

Whole Foods opening its doors in Newark this winter



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on December 06, 2016 at 11:39 AM, updated December 06, 2016 at 11:40 AM

NEWARK -- Construction on Newark's Whole Foods is almost done. The shell has been completed. The walls are being painted, and soon, shelving and refrigeration units will be installed.

Representatives of the high-end supermarket chain say the new location in Newark - which is part of a the [rehabilitation of the long-empty former Hahne and Company flagship department store](#) on Broad Street - say the Whole Foods will be open in the late winter of 2017.

In preparation for the opening of the highly-anticipated store in a city that was once named a "food desert," a Whole Foods spokesman says the company is already working to become a part of the Newark community.

"This store stemmed from the idea that good, nutritious food is for everybody," Whole Foods spokesman Michael Sinatra said in a phone interview.

Combatting what he called "misconceptions" about the chain's intentions, Sinatra said it is not opening only to serve [professionals who commute](#) to the city to work at nearby headquarters like Audible and Prudential Financial.

"This is about healthy food access for the people who live (in Newark)," Sinatra said. "We want them to feel that, certainly, the store is there for them."

Whole Foods is putting its money where its mouth is, launching several initiatives in the city even before it opens its doors, including [a grants program to support local nonprofits](#), a search for local vendors to help stock the shelves, and a hiring drive to fill about 110 jobs.

City officials have lauded the "community partnerships" Whole Foods is in the midst of making as another sign of the revitalization of Newark.

"We are excited about all of the partnerships and opportunities that have been created with the redevelopment of the Hahne's building," said deputy mayor and director of Housing & Economic Development Baye Adofo-Wilson.

"The collaboration between developers, retailers and our anchor educational institutions is remarkable."

In addition to the 30,000 square foot supermarket, the Hahne's building will include [a Rutgers arts collaborative](#), City National Bank's [headquarters](#), a new restaurant [concept from celebrity chef](#) Marcus Samuelsson, 160 apartments, and about 25,000 square feet of [additional office and retail space](#).

Many of Whole Foods' initiatives, Sinatra said, are geared toward extending the energy from the Hahne's project outward. Last month, it launched a community grants program through its Whole Cities Foundation, which will award dozens of grants, ranging from \$5,000 to \$15,000, to Newark community organizations. Its Whole Planet Foundation partnered with Grameen America to [offer loans](#) to Newark entrepreneurs looking to develop new businesses in the city.

In the store itself, Whole Foods is in the midst of considering products from local vendors - a process Sinatra said will go on continuously after the store opens. And, it's hiring.

According to Sinatra, some of the 110 jobs in the store will be filled by current Whole Foods employees who live in and around Newark, but work in nearby stores in West Orange and Montclair. The positions in those stores will then be back-filled, he said.

Company-wide, about 70 percent of Whole Foods' jobs are full-time, Sinatra said. He said he expects about the same full- to part-time ratio to exist in Newark.

"There are a lot of leadership and growth opportunities," for employees, Sinatra said.

At a [groundbreaking for the development](#) last year, Central Ward Councilwoman Gayle Chaneyfield-Jenkins lauded the employment opportunities as one of the reasons "this project is truly going to be transformative."

The formula, Sinatra said, works for the retailer, too. The model in Newark, which will offer some lower prices than other Whole Foods locations and will focus more on making community contributions, will be based on those already employed by Whole Foods stores in Detroit and New Orleans. Those stores, Sinatra said, "have seen a tremendous amount of success."

Skeptics have had "moments of doubt," about the development, he said, "thinking this was going to somehow be less of a Whole Foods. ... We are doing all of the same things here, we have all the same quality standards."

Now, a few months before it opens its doors, "I think people are really excited," Sinatra said.