

Coming on strong: Acme open in Ventnor, N. Wildwood; opening Sunday in O.C., Manahawkin

MARTIN DeANGELIS, Staff Writer | Posted: Thursday, November 12, 2015 6:28 pm

Acme, a supermarket staple for generations of South Jersey shoppers, is suddenly growing a bigger footprint in three local counties.

Two new Acmes opened their doors this week, one in a former Pathmark in Ventnor and the other in the old Superfresh location in North Wildwood. And Thursday, Acme closed former Superfresh stores in Ocean City and Manahawkin to change them into its brand. Both are scheduled to reopen Sunday morning as Acmes.

That wave of conversions comes less than two months after Acme's parent company, Albertsons, bought 72 stores in New Jersey and five neighboring states in a \$243 million bankruptcy sale. The seller was the Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Co., better known as A&P.

That name was also known for decades around South Jersey, but the owners had closed stores in Egg Harbor Township, Millville, Hammonton, Cape May Court House and more places in recent years, before the final Acme sale.

Danielle D'Elia, an Acme spokeswoman, said this week that the chain is being "aggressive" about getting its brand onto those new purchases. Company officials expect the conversions to be complete by Thanksgiving, she added.

And first-time shoppers had generally positive reviews for at least one of the new Acme markets, in Ventnor Plaza, that town's biggest shopping center.

"The display of fruits and vegetables looks very nice, and the customer service was great," said Eduardo Grau, of Atlantic City, a veteran shopper at the old store. "I liked the atmosphere."

As she loaded her bags of groceries into her car, Stephanie McLeod said she was impressed too.

"They have good sales," said McLeod, who also came from Atlantic City. "At Pathmark, you weren't getting that much for \$100. I had to go to ShopRite for that."



new ACMES

Elaine Baca Hessen of Mays Landing heard about the former Pathmark that reopened as ACME in Ventnor Plaza from her daughter who is from Ventnor. Elaine states, "It is so much better than Pathmark. The food is more fresh, there are better prices and it is great for the economy." ACME also bought Superfresh in Ocean City which is currently closed and will reopen as an ACME this coming Sunday. Thursday, November 12, 2015.

Several shoppers added that they didn't have much trouble finding what they were looking for because the new Acme has a very similar layout to the old store. On the opening day, workers and managers were still stocking shelves as shoppers were loading their carts.

Acme's familiar name around the region should be a help as it tries to draw back the customers who used to use their local Superfresh or Pathmark, one veteran industry analyst said.

"It definitely gives them an advantage versus coming in and being 'Jim's Supermarket,' and nobody knows what Jim's is about," said Matthew P. Casey, a supermarket real-estate analyst based in New Jersey. "The Acme name has been around since Wile E. Coyote."

Actually, Acme has been around even longer than the character who did his best to torment "The Road Runner" for decades on that popular cartoon show. Acme's roots go back to 1891 and one store in South Philadelphia, according to the history on its web site.

But to Casey, Acme has something else going for it in its efforts to draw shoppers back to their old stores as they reopen with new identities.

"That shouldn't be too difficult to do, since the old operator was so bad that apparently the customers didn't care," he said. "If Acme operates its stores well, they should have no problem bringing the customers back. ... Supermarket shopping is a convenience, not a destination. And if Acme has good locations and they offer a decent store, people should come back."

Clare Durham, a relatively new neighbor of a new Acme, admitted that she was "never a fan of the Pathmark" — which replaced a longtime ShopRite that closed in Ventnor in 2002. So she was excited to hear that a brand she likes better was coming to an especially convenient spot for her, just a few blocks from the home where she moved recently.

But Fares Nammour, of Pleasantville, just happened to be driving by Thursday morning when he saw the new Acme — a brand he also likes. A full cart and about \$120 later, he was back outside, loading his groceries for the trip home.

Nammour is a coupon shopper, and a competitive shopper. He had a cigar box full of neatly clipped coupons and a receipt he was proud to show off, because his checkout clerk put a red circle around the \$96 the store said he saved this time off its regular prices.

He said he'll be back to Acme, but that won't be his only supermarket.

"I shop all over," he said. "That's the only way to survive with this bad economy."

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