

Posted on Fri, Jun. 27, 2008

Super Freshes, Pathmarks to get new name

By Maria Panaritis
Inquirer Staff Writer

Attention Super Fresh shoppers in Greater Philadelphia: Your supermarket is about to change names.

At least, for most of you.

The company that owns Super Fresh announced yesterday that it was converting eight of its 13 Philadelphia-area stores and all 16 of its Pathmark stores into a more affordable format and renaming them Pathmark Sav-A-Center.

The new centers will be "dramatically redesigned" and stocked with merchandise at "substantially lower prices," said the Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Co. Inc. (A&P), the Montvale, N.J., firm that owns the chains.

A&P, which acquired Pathmark last year in a \$1.3 billion deal, said the new "Price Impact" format will sell typical supermarket merchandise - but with more bulk items, better pricing deals and with some sentimental touches that once belonged to Pathmark.

"They're bright. They're open. The decor is really attractive. The layout is easy to navigate," said A&P spokeswoman Lauren La Bruno.

The remodeled stores will have new color schemes, layouts, employees' uniforms, merchandise and signage, La Bruno said.

They will even have outdoor hot-dog-and-soda stands, just as Pathmark used to have years ago - and now with turkey burgers added.

"It's bringing back all of the great things that were associated with Pathmark," La Bruno said. "We're going to bring all that back."

The fledgling layout has been successfully tested so far at stores in Irvington and

Edison, N.J., the company said. The company did not say what the changes would cost.

Analysts say they believe the conversions reflect the company's efforts to better compete in an increasingly difficult market.

For years, supermarkets have watched once-loyal customers bounce from warehouse clubs to drugstores and even mass merchandisers like Wal-Mart to do their grocery shopping.

The competitive edge is even sharper in the Philadelphia region, where Acme Markets and the ShopRite and Giant supermarket chains have been aggressive in their growth.

The new stores may give A&P a particular advantage in neighborhoods where shoppers are more price-conscious, said Matt Casey, president of Matthew P. Casey & Associates, Clark, N.J., whose firm does real estate market research for the industry.

"It's a pretty smart move on A&P's part to help bolster their sales base," Casey said.

The company did not say where the eight soon-to-be-converted Super Fresh stores are located. But Casey said they would likely debut in less-affluent communities.

"You're probably not going to see the Price Impact store on the Main Line," Casey said.

When A&P acquired Pathmark, it said it would redefine some of its stores to better fit the demographics of their communities, said analyst Jeff Metzger, publisher of Food Trade News.

The Super Fresh stores that remain will be targeted toward upscale shoppers with an emphasis on customer service and fresh foods, he said.

"Pathmark stands for price," Metzger said, "Super Fresh and A&P stand for service and perishables."