

High Marks for Hy-Vee!

Celebrating one year in Bloomington

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The Bloomington Hy-Vee opened on March 10, 2015, in the Lakewood Plaza Shopping Center, in the building that was formerly home to Bloomington's first Wal-Mart and later, to K's Merchandise Mart. The building had been empty for nearly eight years, so just the news that a new tenant was moving in was welcome. Then we heard it would be a Hy-Vee grocery store.

To watch it going up was almost magical.

First, there was the demolition of the old interior. Walls came down.

Then, steel beams rose up, open to the sky, leaving us to wonder, "What will it look like when they're finished?"

Then the walls went up, and all we could see was bright light coming from inside the building that had been dark for so long.

It was easier to see the gas station under construction, easier to imagine the finished product there.

Next, the signs went up. Hy-Vee? A new word to many, who only knew that it was going to be a grocery store.

Then, finally, opening day and our first chance to see what this new "Hy-Vee" store was all about. Why was it such a big deal?

We were about to find out.

The experience started before we even entered the building. Free artisan bread? For everyone? Like nearly every grand opening in Bloomington, the line was long.

But the wait was worth it because that bread was amazing - like a perfect appetizer that leaves you wanting more, just before your gourmet dinner arrives.

Indeed, one's first trip into Bloomington Hy-Vee was like that gourmet dinner, a special treat, a feast for the senses!

From the bright lights shining on the colorful, perfectly displayed produce that greeted us upon entering to the enticing aroma coming from the Starbucks kiosk, all the way round to the HealthMarket and full-service pharmacy, the sights, sounds and smells only served to pique our curiosity. And *everyone* wanted in. Those first few weeks were 108,000 square feet of retail space packed with customers excited to see what all the buzz was about.

No one was disappointed, and no matter how many people passed through, the store was always spotlessly *clean*. Word spread quickly: "It's so much more than a grocery store!" It became a destination almost immediately. Customers came from miles around. Family who were back in town for a visit asked to go see the new store. And for the people who live here, every trip to Hy-Vee is a chance to discover something new that you've never noticed before.

"We were overwhelmed by the response to our grand opening," says Andrew Cochran, Bloomington Hy-Vee Store Director. "Since day one, the response and acceptance here has been so rewarding. We absolutely love this community."

Cochran grew up in Burlington, Iowa, and got his first job when he was just 15 - at the local Hy-Vee. "Ever since then, I knew I wanted to be in the grocery business. Hy-Vee is the only

place I've ever worked. It sounds crazy, but it's quite common in our company. Even our CEO has only ever worked at Hy-Vee."

"We're always looking for new ways to make the customer experience a great one," Cochran continues. "This encompasses everything from how the parking lot looks and how we greet our customers to how easy it is for them to find the products and services they need. Our goal is to make each shopping experience incredible."

That does include *every* shopping experience, in-person or online. Hy-Vee's slogan, "A Helpful Smile in Every Aisle," not only expresses the company's operating philosophy, but even includes the "Aisles Online" program, which offers customers the opportunity to shop online, place an order, and then either come to the store and pick it up or have it delivered straight to their home.

"We have 20 departments in our store," Cochran says. "Aisles Online usually ranks as the seventh or eighth biggest department in the store, and since we were only the third store to offer the program, that was a bit of a surprise. Inside of two weeks, we had to hire additional staff. In our first year, it's grown to six full-time employees. It's the best-performing Aisles Online program in the company, and we're very proud of our dedicated employees who make it happen."

That innovative program is indicative of the company's operating philosophy and has been since co-founders Charles Hyde and David Vredenburg opened a small general store in Beaconsfield, Iowa in 1930. The company expanded quickly and was originally known as "Supply Store," preceded by the name of the town. That chain of general stores eventually grew to become Hy-Vee, the Midwest supermarket chain. In 1952, Hyde and Vredenburg held a contest to rename the stores. The winning entry was a hybrid of the founders' names.

From the start, Hy-Vee has been an employee-owned company. "Now, with more than 82,000 employees in 240 stores across eight states, that local employee control is one of the best things about working here," says Cochran. "Employees are encouraged to help guide Hy-Vee's future, and are empowered to do so."

"At most companies, management from the corporate office makes decisions on various things, such as products. At Hy-Vee, our employees make these decisions at the store level. Our Health Market department is a perfect example – our on-staff dietitians take a lot of requests for very specific products; it's important to give our shoppers exactly what they want, and with our employee-owned business model, we have the power to do that."

The in-store dietitians and wellness department at Hy-Vee are unique in the Bloomington market, but Hy-Vee has been a pioneer in making dietitian services available to its customers since they started publishing a monthly nutrition newsletter sixteen years ago. The Hy-Vee chain currently employs more than 225 dietitians and has won numerous recognitions and awards for their services and programs.

These award-winning services and programs include individualized nutrition counseling; Begin™, Hy-Vee's 10-week wellness and weight management program; biometric screenings; personalized store tours; corporate wellness presentations; and healthy cooking classes.

Hy-Vee is also one of the only grocery chains to offer full-service, in-store restaurants. A relatively new concept, in-store dining at The Bloomington Hy-Vee Market Grille offers a

large casual dining menu and a full bar in a contemporary atmosphere. "Running a restaurant is quite a bit different than running a grocery store," says Cochran. "While many people are still discovering it, the response to the Market Grille has been outstanding, and that's another area where we can grow. We've added new landscaping this year, so our outdoor dining area will feel a little more secluded and our patrons should be more comfortable outdoors."

Indeed, the entire store is meant to deliver a customer experience. From the Gourmet and International cheese department with its two full time experts who receive an ever-changing selection of cheese by the wheel, then cut and hand-wrap it every day while offering advice on the best ways to serve and pair their specialties to the in-house wine and craft beer experts and the amazing bakery department with 5 cake designers and a full-time pastry chef, there really is something for everyone at the Bloomington Hy-Vee.

One of the most popular features at the store is the ready-to-eat food bar. Known internally as "Food Service," that includes the salad bar (enjoy in-store or take it with you on the go), the chef's creation case (prepared meals you can take home and cook), and your choice of rotisserie, fried or baked chicken. It also includes the "hot line" food – with choices from Italian dishes (including gelato!) to the Asian Express department with everything from lo mein to fresh sushi.

"The hot line food is great for working people at lunchtime, and great for families on the go anytime," says Cochran. "If mom wants pizza, dad wants Chinese, and the kids want chicken strips, they can have it all right here."

"We've spent most of our first year focused on what's happening inside our four walls," he continues. "But Hy-Vee is known as a long-standing community partner in the towns where it operates, and Bloomington is no different. Our community is just starting to see what that will grow into. We're already involved with non-profits like the Midwest Food Bank and Home Sweet Home Ministries, local high schools and Illinois State University, and we're just getting started, so stay tuned. Our community partnerships will only grow from here."

So whether you go to Hy-Vee every Saturday for your weekly groceries, come by occasionally for a one-of-a-kind bakery order, or drop in to the Market Grille for a holiday brunch, you will always find "A Helpful Smile in Every Aisle," and that alone will keep you coming back – and you don't want to miss whatever's coming next.

Visit Bloomington Hy-Vee, open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 1403 N. Veterans Parkway. Come by and talk with a department manager or call (309) 663-3050 for more information. The Bloomington Hy-Vee Market Grille, offering casual dining indoors or out, is open from 6 am – 10 pm Monday through Friday and 6 am – 11 pm on Saturday and Sunday.