

THE CITY

City buzzing about Costco opening

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TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

SAINT JOHN – Like most area residents you talk to these days, Bob and Betty Fergus of Grand Bay-Westfield are counting down the days until Atlantic Canada's largest Costco opens its doors at East Point Shopping.

"I can hardly wait," Betty says. "We're both Costco members and we're very excited about it coming here."

"It's about time. I'm tired of travelling to (Costco) in Moncton," said Dave McCutcheon of Browns Flat.

"You say it's opening on May 27? I'll be there."

But the convenience of having Costco in Saint John, while welcome, isn't the only thing that excites Saint John Board of Trade president Imelda Gilman as the wholesale giant readies to cast its shadow on the city's retail landscape.

It will also help market Saint John as a retail destination, she said.

"There is a buzz about Costco because we have a diverse and vibrant retail community in Saint John, which has been growing over the last couple of years," Gilman said.

"From a business point of view, it will help keep shoppers in Saint John so they don't have to travel to shop at Costco. We hope it will attract other shoppers from our region to come not only to Costco, but other retailers in the community.

"Competition is good," she said. "So, I think what we have seen from our point of view, especially in the eastern part of the city and now, with retail growth on the west side, we have more selection and shops to go to. And from our organi-



Imelda Gilman

zation's point of view, we see ourselves as a retail destination — and we want to promote our community now as a retail destination."

Saint John, she said, is a beautiful city with a rich history that has already become a cruise ship destination.

"Now, we would like to see promotion of the city as retail destination," she said.

"We can tell people to come and take in a performance at the Imperial Theatre or a Sea Dogs hockey game, to go shopping and eat at some nice restaurants. We think we have the whole package."

East Point developer Troy Northrup, as well as ordinary citizens who commented, said Gilman is on the right track.

"It is certainly exciting and invigorating to see the excitement of people (when

it comes to Costco)," he said. "Prior to the opening date being announced, you didn't seem to be able to go anywhere without being asked when it was going to open."

He said it makes sense for the city to cash in on what is happening in retail here.

"I think the momentum that has been built, and the continued momentum, will reshape shopping," Northrup said, noting that at 142,000 square feet the east side Costco will be 58 per cent bigger than Home Depot, and considerably larger than its cousin in Moncton.

Geography alone, Northrup said, should mean more people from Fredericton, Sussex and Charlotte County coming to shop here.

The Ferguses, who bought their original Costco membership in Halifax when Bob used to travel there for work, are rabid fans of the Costco experience.

"At Christmastime, we do a lot of shopping at Costco," Betty said. "It's especially good for big families. With bulk buying, it works really well for them. A lot of savings."

The Ferguses said all their friends are anxiously awaiting the opening of the Saint John store.

So are member Sharon Melanson and her friend Barb McKenna, a non-member, who plans to avoid lining up her for a membership — good at all Costco outlets — by dropping by the Moncton store sometime this spring.

"I love to buy bulk things," Melanson said.

"And you get giftware at Costco you can't get anywhere else."

Monique and Dan LeBlanc of Millidgeville plan to sign up, too, saying



CINDY WILSON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

The largest Costco in Atlantic Canada is set to open its doors on May 27 on the east side of Saint John. Job fairs to hire 100 employees will be held on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

they're excited to see Saint John get its own Costco.

"Maybe we'll compete with Moncton for a change," Monique said. "Fredericton people may come down here rather than to Moncton."

Count on it, says Roslayn Flynn of Lakewood Heights.

"I think they will do fine," she said. "I have kids in Bathurst and Fredericton and they both can't wait until it opens. They come down (to visit) every month. I don't think it's going to hurt anyone else in the area, either. It's just going to bring more people in."

But east side resident Joe Kelley said he doubts very much if they'll ever see him at Costco.

"It doesn't really matter to me one

way or another," he says. "I haven't been to Moncton to shop at Costco and I don't plan to go here. You have to shop in bulk and pay a fee. I have no interest in that."

But even he thinks it will end up attracting more people to the city and will make work for others.

Gary Swindells, vice-president of operations for Costco, said the company plans to hire 100 employees. Entry-level positions start at \$11 an hour, with the potential to rise to more than \$22 an hour.

Job fairs are scheduled for the Costco warehouse from Friday to Sunday. The hours are noon to 8 p.m. on Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday and 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Sunday.