

## **Meijer opens its doors in Waukesha**

**Store will be open 24/7**

**By Chris Bucher**

Freeman Staff

WAUKESHA — Saul Rocha stood in silence as he eyed his new school supplies, which filled his brand-new backpack to the brim.

He let his ear-to-ear grin do the talking.

Rocha, a fifth-grader participating in La Casa de Esperanza's summer program, was one of 20 students who attended Meijer's ribbon-cutting ceremony Tuesday at 831 E. Sunset Drive.

Rocha and his La Casa classmates were the recipients of a shopping spree following the ribbon cutting, encouraged by Meijer staff to fill their new backpacks as they crossed items off their school supplies lists.

"I'm very excited," Rocha said. "(I enjoyed) getting all of these materials for free (the most)."

The shopping spree was just one of the many activities planned during the Midwest-based chain's official grand opening at its new 192,000-square-foot supercenter.

Waukesha Mayor Shawn Reilly said he was thrilled to be one of the speakers at the event and was even more excited at the possibilities that Meijer, which is based out of Grand Rapids, Mich., creates for the city.

"I think it will continue to encourage redevelopment along East Sunset Drive for years and years to come," Reilly said. "Meijer has already proven itself to be a great community partner; they've been a supporter of our Tribute Tuesdays, which is a concert series down at Cutler Park ... Meijer has also helped with the Christmas parade. They helped not just this year, but also last year. They came in at pretty much the last second and made the Christmas parade possible."

### **Planning more community involvement**

Prior to the ribbon cutting, Store Director Phil Kelley spoke, extending gratitude to the Waukesha community. He said the store has plans to be as involved in the community as possible.

"We donate 7 percent of our net profits to charitable organizations," Kelley said. "We also help to fight hunger through our Simply Give program, which has generated over \$24 million to help support our food pantry partners throughout the Midwest. We are going to be partnering with the local Waukesha food pantry this fall for our fall Simply Give program."

Kelley presented a check for \$25,000 from Meijer to the city of Waukesha to help fund improvements at the Les Paul Performance Center, Cutler Park and Waukesha Public Library.

### **'Everybody's a potential customer'**

Meijer CEO Hank Meijer said he felt honored to join the Waukesha community in opening the new supercenter.

"We think of Milwaukee as a major metropolitan area, but you don't appreciate how unique Waukesha is and that's what I've started to learn," Hank Meijer said. "I know there were some challenges with the rezoning and site plan approval but we sure try our best to think about neighbors' concerns over lighting, traffic and all of that stuff; we just hope people are pleased."

He added that the goal of his chain is to create a shopping atmosphere that doesn't cater to any specific socioeconomic group.

"We're a bit of an anomaly in the sense that everyone's a potential customer," Hank Meijer said. "We don't want anybody to say, 'Gee, I'd like to go to Meijer but it's so expensive,' because we want to compete on prices with everybody. We also want to have the type of quality where you say, 'Gee, I don't need to go to a higher-priced alternative.' So everybody's a potential customer."

As Hank Meijer finished assisting a La Casa student zip up her new backpack, he said he takes great pride in his company reaching out and extending a hand to those who may need it within the community.

"It's essential," he said. "That's what makes it so rewarding. If somebody can leave this store — these kids will be the ultimate example of that — feeling like their day's a little brighter because of some encounter they've had with a team member, finding something they're looking for, that's what makes it worthwhile."

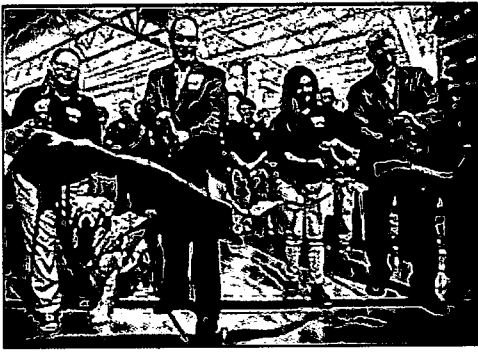
The new store is open 24 hours a day and features a gas station, a drive-thru pharmacy, an expansive garden center, a traditional butcher shop environment and more. In honor of its grand opening, Meijer will have special promotions and events to commemorate the grand opening beginning Thursday.

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Meijer CEO Hank Meijer checks out Nina Perez's school supply list as he helps her get supplies at Meijer on Tuesday.

Charles Auer/Freeman Staff



From left, Anita Nelson, with her leader dog Queen, Store Director Phil Kelley, Esmeralda Jaramillo and Meijer CEO Hank Meijer cut the ribbon for the new Waukesha Meijer store on Tuesday.