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Michigan-Based Gordon Food Service Marketplace Looking at Lakeland Storefront

Gordon Food Service sells food in bulk to restaurants and the public at its locations.

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THE LEDGER

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LAKELAND | Michigan-based Gordon Food

Service wants to bring one of its hybrid supermarket-restaurant supply stores to Lakeland.

City officials on Monday approved a zoning change that would allow GFS to redevelop the former Lone Star Steakhouse at 3723 U.S. 98 N. into a GFS Marketplace.

The restaurant closed in February 2008, along with six other locations.

Suzette Murchison, a spokeswoman for GFS, said the company has not purchased the property but would expect to open the store in 2011 based on current plans.

The GFS Marketplace stores offer a variety of foods in bulk and family sizes, as well as selling cleaning supplies and restaurant products.

Based in Grand Rapids, Mich., GFS currently operates 133 Marketplace stores nationwide, including nine in Florida.

The firm expects to open two new locations in North Tampa and Bradenton this year, Murchison said.

In January, GFS announced it had acquired the former Albertson's distribution center in Plant City as part of a GFS Marketplace expansion.

The Lakeland location would measure about 15,000 square feet, according to documents filed with the city.

GFS is primarily a foodservice distributor serving clients throughout the East Coast, Midwest and Canada. GFS Marketplace customers typically include restaurants, caterers, schools, churches and families, according to the company's Web site.

Though GFS Marketplace stores sell foods in bulk, they do not require memberships and are open to the public. The stores feature both private and national brands.

"They've kinda got a unique business model. They don't really have any similar competitors. I would say the primary competitors are the wholesale clubs," said David Livingston, an independent supermarket industry analyst based in Waukesha, Wis.

Livingston said GFS Marketplaces could be loosely compared to Aldi stores, which carry a limited assortment of mostly private-label goods.



GFS first entered Florida in 2003 and currently operates three distribution centers in Miami, Ocala and the new location in Plant City.

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The Plant City facility should begin distributing to area clients this fall, according to a press release. It will eventually employ more than 350 people.

A GFS Marketplace will open in Tampa's Carrollwood area in mid-May, followed by the Bradenton store in mid-September, Murchison said.

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