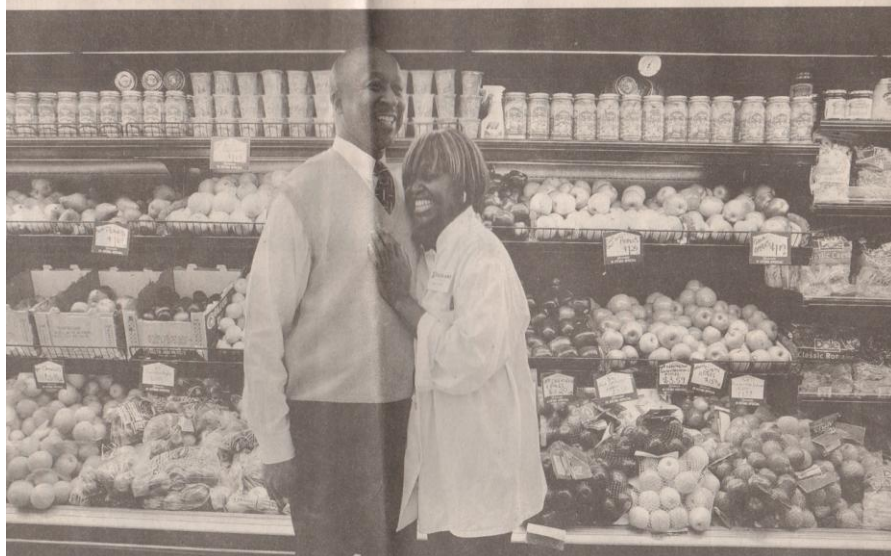


THE QUALITY OF URBAN LIFE

Grocery chains sit out Detroit's rebirth



Chain stores sit out Detroit's rebirth





Metro Foodland also has a wide selection of breakfast foods. Detroiters Toashia Hardy, 23, and her daughter, Kiara, 4, take a look in the cereal aisle late last month. Some stores have left the city because they have trouble selling enough to keep stores fully stocked and staffed.

Issues such as security, theft, lower employee productivity rates, more lighting and maintenance and costly insurance contribute to keeping chains away, said Robert Gorland, a Lincoln Park native who got his start working as a bagger at A&P stores in metro Detroit and now is vice president of Matthew P. Casey & Associates in Harrisburg, Pa., a supermarket and shopping center consulting firm.

Gorland said that national grocery chains would look for a population of 25,000 to 50,000 in a 3-mile radius. Despite its recent growth, downtown Detroit has about only 6,000 residents, recent studies suggest. Gorland said specialty stores would want a median household income of \$75,000 in the area. If looking downtown, stores would want convenient parking and major office buildings within a two-block radius, he said.

"Let's say a suburban store needs \$300,000 a week to break even. A city store may need \$400,000 in sales a week to break even," Gorland said. "Chains will have a lower tolerance for losses."

In Detroit, grocery operators say, stores also struggle with a high number of residents on public assistance, which creates a monthly boom-and-bust cycle.

Food assistance benefits