



Photo by Whitney Buckner

22 ||| AUGUST 2013



# Business Update

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**DOWNTOWN**  
DEVELOPMENT

## Groceries at a Crossroads

*Poised at the corner of Providence and Broadway, Lucky's Farmers Market brings a much-needed grocery store to the center of town*

BY VICKI HODDER

**THE LUCKY'S FARMERS** Market slated to open this fall in downtown Columbia will be a first, both for the company owner and city shoppers.

Its opening will launch a new chain of natural foods stores that Lucky's website says will eventually span six states. Lucky's shoppers will enjoy a wide selection of both mainstream and natural foods — such as “never-ever” meats that contain no antibiotics or growth hormones and hundreds of different cheeses — in a large full-service grocery at the center of town.

Columbia business leaders say Lucky's renovation and reuse of the shuttered Osco Drug building at 111 S. Providence Road will help meet a need in the city's core highlighted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's designation of three downtown census tracts just east of the site as a “food desert.” And Lucky's might accomplish far more. Local development officials believe the grocery store will lure more young professionals downtown, now largely populated by students. That addition to downtown Columbia's residential character could, in turn, act as a catalyst to redevelopment in the area, says Patrick R. Zenner, Columbia's development services manager.

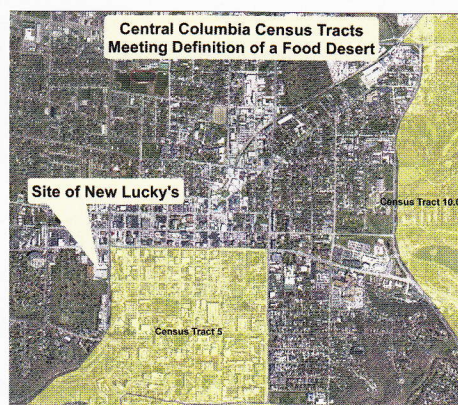
“This is the catalyst,” Zenner says. “I would suggest that Lucky's market is one of multiple catalysts that can occur on the west side of downtown.”

### Organic, locally grown

The roughly 42,000-square-foot natural foods market on which those hopes are centered will be “wild with produce,” Lucky's President Bo Sharon says. Covering nearly a fourth of the market's floor space, the produce section will be the largest and most affordable in town, Sharon adds. Store plans also call for a coffee shop, a natural living department, an outside patio and terrace and a liquor store along with other full-scale grocery store amenities. Although traditional foods will be

for sale, the Boulder, Colo.-based company's focus is on organic, natural and locally grown foods.

Sharon says the Columbia store, currently undergoing a complete interior renovation, will be the first Lucky's Farmers Market to open, with



a second scheduled to open by the end of the year in Columbus, Ohio. The chain's competitive edge? “The prices are the differentiator,” Sharon says. “We're trying to appeal to folks who are looking to improve their health without spending any more money.”

Jay Lindner, president of Forum Development Group in Columbia, says Lucky's will draw shoppers from the entire city, and he believes the store's size and wide range of offerings, plus its fairly central location, will broaden its appeal.

Mike Brooks, president of Columbia's Regional Economic Development Inc., also points to the proposed grocery store's easy access to Broadway Street and Providence Road. Standing at the crossroads of two primary city roads, the site “is about as convenient as you can get,” he says.

The location is convenient for downtown pedestrians as well as motorists, Zenner points out. It's a distinction that he and Lindner say will draw young professionals to Columbia's downtown and diversify and strengthen the core's res-

idential base. Already, new student apartment buildings have added thousands of temporary residents — and potential shoppers — to the area during the past few years. By adding convenient, walkable access to a full-service grocery store, Lucky's is helping create a total living environment that officials expect will draw older residents and eventually swell downtown's population. Zenner sees Lucky's paving the way for a growing downtown population of retired people, an opportunity that's currently largely untapped. If older people who don't want to have to drive can easily walk to a downtown grocery, they might move to the area to enjoy proximity to cultural activities, parks and medical facilities, he says.

### A catalyst for downtown

Whatever the exact makeup, Zenner believes Lucky's will strengthen the downtown residential base. “You will see that increase in the permanent population as a result of services becoming more easily accessible,” he says.

And that may well trigger a whole host of other changes downtown. Public improvements, such as park upgrades, may follow the flow of residents and further enhance the downtown living environment. The end result of downtown's increased population density may be further development.

“I think that not only does this Lucky's grocery create a catalyst to encourage people to come downtown because they have services that are available to them,” Zenner says, “but it also may provide an opportunity to spur redevelopment of maybe sputtering properties.”

With the new grocery store, Sharon aims at shoppers of all ages: “young, retired, however it looks.” And though Sharon considers downtown the new Lucky's core market, he does hope to bring in buyers from the entire city.

“The beauty of this site is we're accessible to all; we're sort of the center of town,” he says. **CBT**