

Frisco Whole Foods Market opening marked with blessings, bustle

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Before its doors officially open Tuesday, Whole Foods Market is offering tours to the public, complete with free samples.

Saturday from 9 a.m. to 7:45 p.m. anyone can walk into the store, learn about it from an employee (or team member, as Whole Foods calls them) and taste products from about a dozen Colorado vendors.

The country's leading natural and organic grocer held a sneak-peek of the Frisco store for local government officials, ski resort representatives and friends of employees

Thursday. The tour began with a blessing by Alex Stark, the company's feng shui consultant.

Stark stood in front of the store and mixed together 99 drops of gin (to represent the heavens), rice (to represent people) and cinabar (a red powder to represent the earth), explained associate team leader Anthony Morici. Stark also hung crystal balls in specific spots in the back rooms.

Then visitors sampled products: goat cheese from Avalanche Cheese Co. in Ba-

salt, pasture-raised beef from Crystal River Meats in Carbondale, Noosa Yoghurt from Fort Collins and cookies from Kim & Jake's, a gluten-free company in Boulder.

GO LOCAL

The company prides itself on being environmentally conscious and involved in the community.

Those fond of preventing food waste through Dumpster diving should know the Whole Foods receptacles are tall and diffi-



cult to get into. And they won't have much food in them.

Part of every employee's job is monitoring perishables for blemishes and preventing spoilage. For example, instead of throwing out wilting spinach, Gengel said, the store will use it in its pizzas. Other foods that don't quite meet the store's standards will be donated to the Family and Intercultural Resource Center or composted.

Items that make the Frisco store unique include hand-sized dessert pies named after the town and doughnuts stuffed every morning with custom fillings.

Breckenridge local Geoff Palmer, who Gengel said is a fifth-generation cabinet-maker, crafted tables for the store's cafe with reclaimed wood from beetle kill and old barns.

Skis and snowboards act as signage, and the cafe features a retired gondola from Keystone Ski Resort outfitted with a table and Bluetooth-compatible speakers. Gengel said he expects some customers will use the

gondola as their own private office.

Next to the cafe, the store has a cozy room for mothers who might want to nurse in private, called the zen room in other stores.

Marketing specialist Stephanie Kato said products with Summit County connections include MyChelle Dermaceuticals, a skin-care line founded by a Frisco woman, Bee Nut Free, allergy-free snack bars made in Silverthorne and sausages infused with local beers — Dillon Dam Brewery's Dam Straight Lager and Breckenridge Brewery's Lucky U IPA.

The store will also keep the same prices as those in its Denver stores, he said. No mountain pricing here.

FINAL TOUCHES

Preparation for opening day has been hectic.

Thursday employees were busy stocking and preparing for a mommy bloggers visit and a fire department inspection, Kato said.

Morici said he went through about a dozen

shots of espresso in one day learning how to properly use the machine.

"Ninety percent of the work gets done in 10 percent of the time, the last 10 percent," he said, smiling.

The last few days before opening are a race not to the finish line but to the starting line, he said, as employees grow more excited.

Gengel said good relationships with vendors have eased the workload. They helped with things store employees usually do, like cutting and packaging portions of cheese.

The cheese has been quite the production. Eight people worked on the store's cheese section for two weeks, Gengel said.

Employees tasted more than \$1,000 worth of cheese over two days this week.

Morici described a pungent spread that included every kind of cheese, even fondue, laid out so every staff member could accurately describe the cheese flavors.

He added that in the spring during peak hours customers can look forward to mozza-

rella-making demonstrations.

Staff will continue tasting foods over the next few days. Gengel said that leaves finishing the outside construction and stocking the perimeter shelves.

The franchise is opening one store a week this year, said John Mammenga, the Frisco store's hiring manager.

He said he has hired 158 employees, and 45 percent will work part time, a higher percentage than usual to fit with the resort-community lifestyle. Most of the employees are locals, with 48 people transferring from

other stores around the country.

Gengel said he's never heard of more interest from within the company. Whole Foods employees from Hawaii to Maine wanted to work at the Frisco store.

Mammenga said he still needs to hire about 20 people in the next month. Store coordinators from around the country, "the best of the best," he said, will fly in to help in the first few weeks.

OPEN SESAME

At the opening ceremony Tuesday, April

29, Frisco Mayor Larry Sawyer will speak, as well as several Whole Foods employees. The event will begin at 9:45 a.m. with introductions of the organizations receiving donations from the store, including Summit County Preschool, Swan Center Outreach, Team Summit, Summit Community Care Clinic and High Country Conservation Center.

Doors will open at 10 a.m. Store hours after opening day are 7:30 a.m. to 10 p.m.

