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Sneak peek: Walmart Neighborhood Market gears up for Downtown South opening



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The Walmart Neighborhood Market in the Downtown South district is gearing up for a June 26 opening.



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Residents and businesses in the Downtown South district close to SoDo Orlando have been waiting for years to see what's to become of the former 30-year-old-plus Albertsons at the corner of Michigan and Orange Avenue.

Bentonville, Ark.-based [Wal-Mart Stores Inc.](#) (NYSE: WMT) and landlord [Pineloch Management Corp.](#) have been working together on the Market at Southside shopping center since 2011, when a lease deal was first in discussions. Wal-Mart Stores had proposed demolishing the long-shuttered, 60,000-square-foot Albertsons that anchored the project and rebuilding it into a 48,000-square-foot Neighborhood Market concept — one that would compete directly with a neighboring Publix in the same center.

The lease was signed and construction began last summer, making way for a larger than usual Neighborhood Market, but allowing for things like wider aisles and more choices — such as a separate area just for gluten-free products and expanded bins, cookware and glassware selections.

The new store, set to open on June 26, is just [one of several new Walmart stores](#) debuting in Central Florida this year, including [a former SaveRite grocery store being renovated](#) in southeast Orlando near Orlando International Airport.

“This is a new prototype for us,” said store manager [Michael Raybuck](#), who has run eight Central Florida stores for Walmart in the last 13 years. “We don’t really know for sure yet, but I think we’re going to attract a very diverse group of shoppers. We’ve already had 100-200 people come to the door every day even though there’s a sign on the building saying when we open.”

The overall Market at Southside project involved renovating and redeveloping the 200,000-square-foot shopping center and bringing in several [new and refurbished tenants](#), including Applebee’s and Dominos. Pineloch was among the [first commercial landlords to reinvest in existing property](#), expecting more traffic when the SunRail commuter rail station near [Orlando Regional Medical Center](#) opens in May 2014. [Orlando Health](#) also is [gearing up for SunRail](#) in Downtown South, as is the [existing Amtrak station](#).

Check out the slideshow of the Walmart Neighborhood Market coming this week to Downtown South.