

# Great Expectations

## Wal-Mart's largest Kentucky supercenter opens Wednesday

05/22/05

By [Keith Lawrence](#)  
Messenger-Inquirer

You have to forgive Jim Wheatley if he's a little excited these days.

After working at five Wal-Mart stores in the last seven years, including a stint as manager of the Morganfield store, the 36-year-old Madisonville native is now manager of the state's newest -- and largest -- Wal-Mart Supercenter.

The 222,732-square-foot store at 3151 Kentucky 54 opens at 8 a.m. Wednesday.

"I'm here to stay," Wheatley said. "This is going to be home."

People, he said, are always asking if the Frederica Street store will close.

**Sales  
associate  
Chrystal  
Ward  
organizes  
chairs for a  
Memorial  
Day display  
Wednesday  
in the lawn  
and garden  
department  
in the new  
Wal-Mart  
Supercenter.  
Photos by  
John  
Dunham, M-I**

"It won't," Wheatley said. "The main reason Wal-Mart puts a second store into a community is to improve customer service and shorten lines."

Generally, he said, a second Wal-Mart will cut the business of the existing store in half.

But then, Wheatley said, both stores will begin growing.

The 200,000-square-foot Frederica Street store usually ranks in the top 10 percent of Wal-Mart stores nationally in sales.

And with a smaller parking lot, it didn't have much room to grow.

The new store, according to documents filed with the Owensboro Metropolitan Planning Commission, will have 1,035 parking spaces and a fuel center -- the company's first in Owensboro.

"If you use a Wal-Mart credit card or gift card, you'll save 3 cents a gallon," Wheatley said. "And the price is already about the lowest in town."

Wheatley is especially proud of his lawn and garden center.

"I'm not sure of the square footage," he said. "But it's huge. It's the largest in the area -- and it's almost totally enclosed."

The store, which is open 24 hours a day, 364 days a year, employs 410 people. The current mix is 80 percent full time and 20 percent part time.

But the company average is 70-30. And Wheatley said the new store will probably settle in at that level after a few months.

He's not sure how many items are on his shelves. But Wheatley said just getting all the shelves in place was a three-day undertaking.

It took 52 tractor-trailer rigs just to haul in the shelving, he said. Another 40 to 50 trucks have hauled in merchandise, and the grocery section hasn't been fully stocked yet.

**Technician  
Kris  
Marshall  
sweeps the  
floor as  
service  
manager  
Randy Clark  
raises the  
bay doors  
at the Tire &  
Lube**

**Express in  
the new  
Wal-Mart  
Supercenter  
at 3151  
Kentucky  
54. The  
222,732-  
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Kentucky --  
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a.m.  
Wednesday.**

The new supercenter has three bays for oil changes and three for tires. And one of the bays is large enough to handle recreational vehicles -- another first for Wal-Mart here.

"This store will draw people from Beaver Dam, Leitchfield, Hancock County, southern Indiana and eastern Daviess County," Wheatley said.

But he also expects people from other parts of the county -- and the region -- to check out the new store on Memorial Day weekend.

Grand opening specials range from 24 cans of Pepsi for \$4.98 to a 42-inch plasma screen HDTV for \$1,900.

Also unique to the Kentucky 54 store are a drive-through pharmacy with interactive TV screens, a hearing center and a "home organization section."

"We're putting everything to do with the home in one section," Wheatley said. "If you're moving, you can find the packing tape, bubble wrap, furniture blankets and garment bags all in one section.

"You'll find everything for the bathroom and kitchen in the same section. It keeps you from running all over the store."

There's also a Subway -- the county's eighth -- inside the supercenter.

Wheatley said he's not sure how big a crowd to expect Wednesday.

A traffic analysis submitted to the planning commission with Wal-Mart's original plans predicts that the store will generate 14,718 trips a day -- between 1,178 and 1,311 vehicles an hour during peak times.

A spokesperson said later that the same vehicle is counted twice -- going and coming -- in that estimate. That would still mean an average of 600 or more cars an hour during peak times.

The only thing you won't find at the new Wal-Mart that you will at the old, Wheatley said, is beer.

The new store is in dry territory.

"Some people say that Wal-Mart comes to town and runs people out of business," Wheatley said. "We're not about running people out of business. We're about competition and getting the lowest prices. I live for competition."

And, he said, "Just look at all the businesses and jobs we're creating in this part of town. It's not just the 410 jobs at this store. It's the jobs at the banks and restaurants and car wash that are being built because we're here."

Five restaurants, two banks, a liquor store and a car wash are among the businesses that have announced plans to locate within sight of the new Wal-Mart. And two other restaurants say they're considering it.

Grand opening activities begin at 7:30 a.m. Wednesday. Doors open at 8.

Wheatley said the celebration includes a donation of \$20,000 to several local nonprofits.

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