

Local landmark leaves customers spoilt for choice

Spargs Superspar opens bigger and better store in the Eastern Cape

BY ANELLE HAMILTON



The newly renovated Superspar has approximately 150 000 SKU's.

SPARGS SUPERSPAR in the upmarket suburb of Beacon Bay is the flagship of a group of stores owned by the Sparg family. With the recent completion of the major renovations and much anticipated official re-launch of the store, its loyal customers are spoilt for choice. The main focus is on offering a massive range and a variety of services under one roof.

A brief overview

This store was opened as Spargs Wholesale Supermarket on 1 December 1976. In the years that followed, the store grew steadily and soon became an integral part of the Beacon Bay community. Extensions were done to the store and a second floor was added on. On 3 December 1994 a devastating fire gutted the premises and

on 22 March 2001 it was converted into one of the first Superspars in the Eastern Cape. Due to the growth and success of the store, the family and management began talking about and planning extensions to the building. Being an integral part of the Beacon Bay community meant that careful thought and planning had to take place as the new, bigger Spargs had to fit into the community.

One must appreciate that the store never lost one hour of trade during the entire revamp. Besides the bakery production area, every service department in the store had to move, some more than once! Ceilings were replaced, the old store was completely re-wired, lighting upgraded, floors tiled, bulkheads removed and rebuilt. The grocery shelving and checkouts were

replaced and new refrigeration as well as a new air conditioning system was installed. The store has become synonymous with the City of East London and has clients that come from as far as Haga Haga and even further afield for their weekly shopping. It is interesting to note that the number of feet through the door increased, instead of decreased during the revamp.

Bigger is better

The store's main clientele are females (60%) in the medium to high LSM range but its selection of groceries is vast enough to cater for everyone in any income bracket. It offers 654 drops in-store. "While the average store has 15 thousand coded items that pass through its till points, our entire store has about 150 000 SKU's,"



Children stay entertained in the new specialised play area, while their parents enjoy their shopping unpestered.



Shoppers can sign up for in-store scrapbooking lessons and the store carries a range that rivals many specialised scrapbooking outlets, at a very competitive price.

says operations manager, Craig Schroeder.

"The butchery display cabinets take up 94 feet and the store employs five blockmen. It offers a large selection of value added lines produced on site including a gourmet counter. Where possible we make use of local vetted suppliers ensuring we are able to pass on the best price and freshness to our loyal customers," he adds. The Eastern Cape boasts a number of game farms and some of the store's customers like to make their own biltong and droewors. "We sell dry spices and carving knives in our butchery for our customers who enjoy hunting."

The bakery has also been completely revamped and 80% of the confectionary

range is produced on site daily. The bakery offers a variety of specialty and health breads. A specialised coffee shop in the Beacon Bay area orders all its health breads from the store. "Personalised cakes have proved to be a massive success story for us. The printing of the cakes is done in-store and are custom made according to customer requirements. We cater for all types of events from small gatherings to large weddings," says store manager Donald Baxter.

Dry grocery sales are the star of the show with 30% of the sales, while the service departments, including the coffee shop, contribute another 30%.

According to Donald Baxter, the store

has seen an uptake in its organic grocery sales. The majority of the products are imported and although Spargs Superspar does not stock the full range yet, interest is increasing. Health products are also popular, especially in the diabetic section. The Spar private label brand is very strong in East London and has gained market share in certain lines.

Meal of the day

The store's HMR is often complimented as being the best in East London and everything is cooked from scratch, daily, in the kitchen. "There are many favourites, but our homemade Biltong Soup is a winner. One of our customers always orders



The 90 seater coffee shop has an elegant look and feel and serves breakfasts, light meals and lunches.



An entire floor is devoted to a massive selection of clothing and the store carries a huge range, from upmarket branded surf wear items to budget lines.



Plants and garden features are a new addition to the store and sales have been very good.

big quantities of sliced biltong and one day we asked her what she used it for. She told us that her family loves her homemade biltong soup and she shared her recipe with us. It retails for R8.95 a cup plus a

free bread roll so it provides shoppers with a meal solution for under R10," says HMR manager Sandy Richardson.

The kitchen holds theme days that are very popular with its customers. On

Saturdays for example, it's Chinese Day, on Thursday the theme is Out of Africa and meals such as ulusu (tripe), pap, stew and liver & onions are on the menu. *Supermarket & Retailer* visited the store



Customers can get photos developed at the in-store photo lab.



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The HMR holds theme days and the menu changes every day.

on Fishy Friday and the selection was impressive. Some of the items on the menu included fried butter fish, calamari, fish cakes, mussels, paella and chicken and prawn curry. However, the Sunday roast is one of the best sellers. The roast offers a choice of four meats, a full range of vegetables and hot puddings. "Our plated Sunday lunches literally fly out the door and at around R35 a plate they offer very good value for money," she says. The theme days ensure that regular shoppers have a variety to choose from and the menu changes every day. "We interact with our customers and ask them what they enjoy eating. We like to experiment and we often do in-store tastings too, when we try out new dishes. We also search the Internet for new ideas and recipes." The HMR department also caters for different functions,

with a range of large and small hot and cold platters. Spargs Superspar is the first store in the Eastern Cape to launch a Spar Chicka Chicken outlet in its HMR section, which is a new concept to SPAR.

Keeping it fresh

The deli counter caters for the health conscious members of the local community by selling open health sandwiches. The deli area prides itself on its salad bars, and is renowned for tasty pickled fish and roll-mops. The salads are all produced in-house, are served fresh daily and have proved to be a big money spinner in summer. The deli also offers an extensive range of both imported and locally produced cold meats.

The fresh produce department is an area the store is very proud of. "We keep harping on range, but our pre-prepared and pre-

packed selection is truly extensive and one of the best in the area," says Schroeder. Farming tunnels are popular in East London and the store believes in supporting local farmers. The store's own vehicle travels five times a week to buy directly from the market. Fruit, vegetables and seasonal fruit are also purchased from local vetted farmers. "It is our way of supporting local suppliers and passing on the best possible prices to our valued customers. The store also facilitates bulk orders."

Getting creative

"We pride ourselves on being the only Superspar to offer in-store scrapbooking lessons. We carry a range that rivals many specialised scrapbooking outlets, at a very competitive price," says Baxter. Keep in mind that the majority of the store's shoppers are female and this is just another example of how they are catering for their market. Shopping in this massive store works up an appetite. The 90 seater coffee shop has an elegant look and feel and serves breakfasts, light meals and lunches. It is especially popular on Saturday mornings for family breakfasts, a bargain at R19.99. The children also stay entertained in the new specialised kids play area, while their parents enjoy their shopping unpestered. Sundays are exceptionally busy and a full roast is served at a special price, offering customers both great value and a relaxed Sunday.



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Dressed for success

An entire floor is devoted to a massive selection of clothing and textiles. The store carries a huge range, from upmarket branded surf wear items to budget lines and stocks the following: ladies wear, mens wear, children's clothing, underwear and swimwear. A large selection of wool, material, home linen, haberdashery, toys and gifts and travel gear is also available on this floor. "We decided to open a lay-by counter, which has been very successful. We expect it to be exceptionally busy around the festive season," says Baxter.

To truly turn the store into a one-stop shop, the Daily Dispatch (the local newspaper) rents office space in the store. "Our shoppers can book advertisements and pick up their daily copy while visiting our store," he says.

Do-it-yourself

The store carries a full range of Plascon Paints and has a colour matching and paint mixing machine on site. It also stocks power tools and all the other essentials for Mr. DIY. If shoppers want to go camping or gardening the store has everything they will need including tents, braai's, etc. Not forgetting the anglers, the store has everything for a fishing trip from baits to rods (professional to amateur).

Wine lovers

The Top's store is situated next to the entrance of Spargs Superspar and was crowned 'Store of the Year' for the Eastern

Cape earlier this year. "We are proud of this achievement and our range of wine. We have one of the best wine selections in East London, and are also mentioned in the John Platter Wine Guide as a preferred wine supplier," says Baxter.

Annually, together with the Daily Dispatch, the store hosts a Wine Fair with live entertainment. It attracts 40 wine estates and about 3000 visitors over the three nights of the fair. Now in its 14th year the event celebrates first-rate wine from all over the country in style, and gives attendees the chance to experience the wine. The wines featured at the fair are available at a special price in the Tops store and this significantly boosts sales. All proceeds from the ticket sales go to a local charity.

Social responsibility

The store makes donations to various schools, churches and other organisations. This goes a long way towards creating a sense of being part of the community, thus ensuring loyalty.

"We are also proud of our Granny Run. Once a month we visit various old age homes in East London and collect whoever would like to go shopping and bring them back to the store to shop. They are then given a complimentary cup of coffee and a piece of cake before being taken home again - some come merely for the coffee," says Schroeder.

The store employs over 300 staff

members. "We pride ourselves on the training that our staff receive. The training is undertaken by both our own Human Resources department and by Spar, where extensive use of the Spar Retail Training Academy is made. We also have dedicated staff members, three of which have 25-year long service records."

East London is not exceptionally seasonal, but there is the constant slight increase during December. Customers are attracted to the store by Spar promotions, maintaining good customer relations and advertisements on local radio, in local leaflets and magazines. The wider aisles, large parking area (1000 cars) and the fact that the store has two entrances have also been pulling shoppers in.

Beating inflation

He adds that although inflation is a very real factor, the basket size and amount of foot traffic in the store has increased. However, customers are more price conscious on luxury items.

"Our plans are to remain abreast of our customer needs in order to ensure that we always maintain and grow within our market, and of course our standard of service will continue to grow to service our clients. This will in turn grow our customer base - keeping us where we are - part of the Beacon Bay and East London community," Baxter concludes.

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