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## Pleasant Hill's Assi Plaza opens *Residents turn out for store's grand opening*

By **Jamie Ward**  
Staff Writer

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Staff Photo: Jamie Ward  
From left, mariachi band members Rigoberto Lopez, Jorge Santos Jr. and Salvadore El Tranquilo play to Asian patrons leaving Assi Plaza. The second internationally themed supermarket in Gwinnett opened its doors Friday on Pleasant Hill Road and was packed by noon.

burger joint?

There's also a panaderia, for lovers of Hispanic-made breads and baked goods, a Hispanic deli, as well as aisles for "Indo-Pak" and Asian staples like kimchi, sushi and sashimi.

A giant seafood market exists, too, with live crabs, lobsters, crawfish, catfish and tilapia just being a few of the sea creatures you can purchase live.

"It's a very unique shopping experience," Allen said. "It also created 180 jobs and represents a \$30 million investment in the community ... Gwinnett is a richly diverse community now and that's what they are tapping into. They're going after the melting pot."

That sentiment was echoed by state Rep. Pedro Marin of Norcross. At a preview opening Thursday night, he referred to Assi Plaza as Gwinnett's version of the Statue of Liberty.

"Gwinnett is one of the most diverse counties in the United States," Marin said. "This plaza is a symbol of what immigrants can do when given the chance to succeed. Whether from Asia, Africa, Europe or Latin America, we all have something good to offer the United States ... Today we recognize anything is possible in Gwinnett County. An empty building yesterday is today a vibrant center of commerce."

The opening was certainly welcomed by nearby resident Angela Cruz, a 14-year Gwinnettian who's from the Dominican Republic. She'd come to the strip mall to get something from a nearby beauty salon and was

DULUTH - First BrandsMart USA, now Assi Plaza - for the second Friday in a row Gwinnettians packed into a new store's official grand opening.

Located in Pleasant Hill Road space that once housed Wal-Mart, the 140,000-square-foot building is now home to Gwinnett's second Assi Plaza, which is considered America's largest international supermarket.

Another Assi store opened in 2005 at Satellite Boulevard and Old Peachtree Road. The stores are owned by Rhee Brothers Inc. based in Columbia, Md., and are one of the largest Asian food distributors in the world.

"I haven't seen the parking lot that full there since Christmas time around 1993," said Joe Allen, director of the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District of its newest retailer. "Assi Plaza is a wonderful addition to the diversity of our CID's shopping options."

By its product offerings, which predominantly capture Asian, Latin American and American food items, it appears Assi is out to target the diverse mix of ethnicities that call Gwinnett County home.

Why else would you have a food court complete with a Korean, Mexican, Vietnamese and Chinese restaurant, not to mention a

"I love it and they are having some great deals," Cruz said. "Usually I have to go three to four miles to do my shopping."

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