

# Supermarket opens in city without one

East Palo Alto residents like Mi Pueblo, hope for diversity

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by John Squire

The supermarket chain Mi Pueblo opened a 35,000-square-foot store in East Palo Alto last Saturday, filling a gaping shopping hole that has existed for three decades in the multicultural city.

"It looks first rate. The food looks fresh," customer Jim Olstad said Tuesday morning.

He stopped in to try the counter-service Mexican eatery inside the store.

"It might be a new favorite restaurant stop," he said.

The supermarket is located in the Ravenswood 101 Shopping Center off of U.S. Highway 101 and University Avenue. East Palo Alto's last full-service supermarket closed in the 1970s.

Brightly painted in primary colors on the outside, the new market on the inside features vibrant murals along its walls and strings of flags overhead.

Mi Pueblo's selection mirrors that of a traditional American supermarket, but with a focus on Hispanic food products. There are fresh concha pastries and large cases of meats, including pigs' feet, along with cereal, Coca Cola and neatly organized produce. There's even a small assortment of Asian foods.

This week, the atmosphere at the market seemed mild-mannered during the day. But Mi Pueblo came alive at dinner time, thanks to the smell of carnitas wafting out into the parking lot.

Many residents stopped by after work to pick up ingredients for dinner.

Gabriel Hernandez came all the way from Sunnyvale because he said this location has a better selection than the Mi Pueblo in Mountain View.

"We needed it for a long, long time," East Palo Alto Police Officer Tracy Frey said. "Older people come here. There are a lot of young families, too. You can imagine how hard it is to have to pack up, get in the car and drive to another city."

East Palo Alto residents said that before Mi Pueblo opened, they traveled to Redwood City, Mountain View or Menlo Park for simple grocery runs.

"Every time we had to go to the store, we had to go to San Antonio" Shopping Center in Mountain View, said Antwon Watts of East Palo Alto. But he said he dealt with racial profiling whenever he went there.

Questions about race have also been brought up with respect to Mi Pueblo. At an East Palo Alto

City Council meeting last month, some residents expressed fears that the market would cater only to Latino shoppers.

The city's population is approximately 59 percent Hispanic, 22 percent black, 7 percent Pacific Islander, 6 percent white, 4 percent Asian and the rest "other," according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

This week, some customers advocated for a racially mixed workforce at Mi Pueblo, saying it would be an important part of the grocery store's assimilation into the community.

"It would be nice if there were black people working there. It feels uncomfortable," said Grace Watts of East Palo Alto after a trip to the new grocery store.

"I think it's nice that it's coming in, as long as they hire minorities other than themselves," said Darrel Matkins, an East Palo Alto resident.

According to Perla Rodriguez, vice president of public affairs for Mi Pueblo, the company went "above and beyond" what was required when it was recruiting applicants. She said the company worked in tandem with the City of East Palo Alto, putting fliers up at City Hall and hosting English-speaking information sessions. Rodriguez said that despite heavy advertising, the sessions were poorly attended.

Nonetheless, more than 40 percent of the store's 200 employees are East Palo Alto residents, 5 percent more than the city required, Rodriguez said.

Mi Pueblo opened its first market in 1991 in San Jose. The East Palo Alto store, located in the former Circuit City space, is the chain's 14th location. The store is open 365 days a year from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m.

# Keep it simple, keep it green

Can the holidays be stress-free and carbon-neutral?

12/11/09

by John Squire

The holidays are stressful times. Luckily, making them environmentally friendly doesn't have to add any more pain. There are simple, eco-friendly ways to pick up a Christmas tree, put up lights, give and entertain that could even make the holidays easier.

Christmas trees have become complicated purchases in the last few years. Besides the standard cut and plastic trees, there are now organic and potted varieties. But according to Mike Bondi, an Oregon State University professor of forestry, buying an old-fashioned cut tree is still the best option.

Because cut trees are farmed, chopping them down doesn't hurt the ecosystem, Bondi said in a lecture last Saturday on the care and environmental benefits of Christmas trees, at Redwood City's Whole Foods. They pull in about 50 pounds of carbon dioxide each year, and it takes six to seven years for Christmas trees to grow to maturity.

And starting the day after Christmas, trees may be picked up with trash for three weeks — and they'll be composted, according to Susan Caudill of Palo Alto's Zero Waste program. Trees may also be dropped off at the landfill through Jan. 31, at no charge.

Though they can be cheaper, people should keep in mind that plastic trees last only five years or so and end up in the dump, Bondi said.

Potted trees can be replanted, but they need special care.

"It's a live organism. You can't get it warm or dried out like a cut tree. They're also very heavy," he said.

Organic trees cause other problems. Bondi said buying a Christmas tree is an aesthetic purchase, much like buying flowers. Organic trees can be a hard sell because without pesticides they have a better chance of being yellow or having bugs. There are also strict government standards growers have to deal with.

"There are only a few growers that can say they're organic," Bondi said. Organic trees are a new idea and there is still a chance they will catch on.

"Customers know what they want. If they want organic trees, we'll get them (next year)," said Nick Peterson, who works at Palo Alto High School's Christmas tree lot.

Many lots like the one at Paly get their trees from Oregon and Washington. One-third of all the trees bought in the U.S. come from the Pacific Northwest, Bondi said. Though most trees are shipped by truck, he estimated the 70 to 80 trees on each truck make the trip carbon-neutral.

Putting up lights typically takes a whole Saturday. With strings of LED lights, at least there isn't any searching for that one burnt-out bulb.

Recently, Palo Alto sent out a coupon for a free strand of LED lights. Residents can bring a coupon and a strand of incandescent lights to the Utilities Marketing Services office in City Hall (250 Hamilton Ave.). The coupon can be found at [cityofpaloalto.org/utilities](http://cityofpaloalto.org/utilities).

"The cost is going down. I saw them at the store for \$10 or \$12," said Joyce Kinnear, Palo Alto's Utility Services Manager. A strand of LED lights is still more expensive than incandescent lights, but it will last for years.

"They don't burn out. There's no need to replace them every few years," Kinnear said. "Personally, we replaced all of our lights a few years ago, just for safety."

There are many alternatives for gift wrap. Paper Source at Town and Country has colorful gift boxes made of thick cardboard. They're sturdy enough to last for years.

Items around the house could also make for good wrapping paper.

"You could make wrapping paper out of the Sunday comics. That's what my uncle used to do. That's how I always knew which gift was his," said Wendy Hediger, Palo Alto's Zero Waste coordinator.

She also recommended reusing gift bags every year.

"Be creative. That's the only thing that limits people," she said.

Some gifts don't need to be wrapped at all. Palo Alto's Zero Waste initiative is encouraging giving tickets and gift certificates.

"People should fight the urge to buy something at the store for everyone on their list," Hediger said. Experiential gifts are great ways to create lasting memories, and don't end up in the garage.

Ranging from lift tickets to museum passes, there's an experience out there for everyone.

"A lot of the time you're going out and doing things together, something that's lacking in society," Hediger said.

How "green" the gift is depends on the experience. A ski trip to Aspen or a safari in the Serengeti would be counterproductive, she said.

"Try to find lower-impact things closer to home. You have to be thoughtful," she said.

When company comes, things can get stressful fast. With a little planning, entertaining can be streamlined to incorporate green ideas.

"Make it part of the event, so it's not an onus," Hediger said. She recommended renting tableware for large parties and having the recycling somewhere where people can easily find it.

When buying for dinner, local seasonal food is some of the cheapest available.

Winter in the Bay Area is crab season. Dungeness crab and sourdough can make for a classic holiday dinner that's also local.

"Squash and root vegetables are in season," Susan Stansbury, Conexions executive director said. Conexions has put on a "100-mile Thanksgiving dinner" for the last few years. She doesn't recommend people jump headfirst into the "locavore" lifestyle, but she did encourage people to take the opportunity to try new things.

"Try what's new at the farmers market. Just put some thought into it," she said.

Stansbury said buying at farmers markets was the easiest way to eat locally, but stores such as Country Sun on California Avenue and Whole Foods label where their food comes from and have knowledgeable staff that can help people find local fare.

## Counties getting bigger doses of H1N1 vaccine

State to increase supply of vaccinations due to underserving Santa Clara and San Mateo counties in past shipments

by John Squire

Santa Clara and San Mateo counties are about to get larger doses of H1N1 vaccines because they have so far come up short in state allocations.

Both counties are now at the top of a priority list for receiving shipments of the "swine flu" vaccine, according to Robin Thaw, public information officer for the San Mateo County Public Health Department.

An internal e-mail stated that San Mateo County has only received 30 percent of its allotted vaccine doses and Santa Clara has received 33 percent, and would now be considered high priorities for the California Department of Public Health, which is in charge of distributing the vaccines, Thaw said.

Other California counties have received about 45 percent of what they requested, Thaw said.

But this weekend there will still be long lines of "priority" persons who should have H1N1 vaccinations due to the additional vaccine not arriving until later, according to Joy Alexiou, information officer for the Santa Clara County Public Health Department.

No lines are expected in San Mateo County, which requires residents to get vaccinated by their health care providers rather than through county vaccination clinics as in Santa Clara County.

"We feel this is the best strategy. There is no control with mass vaccinations. That's where a lot of the frustration comes from," Thaw said.

Santa Clara County residents waited in lengthy lines Saturday (Nov. 9), at the Santa Clara County Fairgrounds to get vaccinated. Alexiou said the clinic is for people don't have insurance and for those whose providers don't yet have the vaccine. Most of the vaccine is going to providers, she said.

Another special clinic is planned for this Sunday (Nov. 15) at the fairgrounds, and officials are asking residents to get there early and prepare to wait.

About 5,000 shots will be available on Sunday, and 500 to 1,000 shots will be available Saturday (Nov. 14) at Valley Health Centers across the county. Details are at [www.sccphd.org/](http://www.sccphd.org/).

The only people the county will vaccinate are pregnant women, children between 6 months and 24 years, people who live with or provide care to children younger than 6 months, and adults with medical conditions that put them at risk.