

Costco opens today

Development New store will draw people into city, mayor says

APRIL CUNNINGHAM
TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

SAINT JOHN - Atlantic Canada's largest Costco store opens its doors today. It's a retail project that's been more than a decade in the making.

The 142,000-square-foot store on the city's east side will be a mecca for people who want good prices, says Mayor Ivan Court, who plans to wear his royal robes and solid gold chain of office to the ribbon-cutting this morning.

"I expect people from St. Stephen, from Fredericton and from Sussex will all be drawn to Saint John," he said Wednesday, adding he already has an executive \$100 membership.

"When they're in town, they'll be going to our restaurants, going to our stores, probably shopping in other businesses in the east side of the city."

Employees were putting finishing touches on displays and making sure the store looked its best Wednesday afternoon in preparations for a VIP event later in the evening, said Gary Swindells, Costco's vice-president of regional operations.

"It's been so many weeks of preparing," he said over the phone. "Finally we get to offer the product that everybody's been waiting for. It feels good. I'm anxious to open the doors."

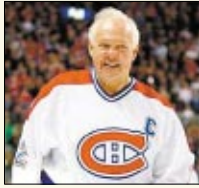
Lorelle Gilpin, Costco's vice-president of marketing, has made the trip from Costco Canada's head office in Ottawa to prepare for the grand opening.

"We're expecting a huge crowd. We think sales will be terrific," Gilpin said of today's grand opening.

"We've got really good indications from the people who are currently members and from the new members that they're looking forward to shopping opening day."

The store has already sold around 5,000 memberships, he said, with the aim of eventually selling up to 40,000.

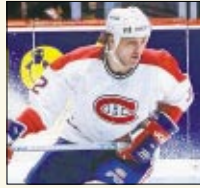
Annual business memberships cost \$50. It costs \$55 for a gold star member-



Yvan Cournoyer



Dale Hawerchuk



Claude Lemieux



Petr Svoboda

Hockey fans in for treat at opening

SAINT JOHN - Among the many treats awaiting consumers who flock to Costco's grand opening today will be an autograph-signing session with some of hockey's elite players, headed by Yvan Cournoyer and Dale Hawerchuk.

The hall of famers will be joined Claude Lemieux and Petr Svoboda, who also made their marks at the National Hockey League and international levels.

Cournoyer is part of hockey's royalty - a Conn Smythe Trophy winner in 1973 who collected 10 Stanley Cup rings with the Montreal Canadiens. Nicknamed "The Roadrunner" for his blazing speed, he amassed 863 points, including 428 goals, during his career.

Hawerchuk was the face of the Winnipeg Jets franchise, beginning in 1982 when he was named the NHL's top rookie. He also played a pivotal role in Canada's memorable Canada Cup victory in 1987. His credentials - 518 goals and 1,409 points - earned him entry into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 2001.

To today's TV viewers, Lemieux is known for his appearance on CBC's *Battle of the Blades*.

To hockey fans, the forward who played with an edge to his game was an exceptional playoff performer, winning four Stanley Cups, a Conn Smythe Trophy in 1995 and placing ninth all-time with 80 playoff goals.

Svoboda was a gifted defenceman who played

on Montreal's Stanley Cup-winning team in 1986. His career highlights include a gold medal at the 1998 Winter Olympics when he scored the game's only goal in the Czech Republic's historic 1-0 victory over Russia in the final.

The autograph session, which runs from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., will also highlight the introduction of MOOV Frozen Foods - the NHL's official frozen fruit - at Costco. Lemieux and Svoboda are partners with Montreal businessmen Platon Gavrielatos and Steve Zervoudakis in the new Canadian company that packages, markets and distributes frozen fruit under the MOOV label.

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KATE BRAYDON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

The shelves of Costco are stacked and ready for today's big opening. The big-box store on the east side is Atlantic Canada's biggest Costco.

IT'S A SIGN THAT SAYS WHAT WE'RE DOING IN THIS REGION IS PAYING DIVIDENDS."

BOB MANNING

ship and \$100 for executive.

After a massive job fair in March, the store hired about 130 employees from the Saint John area. Another 72 workers were transferred from other stores.

For Bob Manning, the chairman of Enterprise Saint John, the store opening is just another indicator the city is moving in the right direction.

"A retailer of this size and scope would not pick to locate its largest facility in Atlantic Canada in a community like the greater Saint John region without having done their due diligence and making

sure this was a community on the rise," he said.

"It's a sign that says what we're doing in this region is paying dividends."

It also means shoppers will be drawn to Saint John, which has the largest square-footage of retail space in New Brunswick, he said.

And for Manning - a father of five children under the age of 16 - a Costco will be a big help.

When he lived in New Jersey, Manning said his Costco membership paid for itself in diapers and baby wipes.

"When I moved back to this region, our family was quite disappointed there wasn't a Costco. It really suits what we need as a large family."

Selling everything from fresh meat and produce to electronics and appliances, East Point Shopping's anchor store is expected to be a draw for many more families across the province.

East Point developer Troy Northrup said the first time he spoke to Costco officials about coming to Saint John was in 1997. Since then, he's worked with several politicians and business officials to attract the retail giant.

"It's going to be a really exciting day for southern New Brunswick and the province," he said Wednesday about the store opening.

"This is a great example of a community working together for an end goal."

The Saint John Costco is 25,000 square feet bigger than the one in Moncton. It's the centrepiece of Northrup's development, which started in 2006, carved out of the side of a rugged hill of shale and quartz.

Swindells said a Costco for Fredericton is already in the works.

"It's in the plan, but right now there's stuff that needs to be happening with the city of Fredericton," he said.

With files from Karissa Donkin



KATE BRAYDON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

Widescreen TVs are ready for shoppers who will stream through the doors at Costco today.



KATE BRAYDON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

Products galore fill the shelves at the Costco at East Point Shopping. Costco executive Lorelle Gilpin says store officials are expecting a huge crowd for today's opening.

SAINT JOHN JOURNAL

Safety

Traffic measures set for Costco opening

A number of traffic measures have been implemented ahead of Costco's grand opening today. Wireless technology is being installed at the intersection of Ashburn Lake Road and Rothesay Avenue so that lights can change according to traffic flow. A raised apron has been installed on Ashburn Lake Road at the intersection, so that large trucks can make the right-hand turn from Rothesay Avenue and avoid waiting for traffic to clear on Ashburn Lake Road. Traffic signals have been installed at the Costco entrance on Retail Drive, and a number of improvements have been made to Westmorland Road.