipper World two doors down from Wal-Mart, was in the center before the big store opened and said his business has not appreciably picked up in the past year.

"You see a lot of cars, but they're not my customers," he chuckled. "But I like this location, it's good overall," Men said.

"Business is good" at the newly opened DK Noodles, waitress Leha Nguyen said. She said lots of her patrons are Wal-Mart customers who saw the Vietnamese restaurant and decided to try it out.

Also pleased is Perko's Cafe manager Tim Burns. "It's been a plus," he said. "It's tough to tell how much with the economy, but it's helped. Employees come over for lunch and we do get people as they're coming or going from Wal-Mart."

At hamburger chain Fuddruckers, Whitney Martin said high traffic was what the company was looking for when it opened, and the center delivers. "We get a lot of customers from people having to pass by us on their way to Wal-Mart," she said.



DARRYL BUSH/dbush@modbee.com Billie Dougherty of Escalon, left, loads groceries with son Heath Dougherty and friend, Christine Davis visting from Sacramento, at The Super Walmart Shopping Center in Modesto on McHenry Ave., on Sunday, December 6, 2009. - Modesto Bee - DARRYL BUSH

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