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# DESIREE COOPER: Store may become a building block

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BY DESIREE COOPER  
FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

In the barren shopping desert of Detroit and Highland Park, a new store rains down both hope and hesitancy: Will the prices be exorbitant? Will the products be shoddy? Will the management bunker behind bulletproof glass?

So when Glory supermarket opened in Highland Park on Aug. 1, it's no surprise that some said glory hallelujah, while others took bets on how long it would be before the new store hightailed it to greener pastures.

When the Model T Plaza opened in 1997, it was only the second strip mall in Highland Park. Its anchor store was Farmer Jack, a wide-eyed, Jonah's belly of a market that heralded the city's re-entry into the First World.

But to stem red ink, Farmer Jack closed 13 southeast Michigan stores last year -- including the one in Highland Park. Customers took it personally.

"In this area, it's reasonable to wonder if another store will move in to take its place," said Detroit resident Joseph Jackson, 81, who had shopped at that Farmer Jack regularly. "I've seen too many businesses leave us behind."

The store converted into Food Basics, a bare-bones shopping wholesaler.

"You had to bring your own bags," said Catherine Ruffin, 66, also from Detroit. "I wasn't too pleased."

When Food Basics closed in July, shoppers had long begun to scatter, undertaking unreasonable journeys in search of the most ordinary experiences: fresh produce, short checkout lines and shopping carts that you can wheel to your car.

Food Basics was closed 15 days before it reopened as Glory. It's the third and largest Glory store in the area -- the other two are in Detroit.

"Meijer refused to come; Kmart left," said Glory store manager Linda Dickow. "We're happy to be here."

Theft was a major problem under the previous owners, she said. The shopping baskets seem to vaporize in the parking lot, but she's removed the barriers anyway.

Customer service is her primary concern, she said.

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Glory's new customers, who come primarily from downtown, Wayne State University and other parts of Detroit and Hamtramck, are as tenuous as twice-scorned lovers.

"I'm not staying if I don't like the meats," said one woman shopping with her daughter Monday. She went in, liked what she saw and stayed.

"I wasn't coming because I heard they were Arab," said an African-American man, airing the tension between the black community and Chaldean grocers. But, he decided to shop there anyway.

Dickow ignores the stereotypes.

"We have 74 employees and 52 are African American," she said. "We have 210 feet of dairy space – that's unseen in Detroit. And we have the biggest line of meats in Highland Park and Detroit – 95 feet."

The floors are spotless, the lighting bright, the produce fresh and the shelves well-stocked.

People from all walks of life shop the aisles. It has the uncanny feel of ... normalcy.

"Our money's here but the businesses aren't," said Jackson on his first trip to Glory. "But maybe things are changing."

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