

*The Woodlands Food Lovers Market is a destination store, providing an extensive range of fresh, quality and unique produce and meal solutions for its busy customer base on the search for convenience.*

## Woodlands Food Lovers Market sets itself apart with its green design, multi-specialist departments and focus on customer convenience

BY LAURA DURHAM

With the largest trading area in the Fruit & Veg City stable and a most unique department offering, Woodlands Food Lovers Market is the new flagship store for owner and Gauteng Retailer of the Year 2010, Sandro Gastaldi. Located in the new wing of the Woodlands Boulevard shopping centre, the store has set the bar even higher – to a shopping experience that is filled with convenience, quality and innovation – so much more than a chore.

### A 'mall' within a mall

The flagship store – 3 700m<sup>2</sup> – opened in November in the new wing of the Woodlands Boulevard shopping centre and it is the first Food Lovers Market to be situated with its entrance in a shopping mall. Although this restricts their ability extend the market into the parking lot, this has just meant a greater theatre of food experience indoors. "It's about becoming a destination store," says GM, Martin de Bruyn.

### Theatre of food

"The whole idea of the Food Lovers Market is to create a theatre experience and entertain and educate customers about



Not just a store...

# it's a destination

food," he adds. Playing DSTV cooking channels on screens throughout the store (except when there is a big sporting fixture of course!) and making sure helpful staff members are always on hand to give advice to customers is key. For example, some of the meat offering from the butchery is placed 'in traffic' to tempt customers to try something new as they walk past. An expert blockman mans the station to explain different preparation methods and what condiments, sauces and spices would compliment the cut of meat.

Another huge attraction is the fish department and the qualified fishmonger, Daniel van Niekerk is always on hand to assist customers with their seafood decisions.

The stone flour mill, The Daily Grind is a new addition to the Food Lovers Market concept and it services a niche market. All of the seeds, beans, legumes and cereals are organic and customers are able to enjoy the farmstyle grinding method in-store.

### Eco-friendly design

When designing the store, management set themselves a challenge: "Let's see how eco-

friendly we can go". The bakery ovens run on diesel and solar panels provide hot water for the entire store. Incinerators at every sink ensure that waste is disposed of correctly and a full recycling practise will soon be introduced to dispose of any other waste.

### A bakery to beat

The bakery is one of the best attractions in the store and staff are given the freedom to create and experiment with the confectionery offering.

During weekends when the store is busiest, tables laden with cakes, muffins and tarts surround the service counter to tempt customers.

This also helps with the traffic flow around the busy department. "We have to keep customers enticed and they need to really believe that our baked goods look, taste and smell too delicious to pass up" he says. Baking from scratch helps to give this homely feel and is certainly sets them apart from their competition. Their old traditional milk tart is made with puff pastry and served in an enamel dish and they struggle to keep up with the demand. ▶

## STOREWATCH ►

### Fresh approach to food

Boasting the largest fresh produce offering than most other retail outlets, the Woodlands store is able to stock an enormous range and quantity of fresh fruit and vegetables. Interestingly, notes de Bruyn, are the buying habits of the customers – they seem to prefer buying smaller quantities more frequently rather than bulk. "A large portion of our customer base is working families – because of their hectic schedules, they prefer frequent visits to the store as opposed to a big weekly or monthly shop."

Convenience is key throughout the store. The general Food Lovers Market model has included a Short Cuts or Housewives Corner where customers could have any of their purchases cut and chopped to their requirements by the staff. The Woodlands store employs a similar convenience concept except that they pre-cut certain popular lines, such as cabbage, carrots and butternut and place them in the designated Value Packs department. "This has proved to be very popular by customers who can then just 'pick up and go'," de Bruyn says. They also offer a free cheese grating service in the cheese department.

### In-store dining

The sushi bar is situated quite centrally in the store, acting as a sort of meeting point for all the departments. Four sushi chefs replenish the wide range on offer constantly and customers get to enjoy a 50% discount on the sushi conveyor every Friday night.

They have also introduced a special meal for everyday that customers may enjoy in-store. The aim of this is to of course keep attracting customers on a regular basis, and hopefully tempt them to browse the store for longer.

Aside from the sushi bar and Market Café (coffee shop concept employed in all Food Lovers Markets), the Woodlands store also has a Spanish Tapas Bar, as well as an Italian offering, La Cucina, where customers can enjoy a selection of paninis, pastas and wood-fire pizzas. "We also offer draught on tap and this is actually going down well with the ladies!" says de Bruyn.

The hot meal replacement (HMR) department is extensive, with all the dishes being served buffet style. "We are constantly changing up the menu and



Customers are spoilt for choice in the large fresh department. Pre-chopped vegetables are also on offer as a convenient meal solution to appeal to the working families that make up the store's customer base.

Location: **Woodlands Boulevard Shopping Centre, Pretoria East**

Tills: **21 (+service departments)**

Staff: **240 (excluding butchery)**

Feet count: **18 000 feet per week**

Average basket size: **R145**

layout to keep the customers interested," he says. The after-work rush certainly proves the department's popularity! The salad bar, which is also replenished throughout the day, has become a regular lunchtime spot for other mall employees and shoppers.

### Gifting

The biltong bar is always a popular feature of every Food Lovers Market and de Bruyn emphasises that its placement in-store is key for its success. Beautiful displays around special occasions such as Easter make the chocolatier a delicious destination. The highly qualified florist – who makes up bunches and baskets as per customers' requests – has also succeeded in creating a whole flower market feel as opposed to a standard florist.

The wine department is the biggest in a Food Lovers Market in the country is "doing



The addition of a stone flour mill, The Daily Grinds, means that customers can enjoy freshly ground seeds, beans, legumes and cereals.

excellently", according to de Bruyn. Wine tastings after hours and a planned wine auction later in the year (proceeds to go to charity) are some of the ways that the store is promoting their extensive selection.

### Staff training

The store employs 240 staff members (excluding the butchery which is run as a separate profit centre) and their training is constant. Making sure that all Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) requirements are met and that every staff member is fully literate is par for the course in the Food Lovers Market concept, says de Bruyn.


## Snaking success

The communal or snake queue has proved to be a great success for the Woodlands store. The improved flow and queuing enjoyment for the customer (boosted by an enormous impulse sales selection) is certainly paying dividends. In addition, a refrigerated selection of fruit salads, smoothies, fruit juices and convenient snacks faces the entrance of the queue.

## Sharing the experience

Following its success in the Montana store, de Bruyn plans to host a winter citrus festival at the Woodlands Food Lovers Market. They will invite celebrities, local schools and the community to join in on a fun day full of citrus activities, such as 'who can drink the most freshly squeezed orange juice' or 'who can peel an orange without ripping the skin'. "It's all about giving a little back to the customers and making your store a fun place to be," he says.

## The coming months

As the store is still in its settling in stage, de Bruyn and his team will continue listening to what their customers want in their shopping experience and mix things up accordingly. Having only been open for six months and to already have achieved 18 000 feet through the store each week, it seems that the theatre of shopping at Woodlands Food Lovers Market has attracted an impressive audience of regular customers. "It's about becoming a destination store," says de Bruyn, "it's about setting yourself apart." 



Buffet-style hot meals and salads provides a convenient meal solution for customers too busy to prepare meals themselves. They can also enjoy a wide range of light meals at the Market Café in-store.



Wine tastings and a wine auction later in the year are all ways to attract customers to the wine department, which has the largest selection in the Group.



Tapas Bar and Italian offering at La Cucina allows customers a taste of some continental cuisine in-store. An enormous selection of imported cheeses and deli meats further boosts the continental offering.

It's all about the food experience in the Woodlands store and staff are always on hand to educate and entertain customers with the wide offering of fresh foods available. Here, an expert blocksman cuts steak to the customer's requirement and suggests condiments, sauces and spices that would work well in the preparation.

