

Business

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BUSINESS WEEK

Matthews lands North Carolina's 1st Super Bi-Lo

*Expanded supermarkets
feature wider wine selection,
more organic and natural foods*

McKee Farms shopping center in Matthews has landed a high-profile anchor tenant: North Carolina's first Super Bi-Lo.

DEVELOPMENT



Doug Smith

The chain's super stores typically are 15 percent to 20 percent larger than its biggest standard supermarkets, and they target a more affluent customer. The 57,000-square-foot McKee Farms store, for example, will include a larger grocery selection, a greater variety of organic and natural foods, an enhanced wine selection and other services.

The look is a lot different, too.

Super Bi-Los feature bright interiors and vaulted ceilings painted to look like a blue sky and clouds, giving produce shoppers the impression of entering an outdoor market.

The McKee Farms super-store site is at Weddington and McKee roads across from Harris Teeter-anchored Plantation Market.

Mauldin, S.C.-based Bi-Lo/Bruno's prototype super store opened last year in Columbia, and several others are in the works in the chain's six-state market area.

As Wal-Mart Supercenters and SuperTargets cut into traditional grocery sales, many supermarket chains see larger stores and one-stop shopping as a way to stay competitive.

About 90 percent of Bi-Lo's 310 stores face competition from a Wal-Mart Supercenter, said Joyce Smart, director of corporate communications.

But she said decisions to build Super Bi-Los are based more on finding a location with the right customer base than competition with Wal-Mart.

"Generally speaking, they have their niche and we have ours," Smart said.

Burgeoning home development in the Matthews area, and the proximity to Union County's residential growth made McKee Farms an attractive location.

Smart said the focus at Super Bi-Lo is on families - providing a place where one shopping trip will fulfill the majority of a working parent's needs.

The McKee Farms Super Bi-Lo will include a coffee shop serving the store brand, a DVD section and kiosk with games and music, a Hewlett Packard digital photo center, a home office supply section and a Wellspot Health and Wellness Center staffed by nurse practitioners.

Bi-Lo expects to employ about 100 people at the store, part of the chain's aggressive three-year expansion plan.

"We are focusing on eight major areas where we have growth potential, and Charlotte is one of those areas," Smart said.

Charlotte's Aston Properties Inc. is developing the 98,000-square-foot McKee Farms shopping center. A CVS pharmacy is open. The Super Bi-Lo is to open by Thanksgiving 2007 with the rest of the center.

The developers plan about 24,000 square feet of small neighborhood services shops and restaurants but are still working on signing leases.

Matthews commissioners approved a rezoning for the roughly 50-acre site about 1½ years ago after the developers agreed to make road improvements around the neighboring Siskey YMCA and use about 25 acres adjoining the center for empty-nester housing.

WKB Properties Inc. acquired that acreage and is developing 114 condos in The Village of St. Andrews.

Aston Properties donated 8 acres to the Siskey YMCA.

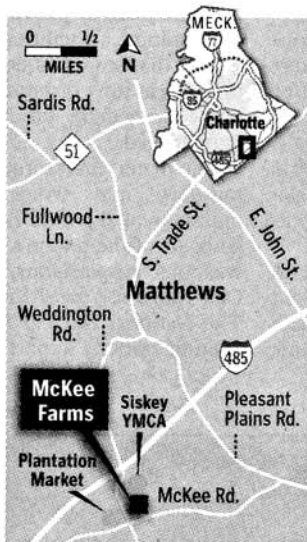
The developers estimate they've spent about \$1 million redesigning the McKee-Weddington roads intersection, adding turn lanes and a traffic light on Pleasant Plains Road.

The improvements will give the YMCA a second entrance via the shopping center.

Barrett Development is building office condos on the road that will run through the project.

Aston Properties hasn't disclosed the shopping center cost, but industry sources estimated a project of that size likely would total \$17 million to \$18 million.

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STAFF MAP

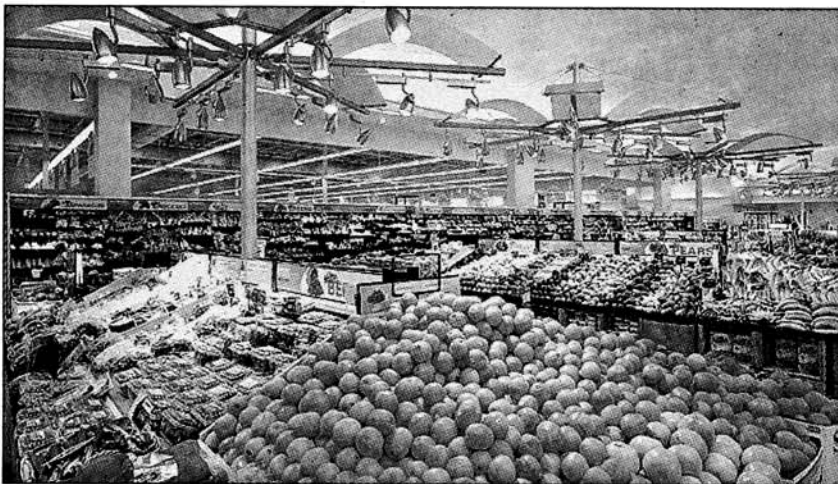


PHOTO COURTESY OF BI-LO

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