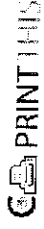


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One-stop shopping: Superstore features clothing, groceries

For Korean business giant Mega Mart's first foray into America, the company chose a destination with a large concentration of Asian residents.

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Staff Photo: Jason Braverman

Noh Chum Haw prepares steamed dumplings on Monday during a media event at Mega Mart at Gwinnett Place Mall. The superstore is set to open Friday.

DULUTH — For Korean business giant Mega Mart's first foray into America, the company chose a destination with a large concentration of Asian residents.

But the superstore that features groceries and clothing at Gwinnett's oldest mall isn't just catering to Korean customers.

"Here, we have everything," purchasing manager Mike Choi said at a tour Monday, the first chance for many of the media and local business officials to see the store that has driven excitement into the 26-year-old Gwinnett Place Mall.

Choi said that many of the local Asian markets feature only the fare from the Far East, driving both Asian and American consumers to two stores. Mega Mart has both — plus a second story filled with clothing and restaurant-style delis in three cuisines.

"You'll see Asian, American. You'll find it all," Choi said, pointing out that 60 percent of the groceries are American, and in the clothing area, much of the merchandise is made in the U.S.

"This isn't your typical Winn-Dixie," said Joe Allen, the director of the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District. The CID has been intent on improving the business atmosphere in the Pleasant Hill area, and Mega Mart, which is filling an anchor position at the mall left vacant for years, is expected to be a boon for the community.

"This really shows how international Gwinnett has become," Allen said. "It shows we've become a global destination. Who'd have thought that back in 1984 when this (mall) was just opening?"

With its opening slated for Friday, Choi said cabinet makers have been working from 7:30 a.m. to 3 a.m., and trucks are constantly dropping off products. At the doors, staffers are taking applications, as the store is expected to hire about 150 people.

"We felt this would be a great opportunity here in Gwinnett," Choi said of the venture nearly three years in the making. "We'll be able to hire, be able to give benefits to employees as well as to the neighborhood."

With 16 stores in Korea and three in China, Choi said Mega Mart is bringing a new concept to the Duluth community, where mothers can buy groceries as the kids shop for clothes or grab a bite to eat.

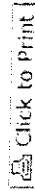
He stressed freshness, as he walked through the first-floor grocery. A special refrigerated room is expected to help leafy greens last longer, and people can get their fish filleted in front of them.

At the mall entrance, sushi is carried by conveyor belt to give people the opportunity to sample the offerings, and people can watch as their food is prepared at three delis — one Korean, one American and one Chinese.

"I think they've done a beautiful job in addressing this mall, and adapting this three-story building into a community center," Commissioner Shirley Lassetter said after touring the space. (The third floor is not part of Mega Mart and is used for offices.) "They certainly have something for everybody."

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