



THE CHAIN GANG

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Hundreds of People Lined Up for the Williamsburg Whole Foods Grand Opening

By Robin Hilmantel

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For what seems like forever, condo developers in Williamsburg have been touting the prospect that, one day, Whole Foods would open a store in the neighborhood. The glass towers grew, the area became increasingly populated, and other grocery options sprung up. But still: No Whole Foods. That all changed today when the chain opened a store at 238 Bedford Avenue — right in the heart of gentrified Brooklyn, as yet another sign that Williamsburg has completed its transformation into a Park Slope-like suburban playground.

Not that it seemed to bother the people waiting outside this morning. Even the sweat-inducing heat and

swamplike humidity were no match for avid Whole Foods fans. Twenty minutes before the store was set to hold its version of a ribbon-cutting ceremony by breaking loaves of Hot Bread Kitchenallah, about 30 people were already in line, waiting for the right to say they were one of the first people to shop in the store. Jackelin Arana, a stay-at-home mom who's lived in Williamsburg for about five years, arrived at 7:45 a.m. She was the first person in a line that grew to more than 200 by the time the store opened its doors just before nine. "I'm excited," she told Grub. "All the other supermarkets are overpriced. At least I know what I'm getting here."



As employees passed out complimentary almond croissants (from Roberta's) and coffee (cold brew), the enthusiasm for the store was strong. Carolyn Grant, a legal secretary who arrived at the store about 40 minutes before it opened, actually skipped work to stand in line. "I looked online last night to see when it was going to open and found out that it was opening today," she said. "So I jumped up really early and ran over here." Grant lives closer to the Gowanus location, but says she likes to visit different Whole Foods stores and plans to visit the Williamsburg shop regularly. Why the enthusiasm? "I just love Whole Foods!"

It's too early to know for sure if the Williamsburg Whole Foods will be a good place to catch Pokémon, but people nevertheless showed up at the opening ready to take advantage of the social-media opportunities. "I was trying to get my friends to come at seven so we could be the first people here to snap it," said Ariel Schneller, a public defender in Queens. "But like total psychopaths, they decided that would be too early." (And no, there's no custom Snapchat filter — yet.)

While many people at the opening conceded that supporting local businesses is important, and reiterated that they would continue to shop at independent stores in the

neighborhood, nobody seemed particularly upset by the fact that yet another chain is opening in Williamsburg. (And with the looming L train shutdown, they'll want as many local grocery options as possible.)

A rep for the company was quick to point out that many of the store's employees live in the area: "Almost 200 of them live in Brooklyn, and then over 100 of them live in north Brooklyn," he told us, adding that store team leader Sam Baris has lived in the neighborhood for years. (Baris gave a small speech at the bread-breaking and let the store's first customers know as much.)

"I think it's good to have this here," said Rita Lynch, a retired schoolteacher who walked four miles to be one of the first people in line. "We need these kinds of stores because we have a lot of food deserts around." Granted, that wasn't the only reason Lynch went to such efforts to be one of the store's first customers. "We wanted to get a free bag," she said.

All in all, it was about what you'd expect from a corporate grand opening: well organized, with a small group of fans eager to line up and check out the new location. It's the kind of thing residents should get used to; an Apple store will open across the street this weekend.