

## Green Valley Center signs up Fresh and Easy

*British-based store should open next summer*

by **Natalie O'Neill**

**F**loating rumors about a new grocery store and anchor tenant in Green Valley Center—where the old Albertsons once stood on Diablo Road by the freeway—are now confirmed.

Owners of the property have signed a lease that could have the United Kingdom-based Fresh and Easy Neighborhood Market up and running by summer 2008.

“Officially today we signed the agreement,” Ted Peterson, co-owner of the property, said last Friday.

Representatives from Fresh and Easy said they could not yet confirm they had signed the lease agreement or comment on what the store will bring to Danville.

“What I can tell you is the company is looking at Northern California locations,” said company spokesman Brendan Wonnacott.

The market’s philosophy is: “People want fresh, healthy food. People want things to be easy.”

“It’s a local neighborhood store with fresh food and affordable prices,” Wonnacott said.

Fresh and Easy locations are generally smaller than the typical grocery store, at about 10,000 square feet, to give customers a faster shopping experience. The company is part of Tesco, the United Kingdom’s largest retailer.

“It’s pretty exciting,” Peterson said.

As for the ongoing buzz about Longs Drugs becoming the market’s neighbor, Peterson said that’s still up in the air.

Green Valley Center has been without an anchor store since summer 2006, and other tenants say their sales have gone down without

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a draw like Albertsons.

"It was hard on all the new businesses. It's been tough," said Connie Palomino, owner of Contemporary Hair Design, which has been in the center for 31 years.

She said she still has a solid customer base, but said that walk-ins and retail sales have gone down.

"We would like more traffic," she said.

She was looking forward to the new anchor tenant.

"I think it's gonna be great for Danville and great for the center," she said.

Shops in the center that rely on walk-ins, like Hospice Thrift Shoppe and Mt. Diablo Barber Shop, have been affected the most, store owners said.

As of May, owners of the center were involved in a lawsuit with Cerberus, a \$60 billion corpora-

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**"It's a local neighborhood store with fresh food and affordable prices,"**

*—Brendan Wonnacott,  
Fresh and Easy spokesman*

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tion, over terms of the lease. The dispute was settled out of court and

they then bought back the lease, Peterson said.

In late October, the Fresh and Easy announced six California stores will open. When stores have opened in the past, they generally hire 20-30 people and offer health care to employees who work more than 20 hours.

The center is also currently home to Taco Bell, Christy's Doughnuts, China Bistro, Diablo Printing and a photo shop.

"There's a lot of potential here," Peterson said. ■

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