

Sweetbay marks beginning of Kash n' Karry's end

The Tampa grocery store chain was set to open its first Hillsborough location on Saturday.

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UPPER TAMPA BAY - Kash n' Karry's official retirement has begun.

The Tampa grocery store chain is being phased out for Sweetbay Supermarket, which was scheduled to open its first Hillsborough County location on Saturday at 13016 Race Track Road.

The opening comes one year to the day after a prototype Sweetbay opened in Seminole.

With gourmet cheeses, 20 types of tomatoes, 5-foot stalks of sugar cane, vodka-accented pasta sauce and everyday necessities, the store is Sweetbay's quintessential "A-game," said vice president of marketing Steve Smith.

"(Tampa) is where Kash n' Karry's 50-year roots started, so every element of our marketing strategy is executed there at 100 percent," Smith said.

Although the Race Track Road and Seminole stores were built from the ground up, the nearly 50 other Sweetbay supermarkets scheduled to open throughout Hillsborough and Pinellas counties in 2006 will be converted Kash n' Karry stores.

"We wanted to launch something entirely new for our debut in Tampa so the whole store is better," Smith said.

Kash n' Karry's parent, Delhaize America Inc., decided to change the grocery chain's strategy to compete in a crowded Florida market that has grown more intense with the emergence of Super Wal-Mart. Sweetbay is responding with variety and an emphasis on service, including a full butcher shop, a seafood counter and full-time cake decorators at the bakery.

The store encourages customers to ask for samples of whatever looks interesting.

"That's how our blueberry sausage became so popular," spokeswoman Nicole LeBeau said.

The grocery chain chose the Race Track Road location because it is central to three counties, and without many grocery options. But the chain's leaders expect business from well beyond the immediate neighborhoods.

"When you are a completely new entity to a community, and we are, you need to reach as many people as possible," Smith said. "We've seen in Seminole that we tend to hold onto a much larger trade area, and the Race Track Road location has that possibility too."