



POLITICS

Coakley, Baker show
emotional side



SPORTS

World Series buzz is
gone, but it's still pretty
good



BUSINESS

Partners chic
trail of resist

Grocers piling in to Fenway amid new urban competition

By Taryn Luna

| GLOBE CORRESPONDENT OCTOBER 29, 2014



MATTHEW J. LEE/GLOBE STAFF

Arlen Smith and her daughter Naimah, 6, shopped at the remodeled Star Market in the Fenway.

For nearly two decades, Marco Baldassarre reluctantly shopped at a rundown Shaw's because it was the only supermarket in the Fenway neighborhood other than a pricey Whole Foods store.

Now the Fenway is on the verge of becoming a sort of grocery paradise, and Baldassarre, 37, is excited to shop around and find new supermarkets with the best prices.

CONTINUE READING BELOW ▼

“It’s good to have options,” Baldassarre said. “Fenway went for so long without having any attention that people just settled for Shaw’s.”

As unlikely as it might have seemed just a few years ago, grocery wars are about to break out in the shadow of the Green Monster.

Target Corp. plans to offer a full grocery section at its massive, 160,000-square-foot urban concept store that is scheduled to open near Star Market next year. To the delight of neighborhood foodies, Wegmans plans to open a 75,000-square foot supermarket in

the redeveloped Landmark Center in the next few years. Star Market recently unveiled a long overdue renovation of its Fenway supermarket ahead of the competition's arrival.

“What’s happening in Fenway is the next generation of development in Boston,” said Kairos Shen, director of planning at the Boston Redevelopment Authority. “Not only do you have a good market, but a competitive market that is raising the bar for everyone.”

Why the sudden attraction to Fenway? The migration of residents from the suburbs back to urban areas is creating more building projects, more residential units, and more grocery stores in the neighborhood, as well as other parts of Boston.

Developers are building 700 new apartments and condominiums in the Fenway, with another 1,500 in the pipeline. Grocers want to locate stores where people live, but also require particular kinds of spaces. Now developers are providing those footprints for the first time in years, Shen said.

“In the past, there weren’t buildings in sight that were appropriate for these kinds of grocery or Target stores because they had very exact physical requirements,” Shen said. “These are brand-new buildings that are tailored specific to grocery stores and that is making it attractive.”



MATTHEW J. LEE/GLOBE STAFF

Kevin Lowe of Boston looked at beer choices at the new Star Market.

The influx of supermarkets is great for consumers. With more places to shop, prices will probably drop and the quality of the stores will improve as grocers vie for their business.

It is a drastic change from the days when most Boston residents, in the Fenway and beyond, often had just a few neighborhood shopping options. Those choices were typically Shaw's and Star Market or Stop & Shop.

Now WalMart is creeping in closer to the city with a new Saugus location. Wegmans is expanding its urban presence and Roche Bros., a grocer that has built its business in the suburbs, plans to open a store at a premium location at Downtown Crossing.

“Everyone is selling groceries today, from the convenience store to the gas station to Walmart and to Target,” said Joe Kelley, president of Stop & Shop in New England. “It’s intense and it’s competitive.”

The Quincy company has more stores in the state than any other grocery chain, and the largest market share in the Northeast. Kelley said one key way to protect his business is to make sure customers are satisfied with the store experience and prices, well ahead of the arrival of new grocers.

New competition in the Fenway could spell trouble for Star Market, according to Edgar Dworsky, who runs the consumer education site ConsumerWorld.org. “Wegmans is going to give them a real run for their money,” Dworsky said.

Wegmans supermarkets are packed with hot-food bars that serve everything from enchiladas to artichoke flan to Indian cuisine. The Rochester, N.Y., chain also features food counters offering grab-and-go items like pizza, sandwiches, sushi, and soup. Dworsky expects the prepared meals to be very popular among many of the neighborhood’s young residents who want something quick and easy.

Fenway grocery offerings



SOURCE: Individual companies

JAMES ABUNDIS/GLOBE STAFF

But Jim Rice, president of Shaw’s & Star Markets, said the grocery chain is starting to turn around under its new owners, New Albertsons Inc. Nine stores have been renovated so far this year and work on another 24 will be complete before the end of the fiscal year.

The previous owner, Supervalu Inc., had invested little in the chains, which are both at least 100 years old.

“Over the years we might have lost some customers and perhaps chased them away,” Rice said. “We know we can’t change perceptions immediately, but we’re doing a lot of things to make the stores better.”

Shaw's recently dropped prices on 7,000 items to be more competitive, and the higher-end Star Market locations, including the Fenway store, are also trying to win back business.

Many shoppers who attended a recent Fenway Star Market grand opening described the store's prerenovation atmosphere as "dingy" and cramped. Those shoppers said they were pleased with the new store, which features a more open layout, thousands of natural and organic products, new food bars, and an alcohol aisle.

Despite growing competition in the Fenway, other grocers are still eager to find a space. Kelley, the Stop & Shop executive, called the neighborhood a very attractive market.

"We would love to have a store down there," he said. "If one becomes available, we'd be in there tomorrow."

Taryn Luna can be reached at taryn.luna@globe.com. Follow her on Twitter [@TarynLuna](https://twitter.com/TarynLuna).

SHOW 6 COMMENTS