

Windy City Times

Whole Foods Opens at Center

by Andrew Davis

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Whole Foods' Kate Klotz and Tom Marciniak. Photo by Andrew Davis

Let the organic shopping begin.

Whole Foods Market, the country's first certified organic grocer, opened its new 39,713-square-foot Lakeview store on July 25. The supermarket anchors the newly-opened Center on Halsted, the most comprehensive LGBT community center in the Midwest.

The store is one of four to open locally this year. Other markets include the recently-opened Cicero and Peterson business and the Roosevelt and Canal (South Loop) site that will open on Aug. 8. A store in Northbrook will open Aug. 29.

“At Whole Foods Market, it is our goal to share our enthusiasm for the freshest, most flavorful natural and organic foods, and we are thrilled to open a store for the Northalsted community,” said Tom Marciniak, the store team leader, in a statement. “We believe that food in its purest state—free of artificial flavors, sweeteners, preservatives, colorings and trans fats—is the best tasting and most nutritious food available.”

Whole Foods marked its latest grand opening with food samples, giveaways and other goodies. On July 25, there was a special bread-breaking and ribbon-cutting.

The store will offer something for practically everyone. Among the all-natural and organic prepared foods will be made-to-order sushi; fresh pizza; a meat-carving station; many types of seafood (that is delivered six days a week) ; and vegetarian and vegan fare. There will also be unique items like (up to 20 flavors of) sorbet and gelato; an espresso, coffee and tea bar; a deli offering global fare; an olive bar; **and even an “enomatic” machine that will allow customers to taste one-ounce pours of various varieties of wine.** Of course, there are grocery items, and they range from (over 200 varieties of) natural and organic cheeses to its famed produce to an array of advanced nutritional supplements. As for “amenities,” they include a baby boutique, free Wi-Fi throughout the store, 19 cash registers, 200 parking spaces and an in-store concierge.

However, Whole Foods’ staff insists that the market is more than about food. “We’re best known for our focus on organic products, but there are so many other things we do, like the care we take for our environment [with the store being composed of renewable/recycled products] , community support and team member happiness,” said Whole Foods Midwest PR Specialist/Copywriter Kate Klotz during a special July 20 tour that saw the staff involved in everything from furiously wiping down store shelves to being trained regarding product placement and baking skills.

As for the market’s interaction with the Center, there is a door on the north side of the store (next to the bakery area) that leads directly to the organization’s lobby. “We have a security guard here [to make sure no one goes through with unpaid items] ,” Marciniak said during the same tour. He also said that the market is planning to donate extra bread and produce to the Center, and added that “we’re going to partner up on volunteer opportunities with [the Center] . [Center on Halsted Executive Director] Tico Valle talked at a [recent] meeting and made team members aware of the all of the opportunities for them to give back to the community.”

Whole Foods seems eager to handle what is expected to be a very high volume of customers. “Over the past couple of days, people are peering in and [try to walk in the store] ,” said in-store marketer Brian McElwain during the tour. “We have to say, ‘Hold up, hold up. We’ll get you taken care of, but not until [July 25.] ’ I think people are really excited for this store to open up.”