

Excitement builds in Oklahoma City as opening of Whole Foods Market nears

The new Whole Foods Market at 6001 N Western opens at 8 a.m. Wednesday.

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Store Manager Steve Cramer can't wait for shoppers to see the new Whole Foods Market for themselves.

His excitement was infectious while giving *The Oklahoman* a tour of the store at 6001 N Western Ave. on Thursday. Workers were busy installing shelves and undergoing training. Exterior signage was in place. Giant pumpkins and gourds were displayed out front and many aisles were fully stocked.

Easily one of the nicest Whole Foods Markets in the country, the store officially opens at 8 a.m. Wednesday. The 35,000-square-foot store anchors the Triangle at Classen Curve shopping center, across from the Chesapeake Energy campus.

Cramer, who became a vegan to understand the products he sells and transferred from the Tulsa store, said shoppers are going to be impressed with the selection of products, especially those with dietary restrictions.

“Every section will offer something unique,” Cramer said.

The store is laid out with fruits and veggies, bulk bins and spices right up front, so cooks in a hurry can get their items quickly. On the opposite end of the store, there's a coffee bar and a deli counter that will serve prepared foods and freshly cooked pizzas.

Seafood, meat (the store sells all locally raised beef) and dairy line the back wall. Canned, boxed and frozen foods fill the middle aisles, along with the “Whole Body” section — which includes personal care products and clothing such as TOMS shoes.

A large display of local products is prominently displayed near the doors. There are at least 45 vendors from Oklahoma supplying the store with everything from barbecue sauce to bottled water.

“We want people to feel like this is their store,” Cramer said.

One of the upscale touches is the personal shopper Whole Foods will have on staff. Customers can call in their grocery list, leave a credit card on file, then pull into one of the designated parking spaces and head home with their groceries without leaving their vehicle, said Sarah Innerarity, a spokeswoman for the store. The service costs \$30 an hour but can be divided in 15-minute increments.

But it's a misconception that someone couldn't afford to shop there, she said.

For those on a budget, Whole Foods' 365 brand items offer an everyday value, the store doubles up on sale fliers each Wednesday and they publish a coupon booklet, she added.

“You really can shop on any sort of budget here, you just have to know what to look for,” Innerarity said.



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