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2nd Wegmans To Come To County

By Daily Local News

EAST WHITELAND -- O'Neill Properties Group has inked a deal with Wegmans Food Markets as the anchor tenant of its Worthington Town Center, its 1.6 million-square-foot mixed-use community going up at the former Worthington Steel plant.

This will be Wegmans' second store in Chester County. Wegmans' 120,000-square-foot Brandywine Square store in East Caln opened in April 2003. The Food Trade News estimated that store had revenues of \$55.8 million for 2006.

The new Wegmans at Worthington will be a free-standing store of approximately 140,000 square feet, though the design has not been finalized, Jeanne Colleluori, Wegmans communications specialist, said in a phone interview from the company headquarters in Rochester, N.Y.

If all goes on schedule, Wegmans expects to open the store in the first quarter 2009.

The two Wegmans in Chester County will be nine miles apart, unusual for Wegmans, which draws customers from a 20-mile radius, but not unheard of.

There are two Wegmans seven miles apart in South Jersey and two in Virginia 10 to 15 miles apart, Colleluori said.

"When we find the right location, it makes sense for us to do this," Colleluori said. "What we generally look for in a new site is space to hold one of our stores. We have a very large footprint."

The supermarket chain also needs a good roadway system for product flow for its trucks and so that the store will be convenient for its customers and employees, the spokeswoman said.

Worthington will be built at the intersection of routes 29, 202, and 30, and a new Pennsylvania Turnpike ramp is scheduled to be completed in 2008.

Colleluori said Wegmans also looks at neighboring retailers to see if shopping in the area is attractive. And like all retailer chains, it counts rooftops to see if there is a large enough customer base.

"When you find a good area that has access to roads, access to land that can support two stores, that's a very appealing shopping experience," Colleluori said.

Terry Moloney, editor of the Food Trade News, said Wegmans is definitely expanding beyond its home base.

"If the area is doing well, fairly dense with good demographics, they seize the opportunity," Moloney said in a phone interview from her Columbia, Md., office.

Wegmans has 71 supermarkets in New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Virginia, and Maryland, and is evolving into one of the most sought-after supermarkets in the country. Last year, the company received 4,896 requests to open stores in various communities

across America, said Brian O'Neill, founder and chairman of O'Neill Properties Group.

"We are very fortunate to be able to add the strength and consumer conviction of Wegmans to Worthington," O'Neill said. "Wegmans sets the bar for the grocery industry in volume, customer service and loyalty. No one else comes close."

According to O'Neill Properties' Web site, the location comes with impressive demographics.

Within a seven-mile radius surrounding Worthington, the average household income is \$104,978 with 35.76 percent of all households with annual income levels more than \$100,000.

Once complete, Worthington will eventually be home to 745,000 square feet of retail, restaurants and entertainment; 753 multi-family homes; and 185,000 square feet of Class A office space.

O'Neill projects Worthington will attract an estimated 7 million visitors per year.

The Worthington Steel mill is being demolished. The 100-acre site has zoning approval from the township, O'Neill said. The developer expects to break ground in the spring.

"With the old steel mill, O'Neill has spearheaded the remediation and will also be 'daylighting' the underground Little Valley Creek which runs the entire length of the property," O'Neill said. "In addition, O'Neill will build an entire loop of the Chester County trail and bike path through the property."

O'Neill Properties, a King of Prussia-based real estate and investment company, has built a reputation by renovating surplus brownfield industrial sites.

Some of the company's brownfield projects include: Rockford Falls, 1,000 condos and town homes in an abandoned textile mill in Wilmington, Del., and Mill Creek, 22 luxury condos in an old grist and munitions mill in Gladwyne in addition to Worthington.

The McGarey Group, a comprehensive planning, development and leasing company, represented O'Neill Properties Group in the Wegmans deal.

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