

The Washington Post

New Prince George's Wegmans becoming a social hot spot

By Ovetta Wiggins
Washington Post Staff Writer
Thursday, February 17, 2011; 12:38 AM

He slid next to Randi Frazier while she was eyeing the fresh fish. He had his eyes on something else.

"How are you?" Frazier remembered him asking. She politely replied: "Good."

He told her he was from the area. An awkward silence ensued. "Maybe you can take my number?" he said.

"Sorry," said Frazier, of Capitol Heights, her shoulder-length black hair brushing against her gray wool jacket. "I'm married."

It wasn't the first time Frazier had fended off a request for her number since shopping at the new Wegmans in Prince George's County.

Indeed, Georgetown may have the "Social Safeway," but Prince George's has what many have dubbed "Club Wegmans." Singles hook up in front of bins of fresh produce; couples gather for dates in the grocery store's sit-down restaurant; and shoppers sway to music from overhead speakers, singing along with Prince, Luther Vandross and Teena Marie.

"[One] Saturday night, I saw a couple hand-dancing to a Rafael Saadiq song," said Ayana

Douglas, the store manager, who plays R&B and smooth jazz on the store's sound system. "The couple was getting their boogie on."

Douglas brought in a live jazz band during the store's grand opening in October. After getting requests for more live music, she has decided to occasionally bring bands in on Friday nights.

"This is not your average supermarket," Kelly Webster of Upper Marlboro said one Friday night.

Webster, who has been in a relationship with his girlfriend, Andi Austin, for four years, said he has watched men approach women at Wegmans. "This is the new spot."

Austin, also of Upper Marlboro, smiled at what her boyfriend had to say. "Men will

Advertisement

Kodak

Bring in any old printer to

BEST BUY and save an additional

\$50 off any new Kodak Printer

3193 S Veterans Parkway
Springfield, 217-698-8551

1450 Koester Drive
Forsyth, 217-875-2418

OFFER EXPIRES 2/19/2011

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/16/AR2011021607354_pf.html

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

The Washington Post

New Prince George's Wegmans becoming a social hot spot

meet [a woman] anywhere," she said. "Especially when you don't have to spend any money."

In the competitive grocery industry, today's stores have expanded far beyond being places where people run in for a quick gallon of milk or to fill the weekly shopping list. In some ways, they have come full circle to the general stores of old: They're community gathering spaces that enlarge the idea of one-stop shopping.

WiFi encourages people to linger with their laptops. Flat-panel televisions lure locals to watch the news or a basketball game. Fireplaces and comfortable chairs invite book clubs to meet. Restaurants offer gourmet meals.

Supermarkets "have to meet customers' needs and have what customers want," said Karen Thomas, a spokeswoman for the Food Marketing Institute trade group. Some stores hold cooking classes and offer children's programs, she added.

Both the new Wegmans and the Social Safeway have lounges.

"It's definitely a meeting destination," said Craig Muckle, a Safeway spokesman.

Last month, the Safeway hosted a brief performance of "Stomp" - a percussion show

that recently played the Warner Theatre - as part of a fundraiser for a food bank, Muckle said.

The store is also considering having ballroom dancing and a reunion event for couples who met there.

"Social Safeway is what our customers have called us, and I guess we have played to that," Muckle said.

Elizabeth Ribarsky, who teaches interpersonal communications at the University of Illinois in Springfield, said singles making connections in grocery stores is not a new phenomenon. But, she said, it is becoming increasingly popular because people feel safe approaching each other there.

"There is a lot of opportunity to open conversations without things that you would

Advertisement



Send flowers for any occasion
Bouquets
 from **\$19.99** +s/h
 ProFlowers
 Offer ONLY available at:
proflowers.com/happy
 or call 1.877.804.1133

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/16/AR2011021607354_pf.html

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

The Washington Post

New Prince George's Wegmans becoming a social hot spot

think of as a pickup line," said Ribarsky, who teaches a class about dating. It is called the "me, too" phenomenon," she said.

A woman might pick up a steak, she said, and a man might comment: "I like that same kind of steak," or "You like that? Me, too."

On a recent Friday night at Wegmans, George Raymond Jarvis Jr., 63, of Upper Marlboro dropped the tongs at the hot Asian food bar, left his plate and slid across the floor to his wife, Maureen, while Eric Marner and Hearsay, a five-piece jazz ensemble, opened its second set with a Gap Band classic.

"How about some 'Outstanding' in the supermarket - come on!" said Marner, a saxophonist.

Jarvis tried to encourage his wife to join him in doing the bump in front of the chicken lo mein and egg rolls but had no success.

Marner, who has played at the Lanham store four times since it opened, said the store has a very "laid-back atmosphere," especially in the cafe, where the band plays.

Marner, whose repertoire includes the Steve Miller Band's "Fly Like An Eagle" and Luther Vandross's "Never Too Much," said the decision to include live music may have led to the store's nickname.

"Part of it may be my fault," Marner said during a phone interview.

"The first time we were there, we were grooving. We were grooving kind of hard. And I said, 'Welcome to Club Wegmans. Did you ever think you could hear music like that in a supermarket?' I didn't realize that someone was paying attention."

Jo Natale, a spokeswoman for Rochester, N.Y.-based Wegmans, said local papers have voted one of the company's smaller stores in New York as the best place for singles to meet.

"There have been lots of romances that have started over the meat case and the produce department," Natale said, noting that Wegmans has hosted a couple of weddings over the years.

Advertisement



HEARTLAND QUALITY
OMAHA STEAKS
SINCE 1917

SAVE
up to **64%**
to

Plus, get
3 FREE Gifts

Special Code: 45069ZWN

To order: www.OmahaSteaks.com/print71
or call 1-877-605-0496

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/16/AR2011021607354_pf.html

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

The Washington Post

New Prince George's Wegmans becoming a social hot spot

That's why Gale Bullock, who buses tables in the cafe, wasn't surprised to hear that the Lanham store has built a reputation beyond its bakery and meals on the go.

She said she has seen men sit down and check out the room. "Next thing I know, I hear, 'Hi. How are you doing?' . . . 'I work out at this gym.' . . . 'Can I give you my number?'"

Naomi Johnson of Fort Washington, who ran into the store to pick up a few items, called it all a "solid strategy" when she heard about the popularity of Wegmans as a social hot spot.

Her mind still taking the news in, Johnson rattled off some of the pros of meeting in Wegmans. "You have to have a car to get here," she said. "And depending on what area the person is shopping, they have to have a little bit of money. . . .

"Maybe I need to stop wearing jeans and sneaks when I come in and think about the attitude on my face."

wigginsovetta@washpost.com Prince George's County bureau manager Jillian Sowah contributed to this report.

Advertisement



DIRECTV has more of what you want to watch!

Switch today!

1-888-778-0985

NO EQUIPMENT TO BUY!
NO STARTUP COSTS!

Offer ends 2/11. Credit card required (except in MA & PA). New approved customers only (lease required). \$19.95 Handling & Delivery fee may apply. Applicable use tax adjustment may apply on the retail value of the installation. Call for details.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/16/AR2011021607354_pf.html

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™