

food & dining

[Print Friendly View](#) [Email Article](#)

Shop downtown

By Ellen Sweets
 Denver Post Staff Writer
 Article Last Updated: 01/10/2007 12:37:27 AM MST

Nothing like having a cool new condo, flat, studio or townhouse in a hip urban area, replete with neighborhood restaurant, bar, cleaners, sports store, coffeehouse, grocery store and ... grocery store?

Did someone say "grocery store"?

Maybe it was Mike Zoellner, president of RedPeakProperties, which recently renovated 1600 Glenarm Place, a 31-story, 40-year-old landmark in the heart of downtown Denver.

The restored building, which had lain dormant for more than a decade, now encompasses 333 rental units, 21,650 square feet of retail space and a grocery store: Cook's Fresh Market.

The new, decidedly upscale emporium brings to downtown what it sorely lacked: a centrally located place to shop for food. And now downtowners have two: a Vitamin Cottage in the Central Platte Valley, and Cook's Fresh Market, relocated from the Tech Center to the heart of downtown.

At Cook's Fresh, you can buy onions, carrots, potatoes, eggs and milk, or Tibetan yak cheese, pheasant pate and Himalayan pink salt. You can sprinkle it on steaks, pork chops, lamb shanks or chicken breasts - which are available ready to cook or ready to eat.

An ongoing conversation

Cook's Fresh has also offered Jim Kirschheimer a moment to breathe easy. Kirschheimer is director of economic development for the Downtown Denver Partnership, a nonprofit organization dedicated developing and strengthening the city's economic core.

For at least as long as downtown residents have wondered how long it would take to get a grocery store, the Partnership has tried to make it happen. For this story, "downtown" is defined as the area bounded by Lincoln Street, Colfax Avenue, Speer Boulevard and 23rd Avenue. Only King Soopers at 14th and Speer has a store in the near vicinity.

"This conversation has been on the radar in a big way for at least two years," Kirschheimer says. "And the conversation continues in terms of more full-service amenities for people living, working and visiting downtown.

Denverite Zoellner says his company knew what it wanted to do with 1600 from the start.

"It was just heartbreaking to see this landmark building just sitting, unused," he says. "We knew that to make it work it had to have the right feel, the right balance.

"We did a national search of dozens of stores - including Dean & DeLuca in New York - but realized we had exactly what we wanted right here in Cook's Fresh. The more we thought about it, the more we realized we needed people who understood Denver."

Cook's Fresh Market relocated after deciding against a new lease that would have more than quadrupled its rent. Ed Janos owns the market with his wife Kristi. Both are formally trained chefs, and Ed is one of only 61 certified master chefs in the United States.

On a recently midweek afternoon, Ed Janos is catching his breath. He's recovering from a whirlwind lunch crunch, where customers waited, sometimes four deep, for made-to-order sandwiches. Cook's Fresh specializes in homemade food, from salads and soups to a noteworthy cheese selection and an impressive meat department with a real butcher.

Narrow aisles are stocked with exotic sodas, canned goods and all manner of nibbles for shoppers willing to spend a few extra bucks to avoid another stop on the way home.

Hamburger Helper



Bill Roehl, left, and couple Kristin and Ed Janos, owners of Cook's Fresh Market, 1600 Glenarm Street in downtown Denver, stand in front of their newly-opened store. Cook's Fresh Market is the first grocery store to open in downtown Denver and is located on the first floor of a newly renovated high-rise apartment building, also a downtown first. (Post / Glenn Asakawa)

Related
FD10_DOWNTOWN
Jan 10:
[Downtown recipes](#)



Shoppers pack the aisles and deli counter at Cook's Fresh Market on the first floor of a newly renovated high-rise apartment building. (Post / Glenn Asakawa)

versus elk tenderloins

A little farther north, a similar story has emerged.

Nineteen months ago, when Dawood Al Dulaimi opened Sarah's Market, a convenience store in the Platte River Valley, residents often depleted Dulaimi's stock of milk and cereal.

"Nobody cooks down here," he says. "They are all students and young office workers. They eat chips and salsa, pizza, eggs and bread. In the summer people are walking about and they stop for cigarettes. The kids from the skate park buy my water and soda."

Sure enough, his shelves reflect the buying habits of dorm life - Tuna Helper, SpaghettiOs, pasta and commercial sauces. The cooler is laden with sports drinks, soft drinks and bottled water.

But with the opening last month of a new 10,000-square-foot Vitamin Cottage at 15th and Platte streets, that has changed. Al Dulaimi will find out soon enough if those who bought Hamburger Helper really wanted natural and/or organic food instead. Otherwise he's stuck: he can't afford to move and he can't afford to stay.

Arborist Tim Herbst takes an estimated 4 minutes to get to the new Vitamin Cottage from his Highland residence. He's big into organics and is delighted at the now easy availability. Vitamin Cottage sells only organic foods and natural products. Herbst is having dinner across the street at Mona's.

"It used to take me up to 20 minutes to drive to Wadsworth and Alameda to get to a Whole Foods," he says. "I'll go to Safeway for a can of soup or something, but we try to eat organic if we can. Plus, Safeway is so big you're just another anonymous shopper. Vitamin Cottage is sort of like 'Cheers.' After a while you know the people who work and shop there."

Lindsay Perkin recently moved into the Platte River area to be close to downtown. She likens the Platte neighborhood to a little urban oasis.

"I work in the Tech Center and will commute from here," she says as she shops at the new Vitamin Cottage. "I live just across the parking lot (from Vitamin Cottage). It wasn't a plan, but it's handy."

And how many small grocers carry ostrich steaks and elk patties alongside frozen packages of ground lamb, organic chicken and grass-fed beef, anyway? Not many.

Linda and Garen Austin, who own Mona's, lived in the Platte River area until their family outgrew their house.

"When we opened in 2004, we really didn't know how much development was going on," Garen Austin says. "My Brother's Bar was pretty much all there was. Then Sushi Sasa, Proto's (Pizzeria Napoletana), House of Commons (Tea Room), Savory Spice all came along. There's a whole new energy going on here, and Vitamin Cottage will be a real complement."

Which is what the planners at Vitamin Cottage hoped would be the case. Marketing director Nancy Flynn says there is a formula that determines when managers consider a site a good one.

"We look at a number of factors, including demographics, population density, disposable income, how many families versus how many singles," she says.

The area's demographic comprises a mix of young and old, not exactly rich, but not exactly poor, residents.

"We weren't necessarily looking for high-end," Flynn says. "We want to be available to all income groups."

"Obviously location is a major consideration. We wouldn't put a store in the middle of a subdivision, but where there are other draws, such as a post office, Blockbuster, or proximity to some other services, that would be an attractive option."

Requests from shoppers can have an impact too.

"If we have a lot of requests, that cues us to a particular area," she says. "But we also ask questions: How easy is city to work with? Are they looking to increase tax base? Is their location on our distribution route?"

When completed, the rest of the space formerly occupied by Shakespeare's Pub and Billiard Bar, will have a raw food restaurant and yoga center.

David Zucker lives in Evergreen but works in nearby Jefferson Park. He's stopping on the way home.

"It's about time there was a grocery store in this area," he says. "I can imagine the big boys, King Soopers and Safeway and those guys, will be keenly interested in seeing how well this store does. With all the condo development still going on around here, this is the sort of thing that makes a community."

Calls to Safeway, which has a store at 20th and Clarkson streets, were not returned, but Dave Savage, vice president of retail for King Soopers, says marketing growth strategies are considered proprietary, so he can't comment on the company's plans.

"We're always looking for locations that will provide service to our customers," he says. "Currently we don't have anything we would disclose in the downtown area, but we do have two stores near downtown at 9th and Corona and 13th and Speer."

Developer Zoellner likes to say that retail follows rooftops. In other words, if you build it, they will shop.

Staff writer Ellen Sweets can be reached at 303-954-1284 or esweets@denverpost.com.

Where to shop for food downtown

Chez Cheese Gourmet Market

1512 Larimer St.

303-825-3122

Cook's Fresh Market

1600 Glenarm Place (on the 16th Street Mall)|303-893-2277|cooksfreshmarket.com