

## Chesapeake Energy: Loss of Nichols Drugstore lunch counter, Crescent Market not part of 'master plan'

A cherished community gathering spot disappears this week with the closing of the lunch counter at the Nichols Hills Drugstore. But unlike the Crescent Market which closed next door in October, the drugstore itself, 6411 Avondale Drive, will not stay closed for long.

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A cherished community gathering spot disappears this week with the closing of the lunch counter at the Nichols Hills Drugstore.

But unlike the Crescent Market, which closed next door in October, the drugstore itself, 6411 Avondale Drive, will not stay closed for long.

In an interview with *The Oklahoman*, owner J. Black said he's been overwhelmed with well wishes from customers who have kept the lunch counter filled in advance of closing on Friday.

“We've been extremely busy,” Black said. “Everyone is getting their last fix. You can't feed any more people than we have. We have 17 chairs and 20 people waiting. We're preparing to cook a lot of food. We'll keep serving until we run out.”

The pharmacy will reopen in another section of the plaza — but without the lunch counter. Black said he has been invited to eventually operate his pharmacy in conjunction with the Nichols Hills Market, which is set to open in the space previously occupied by Crescent.

Robert Pemberton, meanwhile, told *The Oklahoman* this week he is still hoping to reopen Crescent Market, which was the city's oldest grocery, having opened in 1889. He said he had no option but to close after facing a \$6,000 hike in monthly rent from Chesapeake Energy Corp.

“He (Chesapeake Energy CEO Aubrey McClendon) told me I could stay month to month,” Pemberton said. But ultimately, Pemberton said, the situation was “too volatile of a working environment.”

Henry Hood, senior vice president of land and legal and general counsel for Chesapeake, said Crescent Market faced more serious challenges in staying open, most notably the opening of Sunflower Market a couple of miles west at NW 63 and May Avenue, and also Whole Foods, a few blocks south in Classen Curve, which was developed by Chesapeake.

“Like many in the community, we are sad to see these two retail institutions close,” Hood said. “The owners are both fine gentlemen, and their stores have filled an

important void in the retail market for many years. Robert told us before he announced his plans to close Crescent Market how difficult it was to compete in today's retail climate without making a substantial investment and commitment to modernize and renovate his store.”

Hood said the new Nichols Hills market will feature a lunch counter — greatly extended, with a bigger menu and more seating. He said the lunch counter won't be a duplicate of the current setup that's about to close.

Hood said the closing of Crescent Market and the changes with Nichols Hills Drugstore are not a part of any master plan for Nichols Hills Plaza. He said Pemberton was given a choice of continuing with a month-to-month lease or new terms on a new lease that would include revamped space.

The previous lease with Crescent Market dated several years and had a “very, very modest rent and not consistent with market rates,” Hood said.

“This closing was long coming due to the deterioration of Crescent Market and the aging of Nichols Hills and the variety of other grocery options,” Hood said.

“There was nothing we could have done to save Crescent other than to let it limp along.”



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