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U.S. 98 N in Lakeland

Polk's First GFS Marketplace to Open in September

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THE LEDGER

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LAKELAND | The county's first GFS Marketplace store is scheduled to open in Lakeland in late September.

The Marketplace stores, operated by Michigan-based Gordon Food Service, offer foods in bulk sizes, as well as various kitchen and dining supplies. Typical customers include restaurants, caterers and nonprofit organizations, but GFS Marketplace also sells to the public and doesn't require a membership.

"Consumers can shop in our stores and take advantage of buying restaurant-quality products in large sizes without membership fees," said GFS spokesman Mark Dempsey. "It's a high-service experience, so we're different than (warehouse) clubs in that respect. Our stores are very warm and inviting from a décor and layout standpoint."

A 15,000-square-foot GFS Marketplace is being built in North Lakeland at 3723 U.S. 98 N., at the former site of a Lone Star Steakhouse. Dempsey said GFS officials are planning a late September opening. The store will employ about 35 people.

GFS carries some national brands, in addition to private label foods designed for use in restaurants. Products include meats, prepared foods, bakery items, fruits and vegetables.

Supermarket consultant Jim Hertel said retailers like GFS Marketplace are drawing



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SIGN SHOWS the new GFS Marketplace under construction on Highway 98 North in Lakeland.

increased interest from customers willing to try different supermarket formats in a weak economy. Cost-conscious shoppers have flocked to chains that offer value through bulk foods and private label goods, he said.

"As it stands today the growth engines behind food retailing are limited-assortment stores, they're dollar stores, and club (warehouse stores) are doing pretty well," said Hertel, managing partner of Illinois-based Willard Bishop.

GFS has more than 140 Marketplace stores nationwide, including 10 Florida locations. Nearby stores include ones in Brandon and Tampa.

GFS, which also operates as a distributor to food-service businesses, such as restaurants, opened a distribution center in Plant City last year after acquiring the facility from Albertson's.

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